

Neighbourhoods and communities strategy



AFFORDABLE HOMES STRONG COMMUNITIES



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Foreword

Each year the Housing Corporation funds the delivery of some 30,000 new homes and ensures high quality, responsive housing services across some two million housing association homes in England. Every one of those homes, the way in which they are managed, and the individuals and families that live within them, contributes to the success or otherwise of their local communities and neighbourhoods.

This strategy is about how we intend to deliver for those neighbourhoods and communities. It sets out how we will build strong links with local government, both as a strategic leader within localities, but also as a key source of democratic scrutiny and oversight. It recognises the important contribution that residents can make to improving services, owning and managing assets and – increasingly – holding their landlords to account. It highlights the vital importance of delivering Respect within our communities and tackling remaining concentrations of single tenure stock, poverty and deprivation. And it outlines our bold ambition to release the potential of housing associations to develop further as wider social businesses and neighbourhood-level delivery agencies.

The strategy sets a direction of travel. It will evolve and develop over time. But the message is clear: the Housing Corporation is about delivering for neighbourhoods and communities – they are at the heart of our mission and central to our ambition for the future.



Jon Rouse

Chief Executive

October 2006

Introduction

The Housing Corporation is committed to delivering affordable homes within strong, thriving neighbourhoods and communities.

This strategy sets out the Housing Corporation's strategic vision for neighbourhoods and communities, and the role we see for social housing providers as key partners in delivering that vision.

Our aim is to:

- promote the active engagement of housing associations in the development and delivery of local and neighbourhood strategies;
- encourage housing associations to contribute further to the sustainability of the communities they work within, extending beyond their core housing role; and
- develop greater community and resident involvement in the work of housing associations, empowering people to be able to choose to engage actively in the decisions that affect them.

This strategy flows from the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan (2003), and the subsequent five-year plans Sustainable Communities: Homes For All and Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity (2005). In *Securing the Future*, the national strategy for sustainable development (2005), the Government has set out its definition of sustainable communities and the components that contribute to creating and maintaining them. It has also

published strategies on liveability, Cleaner, Safer, Greener (2002), and on working with communities, Together We Can (2005) and National Community Safety Plan (2005). It has also published the Respect Action Plan (2006). The Rural Strategy (2004) and associated documents set out the position for rural areas.

For housing organisations and other bodies working in neighbourhoods, the distilled message from these initiatives is clear. Achieving sustainable, inclusive, mixed communities must be a core component of successful businesses.

Our proposals address five key areas:

- **working together** – outlining how we see housing associations, local authorities and others working together in partnership to deliver for local communities;
- **sustaining mixed communities** – setting out how the Corporation and housing associations can contribute to delivering and sustaining successful, mixed communities;
- **adding community value** – highlighting the growing role of housing associations as social entrepreneurs and neighbourhood-level delivery agents, in addition to their core housing role;
- **building Respect** – detailing the critical role of housing associations in tackling anti-social behaviour and delivering the Respect agenda, and the role of the Housing Corporation in supporting this; and

- **empowering communities** – highlighting the critical importance of residents, and communities informing the work of housing associations and holding them to account.

The strategy concludes by proposing a new **Communities Standard** for housing associations – enabling housing associations, with communities, to measure their contribution towards the shared objective of making our communities decent places to live.

Over coming months, we will be developing the proposals set out in the strategy and publishing further papers for consultation. In the meantime, we welcome input and comments.

This strategy focuses on our expectations of housing associations. Whilst we have no responsibility for Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs), we believe that much of its content will be relevant to them. We will also be considering where elements of its proposals have relevance to the accreditation requirements being placed on unregistered housing managers. We would therefore welcome contributions from local authorities, ALMOs and from prospective participants in the accreditation regime.

Working together

Effective partnerships are central to the delivery of sustainable communities and neighbourhoods. No one organisation can deliver alone.

Local authorities are essential partners for housing associations. Through their strategic housing and planning roles, local authorities have a key leadership role across sectors, tenure and markets. Their wider responsibilities contribute significantly to the success and well being of neighbourhoods and communities, through the direct delivery of services and as catalysts for wider partnership and delivery.

Increasingly, housing associations are developing the capacity to act as important delivery partners for local government, offering delivery capacity and expertise and a close relationship with local communities.

However, it is also clear that the quality of relationships between local authorities and housing associations can vary significantly.

There is good evidence of effective housing association involvement in Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), and many have a strong record of involvement with Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs). Where associations are involved in these key local partnerships, real benefits can be brought about. Where associations are not involved, it reduces the extent to which the association can align its priorities with developing local strategies and the delivery capacity available to local partnerships.

In some areas, where ownership of stock is fragmented, rationalisation of ownership or management of housing association stock may play an important role in improving associations' ability to engage with local strategic agendas, whilst increasing the effectiveness of service delivery to residents.

In other areas, communication between local authorities and their local housing associations may be limited to issues around lettings, rather than wider strategic issues relating to communities and their homes.

We therefore believe that there is scope for a further step-change in the quality of association engagement with local authorities and in particular in the work of LSPs.

We also recognise that there are many other organisations that play important parts in local strategies, and that associations will need to continue to create effective partnerships with them. This includes statutory bodies such as the police and health bodies, and others such as New Deal for Communities and neighbourhood management organisations, along with initiatives often involving new special purpose vehicles (SPVs). Partnerships with community organisations are essential.



We believe all housing associations should:

- actively engage with local authorities in those communities where they have a significant presence, either individually or collectively, and agree with each such local authority how they will contribute to delivery of local strategic priorities;
- play an active part in LSPs, either individually or through representatives;
- seek to contribute to the development of local and (where relevant) sub-regional and regional housing strategies;
- work with other locally active associations to ensure that consistent approaches are adopted to the delivery of both housing and other services, taking into account community priorities; and
- take a strategic view of stock holdings in different communities as part of their asset management strategies, including consideration of whether management or ownership of stock should be retained in areas where there is not the capacity to contribute to local strategic agendas.

Coventry Consortium of Registered Social Landlords

Twelve associations make up the consortium, which is based in Whitefriars Housing Group, was set up to help address anti-social behaviour through:

- a partnership for representation on the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership;
- key performance indicators, including resident involvement;
- specialist services of casework, training, witness and victim support and community mediation;
- a protocol with the police and the wider agencies in the Safer Estates Group work;
- enabling smaller associations to gain access to services;
- developing consistent approaches;
- gaining efficiency and effectiveness; and
- sharing information formally and informally.

Photo: Whitefriars Customer Involvement Officer Terry Rollings meeting residents at a local festival this summer

LIFE model

A technique started by Harvest Housing and developed in Liverpool to enable associations, with the local authority, to adopt strategic approaches to neighbourhoods and to focus their skills, resources and assets.

Associations' roles can be to:

- Lead** in a neighbourhood;
- Influence** what happens;
- Follow** by working in the direction set by others; and
- Exit**.

The model can be used at a variety of levels, including strategy development, housing management, asset management, community empowerment and stock ownership.

Our proposals

The Housing Corporation is agreeing a protocol with the Local Government Association (LGA) on working together. It will include commitments to:

- seek the views of local authorities on the performance of housing associations operating in their areas;
- work more closely together across a range of areas – both in investment and regulation; and
- replicate the national model protocol across pilot local authorities.

This autumn we will publish the recommendations of the National Steering Group on rationalisation based on the independent rationalisation commissions we set up in Manchester and South Hampshire, and issue a toolkit aimed at helping those associations and local authorities that wish to take forward rationalisation of ownership or management of their stock.

As part of our review of the Housing Corporation Assessment (HCA) format, we will consult on changes to regulatory “traffic lights” to ensure that they take account of the quality of housing associations’ wider asset management strategies, including the extent to which those strategies facilitate associations’ engagement with local authorities and partnerships where they hold stock.

We will promote further involvement of housing associations in neighbourhood management and delivery of other services at a local level through publication of best practice and support for the development of innovative models of delivery. This will include future changes in local governance.

Where housing associations have a significant presence and role in a local authority area, we believe there is a strong case for enabling their work to be subject to scrutiny by local authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees. We intend to examine the practicalities and implications of this, recognising that associations are independent organisations, and issue proposals for consultation in the light of the conclusions of the forthcoming Local Government White Paper.

Rationalisation Commissions

The recommendations of the Commissions for Manchester and South Hampshire have been published by Chartered Institute of Housing. They concluded that rationalisation may contribute to the aims of:

- better service delivery to tenants and wider estate or neighbourhood residents;
- working with partners to improve neighbourhood management;
- wider regeneration initiatives; and
- greater cost efficiencies.

Among the recommendations were that:

- all associations should explore the scope for undertaking all forms of rationalisation as part of their asset management strategy – focusing in particular on community engagement and service delivery;
- all local authorities should identify which (if any) areas are a priority for rationalisation on the basis of robust, evident and transparent criteria;
- effective service delivery and the creation of sustainable neighbourhoods should be at the core of associations' business planning; and
- associations in multi-landlord areas, should move beyond an approach that is about delivering landlord services to individual tenants and engage with the wider neighbourhood regeneration agenda to create quality neighbourhoods.



Opening Doors project on integrating refugees

This key project led by hact and the Chartered Institute of Housing, supported by the Corporation, aims to support associations as they mainstream the work with refugees, asylum seekers and (where possible) new migrant groups.

The objectives are to enable associations to gain a deeper understanding of the issues of meeting housing, along with other needs and aspirations of the relevant groups.

Over the next two years, the project will make the business case for the sector to increase the amount and quality of housing and support to help achieve more integrated communities. The approach will be to build 'hubs' of around six associations in different parts of the country to assist in implementing the Home Office's Gateway programme.

The associations are Accord, Accent, St Vincents, Longhurst with Tuntum, First Wessex and Staffordshire.

Sustaining mixed communities

Mixed communities contribute to the promotion of choice and equality, avoiding concentrations of deprivation and help address social exclusion and community cohesion.

Through our investment programme, the Housing Corporation has sought to support the development of successful mixed communities, providing for a variety of incomes, tenures and housing types, and varying household make up, age groups, ethnic groups and housing and support needs.

Over the last year, the Housing Corporation has supported a significant programme of research, aimed at understanding how successful mixed communities can be created and sustained.

We recognise that housing is only one contributing factor in mixed communities. Other essential components include good schools, transport and health facilities. We also know that a range of approaches is needed – different communities have different needs, and each area will have different history, with unique social, economic, environmental and demographic interactions.

We are therefore developing new approaches to investment, capable of responding to different circumstances and need – for example through our Northern Housing Challenge, which is testing out new ways of contributing to the economic development work of bodies such as the three Northern Regional Development Agencies, the Northern Way and the North's ten urban



regeneration companies. The focus is on delivering tangible wider social and economic benefits for people, for example through Section 106 agreements.

We aim to work proactively with national agencies, local authorities and housing associations to develop responses to key challenges around mixed communities, including:

- the creation of new mixed communities in growth areas, such as the Thames Gateway;
- engaging in large scale regeneration and renewal;
- tackling remaining areas of mono-tenure housing, particularly where this is associated with concentrations of worklessness and deprivation;
- addressing low demand or high demand; and
- dealing with other individual circumstances, for example in rural communities.

We believe all housing associations should:

- consider how their work supports and sustains the objective of mixed communities in each of the areas where they operate, and particularly where they are seeking to develop or redevelop;
- work with local authorities and other partners to develop strategies to balance local housing need, including the needs of groups such as black and minority ethnic groups, refugees and asylum seekers, disabled and vulnerable people, with the need to create and sustain successful mixed communities, both in the

Community cohesion work by associations

William Sutton Trust and Manningham Housing Association have a joint community initiative to boost multicultural understanding in Bradford by developing racial and cultural awareness and helping to boost choice in rehousing.

It allows William Sutton to tap into the local knowledge and networks of BME-led Manningham and, in return, William Sutton's experiences support Manningham's development of tenant involvement strategies.

Their joint Community Initiatives Officer's role involves organising cultural activities including dance and cookery classes, holding meetings and training sessions for tenants of both associations as well as leading development work on issues of racial and cultural awareness.

The early work was to dispel myths and challenge people's preconceptions about racial and ethnic identity and to try to find the best way of delivering community cohesion through activities which people could enjoy as well as learn from.



Community cohesion

Social landlords operating in the Newbold area of Rochdale are working together to promote the neighbourhood as a safe and desirable place, breaking down historic barriers to particular ethnic groups. They aim to tackle:

- limited housing opportunities and poor living conditions experienced by the South Asian population;
- limited interaction and integration between three different ethnic groups; and
- sustainability of local estates and the wider community.

Lessons learned include:

- the importance of landlords working together to achieve common goals;
- the importance of core management tasks to support community cohesion;
- significant gains can be made by actively engaging with housing applicants about what is or is not available, talking through their options and explaining the consequences of holding out for a popular area; and
- gains can only be sustained through continued attention which points to the importance of ongoing funding and mainstreaming community cohesion principles within core management tasks.

Picture: A Rochdale resident talking to a local housing officer

initial stages of developments and in the long term as communities change;

- seek to align local access and lettings plans with choice-based lettings schemes as they are developed and implemented;
- monitor neighbourhoods so that action can be taken early, where necessary, to maintain mixed communities; and
- actively engage with initiatives aimed at delivering more cohesive and inclusive communities.

Our proposals

We will continue to ensure that our approaches to investment help achieve mixed communities, in new developments, in regeneration schemes and in existing mono-tenure areas.

We will commission research into new approaches to addressing remaining mono-tenure areas and seek to pilot such new approaches, subject to the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

We will continue to support the Government's current mixed community initiatives, which aim to transform areas of mono-tenure housing that have concentrations of the indicators of deprivation. We accept that in some circumstances, for instance in areas of high density and high demand, or areas of single house type and low demand, the objective of changing mono-tenure areas will lead to us investing even though there will be a net reduction in rented homes.

We will continue to explore alternative approaches to funding, such as upfront investment to unlock the large-scale regeneration of problem estates.

We will seek to strengthen the requirement that all investment in the 2008-10 National Affordable Housing Programme contributes to achieving and maintaining mixed communities.

Adding community value

Social housing providers work in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country and provide services to some of the most disadvantaged households.

In addition to their core role of providing high quality homes for those who need them, they are also well placed to improve opportunities and life chances to their residents, their surrounding neighbourhoods and wider communities.

With an established community presence, leadership embedded in the local community, sound asset base and business skills, many housing associations are establishing themselves as leading community and voluntary organisations working in both affordable housing and non-housing fields.

Added value work includes:

- early years provision, including childcare and nurseries;
- employment training;
- local labour initiatives, such as young people's construction schemes;
- financial inclusion;
- community centres and activities for community cohesion and inclusion;
- repair and maintenance programmes for private dwellings;
- youth facilities and outreach;
- older people's programmes, including drop-in centres;

- provision of neighbourhood management and wardens;
- one-stop-shop advice centres;
- local transport initiatives, such as Home Zones; and
- public space projects.

Investing in activities of this sort can be sound business, as it helps to protect and enhance previous and current investment in homes and assets. It is also an important part of a coherent overall approach to achieving and maintaining mixed and sustainable communities where people want to live.

To be most effective, housing association added value activities need to be delivered within the context of local strategies and priorities. For example, work with young people should be linked in to the work of local Children's Trusts and financial inclusion initiatives with local economic and employment development.

We recognise that as associations become more involved in non-direct social housing activities, the balance of their business changes. We also recognise that engaging in the range of other work has the potential to expose associations to a wider range of regulatory regimes, with associated burdens and potential for conflicting regulatory requirements.

We accept that as housing associations develop wider non-core activities, they will need to strike a balance between core housing business and



community activities. Our definition of social housing already includes regeneration and improving the quality of life of present and future residents. However, we recognise the argument that our current approach, which sets a maximum threshold of 49% for non-housing activities, may be inconsistent with our risk-based approach to regulation (whilst also recognising that few, if any, associations are approaching this threshold).

We also recognise that sometimes there may be tensions between the pressure to deliver efficiency savings and investing in added value activities. However, associations can, for instance, take into account other factors and benefits when measuring value for money in procurement, such as employment of residents and gains in the local economy. The Operating Cost Index now allows for adjustments to be made to allow for non-housing expenditure.

Adding value

Willow Park Housing Trust re-enforces its regeneration of the area by providing employment opportunities for residents across all its functions.

It has also launched a scheme to help residents set up and develop their own businesses, particularly focusing on helping women and social enterprises.

LHA-ASRA has supported the development of a social enterprise agency, TREES, which is made up of several businesses associated with its work. It has also supported the development of village companies, similar to community land trusts, which have put the control of local shops and businesses into the hands of the communities.

Photo: Kidz Come 1st Director Vicky Burns and some of the children at the after-school and holiday childcare scheme. Four local mothers set up this social enterprise and worked voluntarily whilst studying for recognised childcare qualifications



Adding value

Somer Community Housing Trust involves children and young people in developing play areas, and has used them to train service providers in the best ways of engaging them.

All the agencies involved, including health, education and social services, have made pledges to involve young people more, with the association and young people monitoring progress.

William Sutton Housing Association in Stoke-on-Trent built a partnership with the community, Groundwork, schools, health authority and others to bring a derelict piece of land back into use for organic vegetables, fruit and a sensory garden.

The project puts an emphasis on employment and training for local people and is opening a small shop to sell the produce.

Photo: Children enjoying the HOOPS play area in Show Hill, Bath, created by Somer Community Housing Trust in conjunction with local youngsters

We believe all housing associations should:

- consider the business case for developing approaches that add value to the communities where they are operating;
- where they are delivering added value activities, ensure that they are doing so in the context of wider strategic priorities established with local authorities and other partners. This will dovetail with their approaches to rationalisation of management and stock;
- work together in developing their In Business for Neighbourhoods agenda in order to maximise the value that they add through coherent and co-ordinated use of resources;
- examine ways of supporting social enterprises as a means of strengthening local economies and promoting employment opportunities, including residents working from their homes; and
- support other local social enterprises and third sector organisations in building and developing the local economies and employment. As well as direct investment and in-kind support for social enterprises, associations, individually and in partnerships, can support other enterprises through their procurement strategies.



Our proposals

We are committed to helping associations continue to develop their potential as delivery vehicles for services in support of communities and neighbourhoods. We will seek to identify the barriers and obstacles to associations getting more involved in this area that arise from investment and regulatory requirements, and remove them where reasonable.

We will seek to reach agreements with other regulators, as we have done with the Office of the Regulator of Community Interest Companies, to minimise unnecessary bureaucratic burdens.

We intend to consult on proposals to revise our policy that 51% of associations' business must be social housing, including seeking the views of lenders of private finance. Our aim would be to enhance our risk-based assessment on a case-by-case basis. Ahead of publication of this consultation, we would welcome responses from associations telling us where this policy is causing problems.

We will examine how we can encourage and provide incentives for associations to adopt strategic approaches where their added value work has both sound business cases and is clearly linked to local strategies priorities.

We will work with stakeholders to examine the needs for further guidance and good practice in relation to the provision of support by associations

Examples of significant added value work

Ecotec research for the Housing Corporation showed that in 2003-04, 55 associations invested £5.8 million of their resources in capital projects, leveraging in a further £4.6 million, giving a total investment of £10.4 million. At the same time, they spent £4.2 million on revenue projects, leveraging in £14.2 million, giving a total of £18.4 million.

Research for the G15 group of associations in London showed that they invested £71 million in capital and £99 million in revenue over five years.

A survey of housing associations in the Northern regions in 2006 says that over five years they anticipate investing £114 million in capital projects, leveraging in a further £80 million, making a total of £194 million. The revenue investment is expected to be £181 million, matched by £317 million, giving a total investment of £498 million.

Photo: Don Bennett outside his new home in Blackpool. Revenue investment by housing associations in the North, plus match finding, is due to reach almost £500 million over the next five years

to developing local social enterprises, including removing any barriers to residents setting up businesses.

While some of the added value can be quantified, it is difficult to measure accurately the full social and community benefits. We will continue to work with the National Housing Federation to support its research into developing a tool for associations to use in recording and measuring the added value arising from their activities. If further research and tools are needed following this project, we will work to enable them to happen.

We will assist housing associations to develop partnerships with other voluntary and community sectors, at national, local and community levels by promoting good practice and building relationships with national representative organisations, for instance the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE).

We will promote associations' involvement in other housing services, such as managing and maintaining homes with management orders or repair and maintenance services for owner-occupiers.

Building Respect

We believe that everybody has a right to live in a safe, clean neighbourhood where people want to live and can enjoy living. In January 2006, the Government launched the Respect Action Plan, which set out a range of measures to help achieve this. There are many implications for housing, including continuing to implement anti-social behaviour (ASB) strategies, working with families, participating in Local Area Agreements' preventive work, implementing the Respect Standard for Housing Management, introducing Neighbourhood Charters within the National Neighbourhood Agreement, further neighbourhood management and neighbourhood warden schemes, and the use of further tools to protect communities.

Housing associations have a long track record in dealing with many aspects of building communities and dealing with problems, and they have embraced the recent developments in strategies to ensure progress is made. This includes:

- adopting and implementing anti-social behaviour strategies;
- participating in Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRP);
- supporting and promoting education, diversion and prevention initiatives;
- implementing neighbourhood management and neighbourhood warden schemes;
- implementing the community cohesion solutions highlighted in the range of published guides and developing new techniques in all its



Implementing Respect

New Charter, based in Ashton-under-Lyne, has been working to ensure that Respect is at the heart of the organisation and is a key priority for all staff members, from the Group Chief Executive to frontline housing officers.

It has developed a range of community engagement mechanisms and prevention programmes including community football teams, local 'mini-Olympics', reparation schemes and a community learning programme.

One of its innovative schemes is an anti-social behaviour quiz for schools based on the concept of Who Wants to be a Millionaire?, which encourages local young people to consider the consequences of carrying out anti-social behaviour and the importance of looking after and investing in their local areas.

It has signed up to the Respect Standard for Housing Management and is looking into developing a family rehabilitation programme.

Photo: Young people at the mini Olympic games in Mossley, organised by New Charter Housing Trust



Intensive Rehabilitation Schemes

The Housing Corporation has provided £250,000 through its Innovation and Good Practice programme to support the development of proposals for up to five Family Intervention Projects across the country.

The schemes work with families that have been carrying out anti-social behaviour and aim to deal with the underlying issues and prevent further nuisance behaviour. Multi-agency teams address problems such as education, employment, health and substance misuse issues either within a residential unit or through outreach.

Previous schemes have proved to be very successful and they form part of the Government's Respect Action Plan.

Associations are being encouraged to develop schemes with local authorities and other partners, and the Corporation will share lessons learned and best practice as the schemes develop.

dimensions, including race, ethnicity and faith; and

- addressing other aspects of the Cleaner, Safer, Greener strategy such as environmental action, open spaces and play areas.

As one of its priorities, the Social Exclusion Task Force in the Cabinet Office, as the successor to the Social Exclusion Unit, has working with the Home Office's Respect Unit to help improve services of prevention for families with problems. It published *Reaching Out: An Action Plan on Social Exclusion* in September 2006 which sets out the Government's priorities.

The development of the 'Community call for action' to get more accountability and action to improve services is covered in the section on Community Empowerment.

We believe all housing associations should:

- continue to develop and implement strategies to deal with anti-social behaviour;
- sign up to the Respect Standard for Housing Management;
- include neighbourhood management and neighbourhood warden schemes in their strategies for community involvement. As funding for neighbourhood management and warden schemes becomes part of financial arrangements for Local Area Agreements, associations will need to agree with their partners how schemes will be funded, including from mainstream budgets;

- consider their contribution to other aspects of the Respect Action Plan, including parenting and Intensive Rehabilitation Schemes. Associations should consider what roles they can play in supporting the use of Parenting Orders through the tools available, particularly by working with other specialist organisations. They can also consider, individually or in partnership with others, whether they could develop an Intensive Rehabilitation Scheme by making housing available for others to deliver the service;
- use feedback from residents and communities to develop their strategies on aspects of the Respect Action Plan, as surveys show that there is some correlation between resident satisfaction and actions to deal with anti-social behaviour;
- further develop initiatives in education, prevention and diversion with partners and specialist organisations. This will include work with young people through building relationships with local Youth Offending Teams; and
- ensure that their policies and activities contribute positively to local community cohesion strategies and actions. There are clear overlaps with strategies to deliver and maintain mixed sustainable communities.



Building Respect

Moat has worked closely with young people in developing a 'Respect and Reward' scheme, where young people are rewarded for respecting others and the environment. After the negotiated contract, which was centred on responsible citizenship, the young people demonstrated their commitment to the contract and were rewarded with a trip to the Chessington World of Adventure amusement park.

The scheme is to be extended to redeveloping communal garden areas, with a trip to a pantomime as the reward.

Servite Houses use a full range of methods for prevention and resolution, working in partnership with other agencies and, most importantly, involving residents at every stage. It has a dedicated anti-social behaviour team which includes trained mediators, support staff and an in-house legal team. It has signed up to the Respect Standard for Housing Management because it believes it echoes and endorses the work it has been doing on anti-social behaviour.

Photo: Young people from Cavell Way in Sittingbourne, Kent, as they sign their agreements for the 'Respect and Reward' project with Moat

Our proposals

We will continue to work with the Government as it develops the implementation of the Respect Action Plan, including Neighbourhood Charters and National Neighbourhood Agreement. We will work with the Chartered Institute of Housing, the National Housing Federation and other bodies in the practical implementation of the Action Plan.

We will ensure that associations build on their excellent work to embrace and implement the Respect Agenda in a positive and preventive way, embedding it in their culture of working in communities and neighbourhoods. We will continue to monitor how associations are using the tools available to help ensure that they are as effective as possible. We will continue to promote the potential roles of housing associations and publicise good practice.

We encourage housing organisations to develop and implement coherent programmes of neighbourhood management and services. We will consider how to provide incentives for this. We will examine whether there is a need for further tools to improve effectiveness, and whether we can remove more barriers.

We encourage associations to adopt the Respect Standard for Housing Management. We will encourage partnerships and joint working in neighbourhoods to ensure coherent and effective delivery of the Standard.

We believe that funding of neighbourhood management and wardens should be mainstreamed effectively and efficiently within Local Area Agreement financial arrangements, and will work with Government, local authorities and the National Housing Federation to achieve this.

We will make revenue funding available for up to five associations to examine the feasibility of establishing Intensive Rehabilitation Schemes for families causing serious problems in their neighbourhoods.

We will support prevention initiatives that seek to work with young people, particularly developing our relationship with the Youth Justice Board.

As part of the review of regulation, we will reconsider how the Respect agenda can be given greater prominence.

Up your street

The report Up Your Street, from John Moores University, showed that housing associations and other social landlords have the potential to make a significant contribution to the neighbourhood agenda owing to their:

- ethos;
- long-term stake in many localities;
- track record in wider regeneration activities;
- generally good rapport with residents; and
- level of independence and freedom.

Associations have taken part in many of the neighbourhood management initiatives and either acted as lead organisation, managing agent (usually on behalf of a local authority), co-ordinator (of landlords' input) or key partner.

However, the sector is diverse in character and some associations are more suited to playing an active role in neighbourhood service provision than others owing to their:

- financial strength;
- size and critical mass in particular areas;
- track record in wider regeneration activity; and
- level of experience of working with other agencies.

To play their part, associations should:

- carefully assess the local context;
- their attributes;
- other partners' stances;
- establish the business case for engaging in neighbourhood management and service delivery;
- consider the need for internal restructuring (e.g. creation of subsidiary organisations within group structures);
- examine new ways of working with other housing bodies (e.g. joint marketing, stock rationalisation);
- forge closer links with service providers and voluntary organisations; and
- provide residents with a spectrum of opportunities for involvement ranging from supply of information to running services.

Up Your Street: Housing Associations and the Neighbourhoods and Communities Agenda was published by the Housing Corporation in 2006 and is available on the Corporation's website: www.housingcorp.gov.uk

Empowering communities

Engagement and empowerment of communities is fundamental to achieving the Government's ambitions around civic renewal and improvement in public services.

Our existing Resident Involvement Strategy sets out our expectations of associations in relation to the involvement of residents in the delivery of services to them by their landlord. Resident Involvement Statements are now in place across 80% of housing associations. We will be taking appropriate regulatory action against those associations that have not yet met our baseline regulatory requirements.

We recognise, however, that aspects of this strategy are in need of development and have started to review and develop the strategy in light of the recommendations in the recent report of Sir Les Elton.

Many organisations have already made progress in resident-led inspection, resident audits and 'mystery shopping' and other initiatives that can feed into the development of the wider approach to neighbourhood contracts and community challenges to service level provision.

We want to build on this good practice. We also welcome the conclusions of the National Housing Federation's Resident Involvement Commission, published in September 2006, which we will be responding to in the near future. Some of the overall conclusions are that associations must:

Elton Report recommendations on involvement

The Elton Report recommended that:

- the Corporation and the NHF should ensure that the involvement of residents is seen as core business for all associations;
- the Corporation and partners should encourage, and in due course require, externally verified self-assessment incorporating resident feedback;
- the Corporation, Audit Commission and NHF should work with the Chartered Institute of Housing to progress proposals for resident-led inspection;
- resident participation on boards should be encouraged – and all associations should have at least one resident board member on each board or committee directly responsible for delivering services;
- further promotion of resident board membership should be linked to a re-examination of tax and benefit rules; and
- all board members should be subject to competency assessment.



- first get the basics right and treat tenants as paying customers;
- give them real choice in their housing and management options;
- involve them as individuals and collectively in decisions, show that they can have real influence over their housing and their neighbourhoods; and
- support, train and develop their ability to be involved.

We see these as being in line with the approach of this strategy.

We will also consider how best housing associations can engage most effectively with wider communities, beyond their resident base, particularly where they are delivering a range of non-housing services to those communities.

The Government has proposed that one of the key ways to empower communities in improving services is to develop ‘community calls for action’ to improve accountability and prompt action from providers. We are considering how such approaches might be applied to the work of housing associations. We are also interested in the potential offered by alternative approaches, including Citizens’ Juries and local satisfaction surveys, which could be developed through the National Neighbourhood Agreement and Neighbourhood Charters.

Community Land Trusts

One aspect of building the capacity of communities is to transfer assets to them, and develop and use these assets. The effective transfer of assets to communities can take many forms. Consents are already available for local authorities to dispose of assets at below market price for the benefit of communities. The Government is examining options and possibilities for encouraging further asset transfers.

Community Land Trust (CLT) is an overall term to describe mechanisms whereby assets are held in perpetuity for the benefit of local communities. They are not-for-profit organisations with community representatives having the majority on the managing committee or board. For the provision of affordable housing, the aim is for the CLT to own the equity such as the land, so removing it from the market cost.

The Affordable Rural Housing Commission report recommended that CLTs be examined as a way to meet local needs. The Government sees them as a potential way of empowering communities and says that local authorities should consider them as a possibility in stock options studies.

Photo: Residents on the site of a former hospital at Cashes Green in Stroud, which is being developed with help from Gloucestershire Land for People



Involving the wider community

South Yorkshire Housing Association has been supported to engage the community in the Fir Vale Vision project, in the market renewal area of Fir Vale in Sheffield. It employed staff to work with the community to consider options for housing market interventions and social regeneration. By using video, training Resident Consultants and working with the Community Forum, it aims to involve all the community, including usually hard-to-reach groups in decision making on the future of the area.

Mossclare Housing has adopted a Charter for Added Value to challenge staff to think of how they can deliver long-term benefits for communities in everything they do. This has seen Mossclare deliver more than housing services, including local labour projects, local trading, environmental improvements and educational improvements.

Hastoe Housing Association has developed and piloted, with other partners, Investor in Communities as a national standard for local people to work towards and to come together and commit to deliver shared priorities for their neighbourhood. Local people lead and remain engaged in monitoring action.

Photo: Residents of Fir Vale in Sheffield

We believe all housing associations should:

- use their experience of involving residents to build wider involvement networks within the communities in which they operate;
- incorporate the types and levels of involvement of their residents and wider communities in their business plans and cultures under In Business for Neighbourhoods and involve them in their strategies for different neighbourhoods;
- continue to develop their involvement strategies and use their experience for wider community involvement;
- where appropriate, use their resources over time to enable and build the capacity of local organisations and individuals, be a focal point or 'hub' to help groups co-ordinate their activities, and work to empower the community to take part effectively in wider decision making;
- consider the potential of using their assets, either directly or indirectly, to strengthen community organisations;
- incorporate wider resident and community involvement in their neighbourhood strategies; and
- build on their expertise in involving residents to help develop capacity for wider community involvement in decisions which affect their services and neighbourhoods.



Our proposals

We will consult on a revised resident involvement policy, in particular on increasing emphasis on the neighbourhood as an important level for accountability and resident involvement in every board and committee responsible for service delivery.

We will work with the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Audit Commission to examine the options for resident inspections.

We will examine the implications of housing organisations being subject to ‘community calls for action’. We will also consider whether similar parallel rights should be given to housing association residents for the services they receive directly.

We will support investigations into the role of housing associations in facilitating the ownership of assets by communities, various forms of community land trusts and development trusts, including ways that communities can control neighbourhood assets such as community centres. This will include considerations in local authority option studies set out in the updated Decent Homes guidance of June 2006.

Resident consultation panel

The Housing Corporation commissioned BMG Research to set up a national panel of residents in October 2005. The panel now consists of 1,390 residents. The main objective is to enable the Housing Corporation to ensure that our policies and proposals are informed by residents’ views.

The first survey report summarised the findings of a survey on residents’ feelings about their homes and their neighbourhoods, issues around community cohesion, communication with their landlords, satisfaction with service delivery and issues around anti-social behaviour.

The second survey went out in September 2006 and asked whether they plan to move, what type of housing they would like to live in, what things are important to them in making a home a good place to live and what makes a good neighbourhood. Panel members will also be asked about involvement opportunities in management and decision making – areas they would like to have say over, the extent to which they would get involved and their opinions on resident inspections.

We hope to extend the panel membership to local authority and ALMO residents by spring 2007.

A Communities Standard for housing associations

This strategy has focused on how housing associations can work towards achieving the outcome of developing and maintaining successful, mixed, inclusive, sustainable neighbourhoods and communities.

It sets out a number of clear expectations that we have of associations and the actions they should be taking in order to deliver this outcome. These expectations should be shaped by the individual circumstances of each community and the potential roles that associations can play. Every community will have different needs at different times and will be continually changing. Associations will need to adopt strategic approaches to roles, investment and asset management in the areas where they operate.

However, we believe that there are some core objectives of neighbourhoods and communities which all housing associations should subscribe to. We will consult on a Communities Standard for housing associations, aimed at supporting associations in measure their performance against these key objectives.

In parallel with this consultation, we will develop and pilot up to five schemes whereby housing providers can demonstrate that they meet such a Communities Standard. We think that there is also a lot to be gained by having the achievements independently verified. We will examine possibilities such as verification by the associations' own auditors, or through

models such as Investors in Communities, piloted previously by Hastoe Housing Association.

Our ultimate aim however has to be to ensure that any Communities Standard adds real value to associations' work with communities.

Measuring progress

We believe that all strategies must be monitored to ensure that they are effective and achieving their objectives. At the same time, the regulatory burdens on housing associations must not be increased without major benefits. We will work with all concerned to develop ways of monitoring progress within the existing systems. In particular, we will work with the Audit Commission and the National Housing Federation to examine whether the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) system can provide a means for associations to demonstrate their progress.

Comments

We are seeking comments on all these proposals, and how residents should be involved in the implementation of the Neighbourhoods and Communities Strategy.

Please send your comments to:

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Further copies of this paper can be obtained from our website:

www.housingcorp.gov.uk

Annex

Decent homes and mixed communities: the Government's definition given in A Decent Home: Definition and Guidance for Implementation, June 2006 - Update

What is a mixed community?

A mixed communities approach aims to create better outcomes for the most vulnerable in society and sustainable communities for all. There is no 'one size fits all' approach and how mixed communities are developed will depend on the local context. However, mixed communities are areas that:

- attract and retain households with a wide range of incomes;
- have good quality housing in attractive environments with access to good local schools and retail/leisure facilities and other services such as health;
- have a mix of housing size, type and tenure;
- attract and retain households with choice;
- have strong local economies and contribute to strong regional economies;
- are well connected to employment opportunities through neighbourhood design, transport and job access services;
- provide access to other economic and social opportunities for all residents enhancing their life chances;
- have high quality housing and neighbourhood management;

- have low levels of crime and provide support services for vulnerable people and families at risk;
- have a strong housing market that matches the wider economic area, and
- attract and utilise private sector investment.

Outcomes of a mixed community approach

A successful mixed community would bring together the economic, social and physical aspects of renewal and development in a holistic manner to result in:

- high quality homes, services and opportunities for all;
- narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged areas and the rest (floor targets as key indicators); and
- de-concentration of deprivation, and prevention of social and economic segregation in new areas of development.

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Neighbourhoods and communities strategy

The Housing Corporation wants to help create neighbourhoods where people want to live and work, now and in the future. We also want to help the people in the neighbourhoods make dynamic communities. This strategy sets out our ideas in five key areas for how the Corporation, housing associations and their partners, including residents, can work towards achieving mixed, sustainable and successful communities.