

## Response to CLG National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society

### Background

The Northern Housing Consortium (previously the Northern Consortium of Housing Authorities 1974 - 2002) was established in April 2002. It is an independent non-party political, membership organisation working to improve and promote housing services across the North. Its 202 members include Local Authorities, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), Large Scale Voluntary Transfers (LSVTs), Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and other organisations involved in housing.

The Northern Housing Consortium is governed by its members, who between them manage around 90% of social housing in the North, over 1.3 million homes. These organisations are drawn from the three Northern Government Office regions of the North East, North West and Yorkshire & Humberside, as well as the Housing Corporation (North).

The NHC runs the **Integrated Living Network** which supports the housing sector to work with health and social care in partnerships providing joined up services particularly to vulnerable people.

We are also delivering a programme of relevant events including:

- **Appraisal and Sustainability of Sheltered Housing Stock** in partnership with Peter Fletcher associates, which aims to support organisations to decide which schemes are sustainable and which schemes need de-commissioning, developing asset management strategies and business plans, and importantly, how best can to manage the process of change with Boards, staff and residents.
- **Best Practice in Delivering Extra Care**, in partnership with the DH's Housing LIN, which aims to support organisations to develop effective integrated partnerships and a shared extra care philosophy.

The Northern Housing Consortium welcomes the opportunity to comment on the pre-consultation document for the National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society. We look forward to hearing more on the consultation document and would be very keen to be part of the communication programme for this important strategy e.g. through a strategy launch event and dissemination events.

## **What should the vision be for the National Strategy?**

We welcome the recognition that older persons' housing will be planned, integrated and sustained as part of the mainstream rather than being regarded as housing for 'vulnerable groups'. We also welcome the vision that services will be personal, progressive, high quality and joined up but feel the vision should make more explicit the link between older peoples housing and other government priorities such as health, care and the economy. This supports 'active ageing' and the recognition that older people should be treated as an integral and important part of communities - in line with the recommendations of Opportunity Age.

The vision should recognise not only that independence, choice and quality are central but also that older peoples needs will change as the age 50 to 65 group increases as a proportion of the older population. Housing enablers and providers should be encouraged in the vision to plan for the next generation of older people as they are likely to aspire to a different type of home. This needs to be said explicitly. The vision could include:

“To ensure that there is a range and choice of high quality housing and related services which meets the changing needs and aspirations of older people and allows them to live independent and fulfilling lives”.

## **Have we got the priorities right? Is there anything missing?**

- *Priority 1 “housing that meets basic standards”.*

Is “basic” enough? We support the priority to reduce the % of older people living in non decent accommodation and increase choice in areas of under supply but we ask that this priority should aim higher. The priority should be “housing that meets need and aspiration” e.g. through excellence in design and technology, a range of tenure options, and better quality places not just homes.

How will the government monitor satisfaction with housing? Registered Social Landlords collect data on satisfaction levels, but if 78% of older people live in owner occupied homes, how will the government be able to measure the % reduction in those not satisfied with housing if they are unable to monitor them?

- *Priority 2 “better health”*

This priority should include reduction of preventable accidents e.g. falls.

- *Priority 3 “greater independence”*

We very much support this priority, however we would stress the need for individuals to feel connected to their communities whilst living independently. We are keen to see recognition in the strategy of the role of telecare and telehealth, and of the use of community portals to enable greater integration in the community. The Northern Housing Consortium's commercial services team, Consortium Procurement is working with the NHS PASA to support

organisations to deliver efficiency gains and best value through the collaborative procurement of Telecare and telehealth, and members are seeing real benefits from this partnership.

- *Priority 5 “preventing crisis”*

This priority should include increasing the % of people receiving services such as those delivered through Linkage Plus and the POPP’s (Partnerships for Older People’s Projects).

- *Priority 6 “reducing inequalities”*

This priority should include the need to increase access to information to promote choice and access to housing and services. Information should be available in a form which is accessible to all older people including those with disabilities and those from a minority ethnic background.

- *Priority 7 “stronger communities”*

Again our point is how will the % level of trust to be measured? And, how will satisfaction with the community be measured, in particular in areas with a high % of owner occupation? The Housing Corporation is piloting the Communities Standard which aims to enable housing associations to measure their contribution to decent communities. This would be a useful approach to achieve this priority but would need to be cross tenure. We welcome the vision to increase community participation and involvement but the approach must be holistic, involve people from the outset and be outcomes led rather than process led.

- *Priority 8 “better use of housing resources”*

This priority should include making best use of existing stock e.g. remodelling sheltered stock beyond decent homes standards and towards housing which meets need and aspiration such as extra care and different tenure options for older people.

**How can Government take action in the short and long term? Is there anything we haven’t covered that you would like to tell us about?**

We are concerned that in the 2007 comprehensive spending review, private sector funding will be diverted towards the provision of affordable housing in the South. Given the fact that the North is home to 53% of England’s most deprived places and 18% of the North’s stock predates 1919, private sector funding must continue to support the vision in this strategy. Government funding to support local authorities to deliver loans and grants schemes is vital to ensuring that all older people can live in a home that meets basic quality and thermal comfort standards.

The use of funding to provide loans for improvements, and indeed adaptations, which can then be recycled, is a vital resource which through its preventative role contributes to the government objectives for health, energy efficiency as well as stock condition.

Local authorities are aware that they need to access private funding to operate loans schemes at the scale that is required but given the limited take up of loans by the public, no local authority has successfully built up a loans portfolio of sufficient enough size to attract the private sector.

We are aware that some older people are reluctant to access loans, and whilst local authorities are working with independent financial advisers, there is a role for government to promote and educate the public around the benefits of access loans to improve their homes.

In terms of new supply the government must encourage the better management of land assets, most efficient use of s106, fast tracking applications through planning, innovation in leveraging financial resources and use of new delivery models e.g. joint venture companies. The increase in provision required to meet the needs of the ageing population will be so significant that it will only be possible by addressing these fundamental issues. The Northern Housing Consortium has launched a two year research project, funded by the Housing Corporation, which will explore these issues through a series of 6 demonstrator sites.

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