
Working together to build homes and strong communities

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The national agreement

1.0 Introduction

The Local Government Association (LGA) and the Housing Corporation have developed this joint protocol setting out how the Housing Corporation and the LGA will work together more closely in promoting affordable housing and building strong, sustainable communities.

The impetus for developing the protocol rose from the joint LGA and Chartered Institute of Housing vision for a new-style local authority strategic housing role. The protocol's initial aim was to address the approach to affordable housing investment. It would set out the basis against which Housing Corporation investment decisions would be made, utilising local knowledge and strategies in return for assurances that authorities would improve performance in relation to planning for housing and delivering sites. However, recognising that local authorities, the Housing Corporation and registered social landlords are not solely concerned with financing the development of new homes but are equally concerned about the management and maintenance of existing homes and communities, the protocol also aims to reflect wider issues.

1.1 Context

Working together

Effective local authority leadership is fundamental to the success of sustainable communities. It is local council leaders working on the ground who must win the public's backing for the wide-ranging social and economic initiatives that underpin the vision of sustainable communities. They can convene partnerships with public, not for profit and business sectors and work with wealth and social capital creators to deliver major physical improvements, infrastructure and stronger local economies. Authorities should be the catalysts for the renewal and regeneration needed to support stronger local economies. Only they can develop the long-term, multi-tenure vision to meet housing and support needs that takes account of local socio-economic drivers and is embedded within wider community plans.

While many authorities no longer directly provide or manage rented homes, they must still seek to influence and manage local housing markets. That includes making sure that housing demand and needs are clearly identified; that local planning systems work effectively to deliver homes; that different local authority functions are joined up and striving for the same goals; and that the right conditions for housing providers are in place to encourage them to play their part in meeting the needs and aspirations of local people. Fully functioning housing markets rely on powerful partnerships and local authorities cannot achieve them alone. They are dependent on a wide range of individuals and organisations pulling together. However, through their local democratic mandate, an essential part of that role is to provide the visionary leadership necessary to encourage the various partners to work with them.

The Housing Corporation works on a day-to-day basis with local authorities across the country. Local authority input has been key to the decision making underpinning the Corporation's 2006-08 National Affordable Housing Programme. There is already a good working relationship between the Housing Corporation and local authorities on local housing market issues and the role and delivery plans of registered social landlords. The Corporation is also a crucial partner in delivering estate renewal and other neighbourhood regeneration projects.

The Housing Corporation recognises that local authorities have crucial knowledge on housing association's performance in delivering good housing management standards, tackling homelessness and contributing to a wider range of community issues. In addition, the Housing Corporation selects developing associations to receive its grant in full consultation with local authorities.

The Corporation also works closely and constructively with officers of the Greater London Authority across all aspects of our programme. We welcome the positive contribution the Mayor and Greater London Authority have made to providing clear strategic leadership in the capital in relation to housing, and in promoting high quality development with a significant affordable housing component. This protocol recognises the particular circumstances in London, and a separate agreement covers the relationship between the Housing Corporation and the GLA.

The purpose of this protocol is to ensure the importance of joint working in achieving shared goals for affordable housing and sustainable communities is brought to the fore of the working relationship between the Housing Corporation and local authorities.

By working well together the Housing Corporation and local authorities are able to play an important role in the delivery of sustainable communities and contribute to local and regional economic success.

Status of protocol

This jointly developed protocol sets out the issues which the LGA and the Housing Corporation have agreed to work on. It can be updated from time to time to meet new legislation, guidance and opportunities. The protocol offers a basis for local agreements between the Housing Corporation, local authorities and registered social landlords to bring about improvements in local services.

The protocol is not only about developing a framework against which investment decisions are made. It seeks a wider engagement with local authorities to cover the issues which both RSLs and local authorities have identified as being important to the development of sustainable communities.

It is important to recognise the different roles that signatories to this national protocol play. The LGA is a lobbying organisation representing the interests of its member authorities. LGA priorities are therefore set by local authorities to whom it is accountable. Thus, while the LGA encourages, shares best practice and lobbies on behalf of authorities it cannot compel them to act. The Housing Corporation has direct responsibility for delivering

housing investment through housing associations and non-registered developers, and seeks to do so in a way that reflects the priorities of Regional Housing Statements and local housing strategies. Housing associations are independent bodies and are not parties to this protocol, although they operate in a regulatory context operated by the Housing Corporation, parts of which are addressed by this protocol.

1.2 Core components

This protocol sets out a number of key building blocks. It identifies how Housing Corporation funding can better help to meet the needs and priorities contained in local housing strategies. It also focuses on elements linked to the provision of affordable housing, such as planning and the use of assets, and on elements linked to the ongoing effective use of social housing stock to promote sustainable neighbourhoods and communities, for example, choice-based lettings and tackling homelessness and anti-social behaviour.

Affordability and supply

A core component of the local authority strategic housing role is identifying the housing needs, demand and aspirations in the local housing market and working with partners to better meet them. The effective use of land and other resources is critical to the delivery of affordable housing, as is consistent and optimal use of planning powers.

Accordingly, as core components of this protocol, the Housing Corporation and the LGA will work together to:

- construct robust evidence bases upon which long-term plans for housing supply can be based;
- prioritise funding to meet identified housing needs;
- ensure that the planning service supports and prioritises the provision of sufficient new build scheme opportunities for affordable housing against local plan targets;
- make informed selections of partners for grant-aided development;
- operate optimal section 106 policies in respect of affordable housing;
- make the best use of land and other assets in delivering more affordable housing; and
- undertake long-term planning of affordable housing supply to ensure a planned throughput of projects and reliable delivery against those plans.

Sustainable communities

Local authority leadership is also important in understanding how housing can contribute to how communities develop economically, socially and environmentally. The local authority strategic role is pivotal in convening provision from across the public, private and voluntary sectors. It also has an important role in bringing “double devolution” to life by moving decision making closer to neighbourhoods and individuals.

Accordingly, the Housing Corporation and the LGA will work together promote partnership at a local level to:

- co-ordinate the prevention and tackling of homelessness;
- co-ordinate relevant access policies, that make maximum use of sustainable lettings plans;
- run high quality housing benefit services;
- co-ordinate the promotion of choice-based letting, preferably on a cross-boundary sub-regional basis;
- align provision of new supported housing to Supporting People strategies and resources;
- work with RSLs, Local Strategic Partnerships, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and the police in promoting Respect;
- promote regeneration and renewal and the provision of mixed communities, including consideration of stock options where appropriate;
- work with the sector in facilitating the rationalisation of stock holdings and management;
- encourage greater diversity of viable local providers where such diversity does not currently exist;
- promote and champion sustainability, recognising the impact of activities on the environment and in particular climate change;
- help assess the performance of RSLs and local providers;
- take an innovative and inclusive approach to involving RSLs in the development and provision of community-based services;
- work with the sector in promoting and maintaining decent homes (including those in the private sector) and decent communities; and
- champion the development of neighbourhood management and community empowerment and participation.

Local authorities and the Housing Corporation have powers and duties that complement each other in contributing towards fulfilling these shared ambitions. This protocol is a commitment to work together to deliver specific outcomes to help achieve sustainable, mixed communities.

1.3 Local protocols

The national protocol cannot by itself improve partnerships on the ground. Each local authority along with the Housing Corporation, RSLs and other social housing providers working in the area will need to work together to do things better and achieve more. Neither the LGA nor the Corporation can determine what the local issues are; how partnerships should be structured; or how local issues can be resolved. Our aim is that the Housing Corporation and the LGA's national protocol will provide a starting point for discussions and a baseline from which the Housing Corporation, local authorities, RSLs and other social housing providers can be inspired to take levels of partnership working to a higher level.

Protocol pilot projects are under way in each Government Office region, other than London, where arrangements already exist between the Housing Corporation and London Councils. They aim to make a real difference to the way in which the Housing Corporation

and local authorities work together. They will provide examples of how different areas have utilised the national agreement to address local concerns. These protocols will be locally flexible, in that the targets and methods of assessing progress may be re-written and agreed locally, within the national template. Some local protocols may involve groups of local authorities. Following the evaluation of the pilots, a programme of local protocols between the Housing Corporation and local authorities will be rolled out across the country.

2.0 Working together in partnership

2.1 Meeting housing needs

What the Housing Corporation will do	What the Local Government Association will do
Co-ordinating the prevention and tackling of homelessness	
<p>The Housing Corporation will seek to ensure that RSLs meet their duties to co-operate with local authorities to fulfil their statutory obligations in respect of the homeless and people in priority housing need. We have published a homeless strategy which supports this aim and encourages best practice.</p> <p>We will also ensure that accommodation is available to address black and minority ethnic needs, excluded groups and households with chaotic lifestyles. We have funded the creation of a homelessness action team to provide practical support to RSLs in their work in preventing and tackling homelessness.</p>	<p>The LGA will encourage local authorities (LAs) to work with RSLs in the prevention of homelessness. We will also encourage LAs to ensure information given to RSLs is as accurate as possible. Solutions to tackle and prevent homelessness need to be developed and agreed locally in order to reflect local circumstances. We welcome the Housing Corporation's (HC's) homelessness strategy and will seek to ensure it complements local authority homeless strategies, as well as wider sub-regional strategies.</p>
Co-ordinating allocations policies that make maximum use of sustainable lettings plans	
<p>The Housing Corporation will seek to ensure that through their allocation, letting and sales policies, RSLs support local authorities in meeting housing needs and achieving sustainable, mixed and inclusive communities.</p> <p>We will encourage RSLs to adhere to nomination agreements.</p>	<p>The LGA will work with local authorities to encourage the development of effective and practical nominations policies and local lettings schemes. We will encourage greater RSL involvement in the drafting and implementation of such policies.</p>
Co-ordinating the promotion of choice-based letting	
<p>The Housing Corporation will encourage RSLs to work with local authorities in the design and implementation of CBL schemes. We will expect partners in CBL schemes to work together effectively to deliver a seamless service for residents and applicants at local and sub regional levels. Nomination agreements should be refreshed to reflect the roles and responsibilities within CBL schemes.</p>	<p>The LGA acknowledges CBL as a useful tool and supports the extension of the schemes. We will encourage the operation of CBL on a sub-regional and/or housing market basis and support neighbouring authorities agreeing the operation of CBL schemes in their housing markets.</p>

Running a high quality housing benefit system	
The Housing Corporation will expect RSLs to support local authorities in their role to deliver a consistent and efficient benefit service which is responsive to the needs and circumstances of individuals and meets the targets and standards for processing claims.	The LGA will encourage local authorities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of housing benefit services.

2.2 Delivering more homes where they are needed

What the Housing Corporation will do	What the Local Government Association will do
Ensuring the planning service supports and prioritises the provision of sufficient new build scheme opportunities for affordable housing against local plan targets	
The Housing Corporation will take account of local planning policies when considering proposals for new development. We will engage with all relevant stakeholders from an early stage to determine appropriate investment required by identified sites, and we will have regard to no-grant policies where these are in place.	The LGA will continue lobbying to ensure that local housing market assessments are practical and provide local authorities with the robust evidence upon which local planning policies for (affordable) housing can be based and justified.
Selecting partners for grant-aided development	
Within future bid rounds the Housing Corporation will support local housing strategies and priorities by taking local authority views on bids for individual schemes into account. In addition, we will utilise the new local authority input to housing association regulatory assessment to influence our selection of partners.	The LGA will work with the Corporation to construct a process that enables local authorities to identify housing association partners which are best placed and most capable of meeting the needs of local communities.
Operating optimal section 106 policies in respect of affordable housing	
The Housing Corporation will engage with relevant stakeholders from an early stage to determine appropriate grant input to S106 sites. We will continue the refinement and implementation of tools (such as Financial Workbooks and the Housing Corporation Economic Appraisal Tool) to ensure grant to S106 sites is at an optimal level.	The LGA and its partners will champion and disseminate good practice relating to viability assessments and the use of optimal section 106 approaches to local authorities. We will encourage them to ensure that local planning policies address both local housing market demand and affordable housing needs.

Making the best use of available assets in delivering more affordable housing	
<p>The Housing Corporation recognises that land assets represent a source of potential revenue to authorities and that they will seek to achieve the best outcomes for their communities from the use of their assets. The Housing Corporation will work with RSLs and local authorities to ensure the best outcomes for residents of affordable housing. We will work with the LGA to publish research and good practice advice on valuation options for local authority disposals. We will also encourage the optimal use of RSL assets, land and reserves to assist in the delivery of affordable homes.</p>	<p>The LGA will identify and promote good practice in the creative use of local authority assets (both land and other assets) to increase the supply of affordable homes. We will encourage authorities to include explicit consideration of affordable housing in their asset management plans and capital strategies, where this supports the objectives of the community plan.</p> <p>We will work with the Corporation to produce a good practice guide for land valuation.</p>
Undertaking long-term planning of housing markets with the Corporation to ensure a planned throughput of projects and reliable delivery against those plans	
<p>The Housing Corporation will work to ensure that local housing market assessments and strategic priorities are able to influence the allocation of funds for affordable housing provision at the local level.</p>	<p>The LGA will work to influence the development of robust evidence bases from which long-term plans for balanced housing markets, including affordable housing, can be developed. We will seek to ensure that RSLs are able to contribute to local and sub-regional data-gathering processes. We will continue to press for local housing strategies to be backed by investment strategies and action plans so that local priorities can be delivered.</p>
Aligning provision of new Supported Housing to Supporting People strategies and resources	
<p>We will respond to and support local authorities' role to identify and offer choice to vulnerable people. We will invest in schemes that provide quality and control as vulnerable people seek to live independently, maintaining their tenancies and enjoying a good quality of life. The needs identified in Supporting People strategies, regional strategies and health strategies will be considered by the Housing Corporation when making investment decisions.</p>	<p>Local authorities will continue to deliver the Supporting People programme, offering vulnerable people the opportunity to improve their quality of life by providing a stable environment which enables greater independence.</p> <p>The LGA will support authorities in consulting with the Corporation and RSLs on future patterns of service and involvement of the planning process for Supporting People in their area. We will continue to lobby for longer term Government funding streams to support long-term planning and enable greater certainty of provision at the local level.</p>

Working with the private sector in the delivery of sustainable housing solutions	
<p>The Housing Corporation will work with housing developers from all sectors to ensure the delivery of high quality homes in sustainable communities. It will ensure that the quality of development and housing management delivered by non-registered housing providers delivers the same benefits to residents and local communities as that provided by RSLs.</p>	<p>The LGA will encourage authorities to develop partnerships with RSLs, private landlords, owner occupiers and housing developers to find innovative ways of increasing the supply of (affordable) homes and maintaining properties.</p> <p>LACORS (Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services) will work to secure and maintain high standards of housing in the private rented sector.</p>
Securing good design and long-term viability of homes	
<p>The Housing Corporation is currently reviewing its Scheme Development Standards. In doing so, will ensure that the homes that it funds meet the highest standards of design and environmental performance, including the Code for Sustainable Homes.</p>	<p>The LGA will encourage planning authorities to develop design guides offering clear and practical advice to owners and developers on the standards of design that will be expected both in new developments and in altering existing buildings.</p> <p>We will support authorities seeking to ensure that new homes remain affordable in the long term in line with guidance from the National Advice Unit.</p> <p>We will continue to press for the Code for Sustainable Homes to encompass wider aspects of environmental sustainability. We will also publish and disseminate guidance to help local authorities promote sustainable buildings through Local Development Frameworks.</p>

2.3 Securing thriving neighbourhoods

What the Housing Corporation will do	What the Local Government Association will do
Working with RSLs and the police in promoting Respect	
<p>The Housing Corporation will continue to promote the development of effective multi-agency partnerships; consider how RSL consortia can facilitate more effective partnership working; and will encourage RSLs to participate in Crime and Disorder</p>	<p>The LGA will continue to lobby for, and work with the Housing Corporation to promote, effective multi-agency partnerships. Elements of the Respect Action Plan concerning preventing anti-social behaviour, pro-active housing</p>

<p>Reduction Partnerships as a critical part of the process. We will publish a Good Practice Note highlighting the benefits of multi-agency partnership working. We will also encourage RSLs to sign up to the Respect Standard.</p>	<p>management and early intervention are critical. We will encourage local authorities to secure RSL participation in Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships as an essential part of the process.</p>
<p>Working together to deliver regeneration and renewal</p>	
<p>The Housing Corporation will seek to support local estate regeneration and neighbourhood renewal, exploring new investment approaches to contribute to transformational change, in particular in areas with high concentrations of deprivation and monotenure housing, and will work together with stakeholders to consider all options for better enhancing the asset strength on behalf of the community.</p>	<p>The LGA will continue to lobby for an enhanced strategic housing role through which local authorities can deliver sustainable communities.</p> <p>We will promote a holistic approach that addresses housing need in the wider social, economic and environmental context. We will encourage authorities to pursue the neighbourhood agenda in partnership with the Housing Corporation and RSLs.</p>
<p>Taking an innovative and inclusive approach to involving RSLs in the development and provision of community-based services</p>	
<p>The Housing Corporation will promote and support RSLs in providing community focused, efficient and effective services to their neighbourhoods. We will seek to ensure that these are co-ordinated with local authority strategies, in particular community strategies.</p>	<p>The LGA and its partners will support the development of procurement practices that encourage the involvement of RSLs as social businesses.</p>
<p>Working to promote and maintain decent communities</p>	
<p>The Housing Corporation will encourage RSLs to adopt strategic approaches in the neighbourhoods where they operate so that they add value in achieving sustainable, mixed and inclusive communities in partnerships with local authorities and local communities. The strategic approaches will include such aspects as clarifying their respective roles, rationalisation and community empowerment. We will encourage membership of appropriate partnership groupings such as LSPs, CDRPs etc.</p>	<p>The LGA will continue to lobby to ensure that the new generation of Local Area Agreements set out clear visions for each area, supported by investment plans and accompanied by delivery programmes owned by all the partners, who are bound by a duty to co-operate with each other.</p> <p>We will encourage authorities to review the way they engender the support of relevant stakeholders in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of local (housing) strategies.</p>
<p>Working with the sector and the Corporation in developing neighbourhood management and community empowerment and participation</p>	
<p>The Housing Corporation will promote and enable RSLs to develop neighbourhood management in partnership with other stakeholders, within</p>	<p>The LGA will continue lobbying to secure real devolution of power away from Whitehall through local authorities, to local people. Drawing on the best practice</p>

<p>their neighbourhood strategic approaches. We will implement the Resident Involvement policy and regulate RSL activity in resident involvement.</p> <p>With the Corporation’s assumption of the Tenant Empowerment Programme for local authority tenants, we will also work to ensure that research and best practice is both tenure neutral and accessible across all affordable tenure types.</p>	<p>approaches contained in the Local Government Reputation Campaign, we will challenge authorities to ensure that local people always have the mechanisms available to exercise direct influence where they choose to do so.</p>
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2.4 Promoting greater efficiency and effectiveness

What the Housing Corporation will do	What the Local Government Association will do
Facilitating the rationalisation of stock holdings	
<p>The Housing Corporation will publish guidance and relevant toolkits to facilitate the rationalisation and greater efficiency in the management (and where appropriate) ownership of RSL stock holdings. While continuing to promote diversity of provision to meet varied housing needs, we will encourage RSLs to undertake strategic reviews of their stock holdings to ensure that they optimise the delivery of high quality services to tenants on a cost effective basis and facilitate effective delivery of local regeneration and neighbourhood management initiatives.</p>	<p>The LGA will encourage local authorities to take a proactive role in discussions relating to the rationalisation of management and ownership housing association stock in their areas. We will support authorities in seeking broader negotiations between organisations that might develop and manage housing with a view to building strong partnerships with those involved in the ongoing management of an area.</p>
Helping the Corporation assess the performance of RSLs	
<p>The Housing Corporation has undertaken to develop tools to enable local authorities to provide input into the assessment of performance of RSLs in their communities.</p> <p>Where housing associations have a significant presence and role in a local authority area, the Housing Corporation believes 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 and issue a consultation, recognising that associations are independent organisations.</p>	<p>The LGA believes it is important for authorities to contribute to the assessment of RSL performance. We welcome the opportunity to work with the Corporation to establish effective processes for doing so and will encourage local authorities to engage constructively in them.</p>

**Working together to rationalise the data collected from
registered social landlords and local authorities and the HC**

As part of its commitment to working with local authorities, the Housing Corporation is developing a portfolio approach to managing relationships at the local authority level. This approach will mean that a local authority will have a single point of contact within the Corporation and we will ensure that we communicate clearly and at the appropriate frequency. We will work with local authorities to ensure they are aware of and best able to access data about RSLs in their communities.

The LGA will encourage local authorities to contact the HC for data is the first instance. We will work with the HC to see how we can standardise the data required by local authorities.

3.0 Review and monitoring arrangements

This protocol may be amended by the LGA and the Housing Corporation to take account of legislative changes, policy developments, and implementation of best practice, and organisational changes.

The LGA and Housing Corporation will commission a review of the operation of this protocol and pilot local protocols in December 2007 to review progress and identify areas where further work or consideration is needed.

Signed on behalf of the Housing Corporation.....

Title

Date

Signed on behalf of the Local Government Association

Title

Date

4.0 Sources of additional information

For additional information about this agreement please contact:

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