

Northern Housing Summit 2019

Tuesday 5th November | Renaissance Manchester

The Northern Housing Summit took place earlier this month, attended by over 180 representatives from housing associations and local authorities. The day had three main themes running throughout – future vision and ambition, quality and place, and capacity, delivery and regulation.

Our Chief Executive, Tracy Harrison welcomed delegates to the event, recognising that we face unique challenges in the sector at this time and quoting Amiel: 'Uncertainty is the refuge of hope'. We certainly have experienced uncertainty, with nine housing ministers in nine years – and one (Gavin Barwell) is present today.

Tracy went on to say the NHC is not waiting for direction at a national level. Engagement with our members was at 94% last year and it's currently higher this year. She defined our focus which is on influencing and the vital role for the [#OurNorth programme](#). She talked about the research we have commissioned with CaCHE and our work on the Private Rented Sector (both showcased later during the event). As well as this we announced the launch of our new [MyNHC platform](#) – an online portal to make our members lives easier.

Making sense of it all – what can we expect for the housing sector in the North?

Gavin Barwell, Chief of Staff to the British Prime Minister 2017-2019 took to the stage saying predictions at the moment are a thankless task. The political consensus is one of worry. Housing is down the political ladder. He thought a Labour majority was unlikely and a minority Tory result is the most likely outcome.

A Tory majority would see increased emphasis on home ownership with Boris Johnson at the helm. The Housing Secretary is keen to maintain a close relationship with the sector and will need to utilise mixed tenure developments to reach his aims. The Tories need to ensure they also reach social renters and hopeful future owners. He felt as a former mayor, Johnson is more inclined to devolution.

A Labour minority government would be keen to hit the target of 100,000 homes per year. There is the potential for rivalry to develop between councils and housing providers. There would be an increased emphasis on housing standards.

Polly McKenzie, Chief Executive, DEMOS was in agreement with much of what Barwell had said. Stating that it is clear whatever the result of the general election, public spending is set to increase. She went on to say Boris Johnson has shown to be more in line with the public on this, promising spending on the NHS, policing and education. Welfare, she said, will unsurprisingly be bottom of the list. It's not popular with the electorate and in 2017 Labour didn't put plans in to increase welfare spend in their manifesto.

McKenzie suggested that while Devolution has been used extensively and successfully in Manchester, it is still quite far away. The challenge is greater than the minister's capacity. However, she went on to say a collective Northern voice is the best chance. Brexit has cannibalised the political debate. Housing associations have immense power and hold it outside of government action, she said tenant budgeting is becoming more difficult with the instability and fluctuating incomes felt in recent years, giving the example of an increased role for housing associations on mental health.

Paul Hackett, Director, Smith Institute provided his ten points ahead of the general election, suggesting that in 2015 the electorate may have voted differently if they'd known that we'd face a decade of uncertainty.

1. Only certainty is uncertainty
2. Complication is increasing, 1/3 of voters are defecting from main parties. Another 1/3 undecided. Impact of winter weather and conditions, a youth vote and lots of marginal seats.
3. Local politics matter. There is more certainty here than on the national level.
4. There is no turning back from this.
5. Economy is key; confidence, jobs, incomes.
6. Any 'money tree shake' could see money focussed in the South.
7. The push me, pull you nature of policy shift within the Tory party, Cameron very much settled on a neoliberal focus, May softened this.
8. Does this signal the end of austerity? We certainly hope so. Signs point this way.
9. More joined policy on the national level? South needs to look North
10. With central government bogged down with Brexit a collective northern voice for housing associations and local authorities is essential.

Creating the local authority housing and planning capacity we need to realise the North's housing ambitions

Dr Stephen Hinks, Reader, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, University of Sheffield and the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) and Tracy Harrison, Chief executive, NHC.

The NHC and CaCHE have conducted research on LA capacity after experiencing 49% funding cuts. Dr Stephen Hinks, Reader, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, University of Sheffield and the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) talked delegates through the research which will officially launch in January 2020. We carried out a wide-ranging literature review, seeking to understand the scale of the cuts within individual LAs and find the burden of uneven distribution. We have diverse northern markets, especially since devolution has begun. The research demonstrated we need to increase the emphasis upon mobilising investment and importantly revitalise place, not just markets.

Dr Hinks talked through the methods, an analysis of change in LA expenditure as a proxy for LA capacity, utilising semi-structured interviews which were carried out in the North East, North West and Yorkshire & Humber.

Housing and planning services have seen greater cuts per local authority than those of education, and road infrastructure. The lowest percentage cuts are uneven geographically, primarily found in the South East and East. The North went from relatively better in terms of planning and housing budgets in 2010-11 to far worse off by 18-19. The case data saw LAs described as running 'skeleton models'. There has been a strategic decommissioning of housing within LAs, he suggested we should ensure that the focus is not just on numbers going forward but should be about the quality of existing stock.

Our Chief Executive, Tracy Harrison gave the NHC's response to the research. Housing associations look to LAs for place leadership, even though councils have faced much reduced funding. LAs have had great capacity to adapt rather than buckle, but we simply cannot go on like this. 80% of capacity is in statutory services. The spending review has seen the largest increase in a decade but only committing to figures for one year does not allow enough security to plan. Long term spending increases are essential. She welcomed McVey's announcement of a planning 'A-Team' but said you cannot have a flying squad running a national service. It must be open and available to all throughout the country. A more mature conversation on capacity is needed.

The role of housing in civil society

Julia Unwin CBE, Chair, Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society

Unwin addressed delegates on the role of housing on civil society, and talked about the investigation findings of two streets: one poor and one more affluent.

This is not coincidence, she said, it is systemic. Housing associations have made decisions about who lives where and how they live. Poorer people in society feel that huge decisions that affect all aspects of their lives have not been made by them. This is part of the reason that people voted to 'take back control', why the message worked so well. There is a pronounced division in the north between the core and the periphery. Politics was 'place-blind' for a long time (Blair/New Labour).

Cuts leave people feeling devalued but as they close community centres and local spaces it leaves people with no forum to discuss them. Work in modern times gives people no sense of identity. She went on to say we need housing associations to be more central to place and sense of place.

We need to view our tenants and residents who complain as 'canaries in the mine', alerting us to the real issues within communities. Climate emergencies require resilient communities. People in these communities must be listened to. There are very few functioning anchors in these communities, housing however remains. A long-term commitment to place is what housing associations bring through their knowledge, sense of history and pride. We need to maintain that we are the providers of the place where people have their most intimate moments and relationships. Too often this is framed merely as numbers and units.

Unwin questioned how someone can contribute to their community when they live there on a six-month tenancy. Social housing providers are not merely that, they are organisations which build houses in which people can live their lives. Active engagement with civil society is key, using the acronym PACT: power, accountability, connection, trust.

The Professional Practice sessions included breakouts focussed on the three main conference themes: future vision and ambition, quality and place, and capacity, delivery and regulation.

**From Ambition to Delivery – Liverpool's Innovation in Meeting Housing Need
Hearing from Mark Kitts, Chief Executive, Foundations and Alan Rogers, Chief Executive, Cobalt Housing chaired by Danny Kaye, Associate Consultant, Campbell Tickell.**

Mark Kitts, Chief Executive, Foundations started the session. Foundations is the housing delivery arm of Liverpool City Council. Delegates heard their approach to building new

homes and renovating existing properties is dependent on a mixture of delivery, innovation, and local knowledge.

Kitts highlighted Foundation's three priorities:

- Plug gaps in the housing market in Liverpool;
- Tackle challenging neighbourhoods and;
- To be a commercial body capable of making savings and profit for the City Council.

He went on to say Foundation's commercial approach is key -that Liverpool City Council has an 'invest to earn' opportunity, creating an income stream for the Council that can be reinvested. This is also tied into Council Tax; the City Council currently taking in an amount far below the national average – if Liverpool's property bands were on par with the rest of England, the Council would recuperate around an extra £150million annually.

Kitts discussed the 'regeneration zones', prioritised by Foundations as priority areas which are benefitting from an area-based approach to housing investment.

The work of Foundations highlighted the many challenges and opportunities that Local Authorities looking to establish their own Ethical Housing Company would experience. Particularly for northern Authorities, having a plan to deal with legacy housing issues such as poor-quality housing and low land values will be imperative. Kitts went on to say with the right strategy in place, an ethical company such as Foundations can benefit from a Council's sound reputation and access to land.

Rogers discussed the partnership of Cobalt Housing and the University of Liverpool. Following a demerger from a larger housing group in late 2017, Cobalt's Board challenged the organisation to an ambitious programme of maximising their position as a significant anchor institution in the neighbourhoods of Croxteth, Fazakerley and Norris Green. The University of Liverpool was commissioned to build an evidence-based strategy that would guide Cobalt's influence in the area.

Four key themes were identified:

- The neighbourhoods of focus suffered from misrepresentation and this should be confronted
- Creating the ability for older households to 'rightsize' – move into smaller properties whilst remaining close to family ties in the local area – would be central to meeting housing need
- Gaining a greater understanding of housing market transitions and the needs and ambitions of communities would strengthen Cobalt's role in the economic development of neighbourhoods and resident social mobility
- A joined-up approach was needed to ensure the successful regeneration of the area

Rogers said that whilst the study areas did face challenges, with many deprived neighbourhoods present, research highlighted many positive features. Significant parts of the study area have seen successive waves of private investment, a response to demand from incoming residents many of which are younger families. Overall it was determined that for many, the neighbourhoods under focus were desirable places to live.

Rogers discussed the need to diversify the types of housing in each neighbourhood. Cobalt will continue to work with partners across Liverpool City Region to ensure their growth plan fits into the broader policy framework for addressing deprivation through sustainable regeneration.

Every House a Home? Raising and Enforcing Standards in the northern Private Rented Sector

Karen Brown, Senior Policy Advisor, NHC, Roli Barker, Development Manager, Fair Housing Futures, Shelter, chaired by Lee Sugden, Chief Executive, Salix Homes.

Our Senior Policy Advisor, Karen Brown started the session emphasising that PRS standards is making its way up towards the top of the political agenda – it wasn't mentioned much in the Social Housing White Paper, but due to the stark statistics this has changed.

She went on to say the demography of those in the PRS has changed dramatically over the years – more families with children and older people suggesting we really have to start to think about adaptations to meet the needs of this group, this is not something that landlords want to do as it comes at a cost. Due to the low prices of housing in some areas, the PRS in the North is attracting out of area landlords who are absent.

Feedback from across the sector and wider following the NHC PRS Inquiry includes:

- The Review of the Housing Health & Safety Rating System HHSRS – it is useful but too complicated, needs to have a simpler scoring system and need to update evidence around this.
- More evidence needed on Selective Licensing Tools – it's a last resort for LA's, it is costly and difficult, but can be the only tool that will work in some cases. LA's would lie more local powers on this
- Knowledge and data – a need for a national register
- Tenancy Reform – a consumer revolution is needed, which needs to go in hand with devolved rent control and removing no fault evictions.

Failed housing markets lead to competition for poor quality PRS – she suggested we need to break this cycle, it doesn't give any power or choice to tenants. The NHC's Inquiry into the PRS through the APPG for Housing in the North will report its findings in 2020.

Roli Barker, Development Manager, Fair Housing Futures, Shelter talked about Fair Housing Futures, an innovative project supporting vulnerable tenants in Greater Manchester.

Barker stated making Manchester's PRS work for everyone (particularly vulnerable groups and those on low income) will be achieved by listening to tenants, housing providers and wider partners. Tenants and landlords want the same things, a well maintained house that feels like home, improved regulation, fairer process and more support.

Barker talked about engaging with 80 participants including tenants, landlords and letting agencies to gather the evidence base of what its like in the PRS, findings included:

- Both tenants and landlords had fears
- LA's acutely aware of issues and unable to deal with them due to lack of resources and capacity
- Tenants were aware of their rights and the same went for landlords
- Tenants fears were around rent increases and repairs not being done
- For landlords' fears around rent arrears and damage to property
- Tenants lacked control and choice across the PRS due to affordability
- Both groups would like a one stop shop information platform

Hackitt Review – lessons from the early adopters group

Sue Sutton, Executive Director of Operations, Salix Homes chaired by Liz Haworth, Chief executive, Halton Housing.

Salix Homes were the only housing association in the north to be part of MHCLG's early adopters group. At the time of the Grenfell disaster, Salix were completing decent homes work.

Sutton said Salix learned a lot from the first tower block work and are pro-active in their approach to subsequent work. They have:

- Introduced a resident panel
- Used industry experts in major cladding replacement (with fire engineers)
- Have fire strategies
- Installed fire alarms/sprinklers
- Property Safety Officers

- Building Safety Handbook for every block (explaining evacuation routes etc.)

As an Early Adopter, Salix lead the implementation of Hackitt recommendations. They share best practice with other providers and support government in developing and building a safety policy. MHCLG say that it will take 2 years to have a Building Safety Regulator in place. This body has a lot of work to do. Additional building for the vulnerable are also to be added to their remit.

Sue recommend people make themselves familiar with the Raising the Bar document, as well as also recommending that providers look at what they must prove to the regulator. These include meeting requirement on the following Gateway Points:

- Gateway 1 – before planning permission can be granted
- Gateway 2 – before construction can begin
- Gateway 3 – before occupation can begin

Salix have implemented a Mandatory Occurrence Reporting requirement for tenants to report issues to Salix but making it easier for them to do so. The system has been tested and there is a standardised list of issues. An infographic has been produced for tenants and contractors as well as a promotional video.

Scotland and Wales – A template for Northern Housing Policy

Zhan McIntyre, Policy Lead, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA), Aaron Hill, Head of Policy & External Affairs, Community Housing Cymru chaired by Yvonne Castle, Chief executive, Johnnie Johnson Housing.

The SFHA work with government and their members on an ambitious and innovative variety of services that ensure the Scottish social housing sector is as strong and ambitious as possible.

Prior to devolution housing had been ‘administratively devolved’, which meant that in general meant Scotland had ‘Westminster policies with a Scottish Flavour’. This evolved into a distinctive policy agenda following devolution with Scotland establishing its own housing Cabinet position and the creation of a junior housing minister to oversee policy. Scotland has published 11 housing related acts with policy divergence from England most notable around Right to Buy, homelessness, and private rented sector reform.

Zhan talked about the Homelessness Task Force established by the Scottish Executive to make recommendations on how homelessness in Scotland could best be prevented. She also discussed the introduction of legislation on private rented housing on an incremental basis, driven by the need to react to poor management and condition standards.

Significantly, the Private Housing (Tenancies)(Scotland) Act 2016 reformed the private sector tenancy regime which had been in place for almost 30 years. The Act introduced the new private residential tenancy addressing the problem of a lack of security of tenure by ending the 'no fault' ground for eviction.

Overall, Scottish housing policy has benefitted from a starkly different Governmental response to the financial crash of 2008. Whereas England has experienced cuts to Communities and Local Government funding, the end of Housing Association grants and historically low funding for the Affordable Rent Programme; Scotland's response included the safeguarding of the capacity and funding, the introduction of innovative sources of long term funding, and an overall environment that encourages Council Building.

Aaron Hill, Head of Policy & External Affairs, Community Housing Cymru talked about how Devolution in Wales has evolved over many years, bringing its own opportunities and challenges. In 1999 it could be considered that Wales had 'money, but no power' with the opposite true of today: 'power, but no money'. Like the rest of the UK, Welsh housing policy has also been set in the context of national uncertainty and change – austerity, Brexit, and demographic shifts. Today, the Welsh social housing sector provides around 10% of all homes in Wales. Together, the sector spends around £1.1bn and has built an additional 20,000 homes since 2008.

Aaron talked about the The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 which brought changes to private rented housing, homelessness, standards for local authority tenants and changes to housing finance, council tax and housing associations.

In 2017, Community Housing Cymru published 'Housing Horizons', their vision for the future of the social housing sector based around the question of 'what if good housing was seen as a basic right for all in Wales'. The document centres around the core themes of health, prosperity and connectivity.

Partnership Approaches to Tackling Empty Homes and Low Demand

Sharon Thomas, Director of New Homes Delivery, Thirteen and Lyndsey Coe, Senior Neighbourhood Development Manager, Middlesbrough Borough Council & Thirteen

The need for regeneration has never gone away in the North to tackle low demand and deprivation. Work is taking place in partnership across North Ormesby to keep it afloat and let residents know that they matter, it's the second most deprived ward across England and

Wales. Homeowners have left the area, PRS has increased by 118% over 2001-2010, transient communities as only 50% of children stay until yr6 of the local schools.

Sharon and Lyndsey talked about a joint venture between Thirteen and Middlesbrough Council to tackle empty homes, both organisations put in money and received funds from Homes England.

Generally, people are staying put in the area as result of intervention. Selective Licensing scheme led by council – criteria low demand stock and persistent ASB. Focus is required, particularly in early intervention and help. Linking into wider areas – including employment and training, offering opportunities to local people to refurb homes, some of which have moved into direct employment and local businesses are benefitting too. Have had 10 families who have settled into an affordable quality home. Community Land Trust – was initially given £150k to refurb and manage 6 homes, with another 8 on top and then raised additional funds themselves through re-mortgaging and looking at RP status. Also held community events for communities to feed in their priorities, linking opportunities to volunteering schemes and fresh project to encourage cooking at home and eating fresh produce. Things have changed as a result of the above but difficult to prove statistically, but we can see it with our own eyes and what we hear from locals. Tackling low demand goes further than bricks and mortar, not just about the physical aesthetics; it's about investing in people and the social issues they face. Not doing it to the community but with them!

Housing the Powerhouse

Hugh Owen, Director of Strategy and Public Affairs, Riverside

Housing is not prominent in discussions on the Northern Powerhouse but it has a key role to play.

There are two key pieces of research by Homes for the North.

- Long-term housing supply needed to support growth ambitions
- Investment in housing in the north

Research established a need for 50,000 houses in the north. Higher than other estimates.

Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review (NPIER) compiled a transformational growth scenario to 2050 and identified 850,000 new jobs and £100bn boost based on Transport for the North demographic and economic data.

It became clear that this has implications for housing after engagement via roundtables. There is a declining market share of the working population in the north (a gap of 5% on England as a whole) and it currently looks like there a lower percentage share of population and households in the north.

Housing needs to support economic growth in the north. There needs to be 2m homes by 2050 under NPIER scenario and housing should be planned alongside economic growth. Not surprisingly, Leeds and Manchester are projected to see the highest growth, while Cumbria is set to see the smallest. The success of the Northern Powerhouse is riding on housing.

Research was commissioned early this year to investigate historic distribution of public investment between the regions. It found that the north had done OK but that its share of spending in the UK was falling (by 18% in 2017/18). This should be seen within the context that this includes the poorer devolved nations of the UK.

Large areas of the north would not qualify for social housing grant and 80% of funding under 5 Homes England programmes. In the future it is estimated that the north's share of funding could as low as 10% - less than half of historic levels and only four local authorities will benefit from 80% of the five available funds due to targeting policies of "areas of highest affordability pressure".

Homes for the North have three key asks:

1. Need a clear starting point for the north. There is space for a pan-northern approach to demonstrate how housing contributes to the Northern Powerhouse by addressing the quality of the stock, working collaboratively and seeing housing as part of the Northern Powerhouse strategy.
2. An overt spatial strategy that aligns with ambitious planning policy to ensure that the north can build the homes to grow its share of the working age population.
3. Regeneration. There is a need for a renaissance of the regeneration agenda after it disappeared in 2011. In some areas this may mean replacement of existing stock. However, where this happens replacement must fit with the local demography.

Panel session: Power up the North

Andy Bounds, Enterprise Editor, Financial Times, Professor Katy Shaw, Professor of Contemporary Writings, Northumbria University and New Statesman contributor, Edna Robinson, Chairman, People's Powerhouse, and Chair, Trafford Housing Trust, chaired by Henri Murison, Director, Northern Powerhouse Partnership.

Henri Murison kicked off the session stating the Northern Powerhouse launched 5 years ago, building upon the previous work and committed to unlocking devolution. Now the North is prominent in a general election. The 'Power up the North' Regional newspaper campaign sees housing on the agenda.

Andy Bounds stated the Northern Powerhouse puts the North on the media map. It has declined in its number of FT mentions, peaking a few years ago. It has increased this year, however. Northern citizens are £7k per year worse off. There is missed potential. Foreign direct investment in the region is up. Unemployment is down. Productivity is struggling however. Good signs in terms of major companies relocating to the North; C4 to Leeds, Sky expanding.

Economic contraction with quarter; worst since 2012. In the last decade NE & NW have been more productive. Even London is down in this period. Yorkshire is worryingly down. Business is pro-devolution; private and public pushing together. What about party politics? Tories keen, Labour unsure of uneven regional devolution. Cheaper housing is the key to attracting talent.

Katy Shaw highlighted the need to think of culture as an engine to change, either politically or socially. Culture is something that people think they need to go out to consume. It is also about community and commonality. The North in popular imagination is buildings, consensus that old places need to be changed/reimagined into places of the future. Where does the small/local come into this? You find marginalisation and fragmentation in these spaces. How can we make them feel engaged, to co-author use of urban buildings? Culture-led investment in housing yields happy people; this yields happy communities; and ultimately sustainability. Houses create cohesion. When invited to help author the nature of places, people promote and boost areas. Culture has so far been overlooked in the Northern Powerhouse. Communities are vital in encouraging people to the 'better half of the nation'.

Edna Robinson talked about the People's Powerhouse which was formed around the idea that a new power structure is emerging. She suggested the debate is missing English devolution; what does this look like? Greater Manchester has seen it in a big way, others less so. We want a say. We're lacking a holistic approach to how it's all done. Lack of housing funding is 'spectacularly obscene'. 'Ruthless disinvestment' has been fuelled by the idea that civil society has no place anymore.