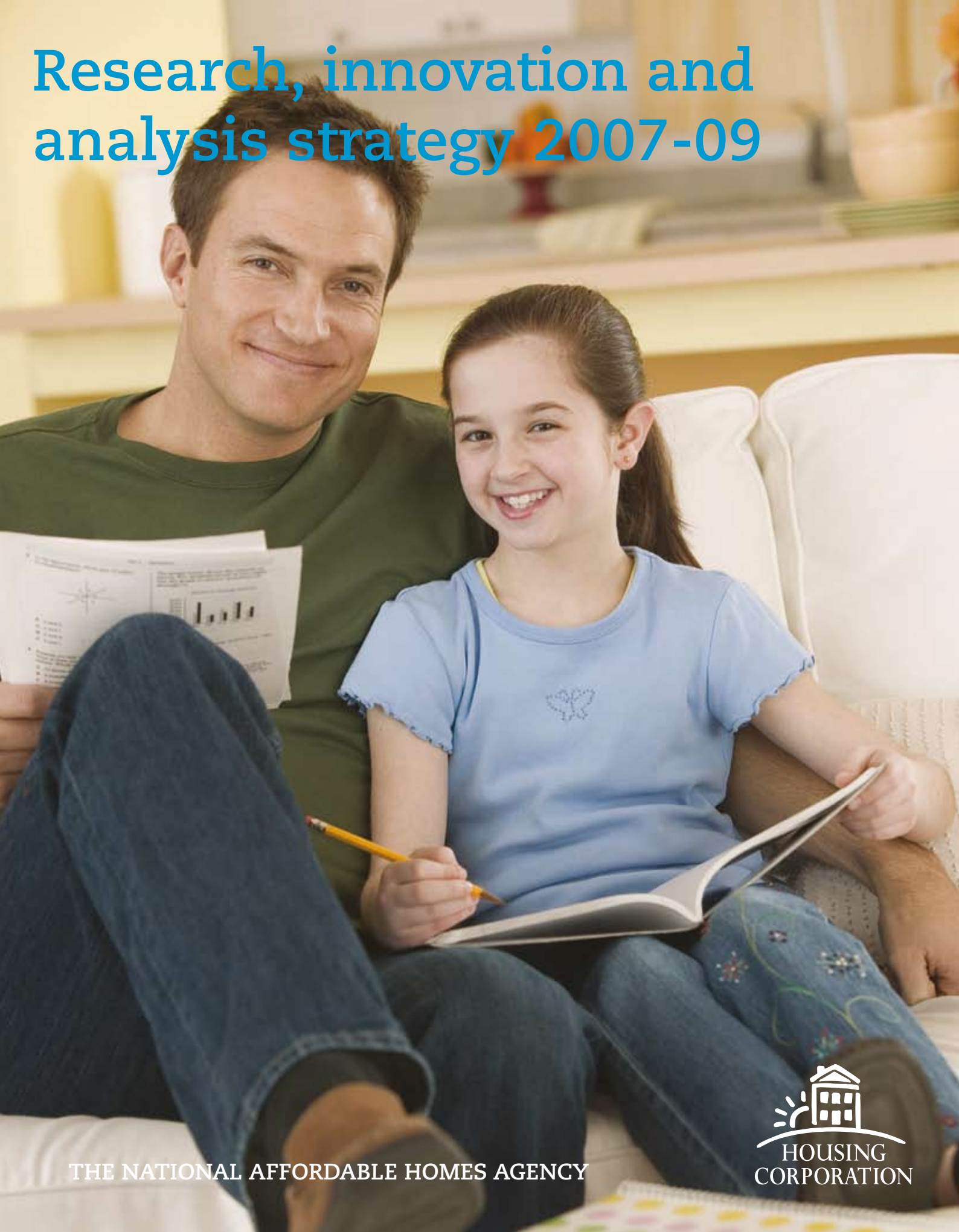


# Research, innovation and analysis strategy 2007-09



THE NATIONAL AFFORDABLE HOMES AGENCY



August 2007

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# Foreword

The Housing Corporation is committed to promoting continuous improvement and innovation in the delivery of affordable housing and strong communities. To underpin this we have an ambitious analysis, research and information programme underway. This document, building on the successes of the Research and Innovation Strategy 2005-08, takes forward our approach and shows how we will drive our research and information agenda, to the benefit of millions of tenants.

Within this strategy we set out how we will get the maximum value from our unique data sources and develop a distinctive research voice on themes which are central to the social housing sector now, and crucial to its future. We show how we will drive and celebrate innovative approaches, best practice and excellence through our IGP and Gold Award schemes. We also explain how we will make sure that this essential work is made accessible to key external stakeholders, including Communities and Local Government (CLG) and other parts of government, as well as to our own staff.

Leading the delivery of these objectives is our new Centre for Research and Market Intelligence (CRMI). CRMI was created in 2006 to drive forward the Corporation's ambition to be an acknowledged centre of expertise for housing knowledge and information. Within CRMI we have brought our research and data management functions, tenant empowerment, and innovation and good practice programmes – including the Gold Award for Excellence – together into one place. As a result we expect to be able to produce and analyse housing information in ways and on a scale we've not been able to before.

We aim to make the wealth of information and data we hold accessible to all and will build on our close relationships with stakeholders to ensure that our work is timely and addresses the right issues. We will also aim to ensure that our analysis, research and innovation programme continues to inspire the positive changes within social housing and communities that will, ultimately, improve people's lives. This is, and will remain, our key objective.



**Steven Douglas**  
Acting Chief  
Executive

# Introduction

## Review of our 2005-08 strategy

The Housing Corporation published its first Research and Innovation Strategy in 2005 to cover the period 2005-08. The strategy set out our ambition to establish an outstanding programme of housing research, innovation and good practice that would deliver maximum value and impact from our research investment.

The strategy had five key objectives:

- better targeting our research and innovation resources to support our business objectives;
- building strong partnerships to pursue joint working opportunities and to promote our research capacity and project outcomes;
- ensuring our research and good practice is disseminated effectively;
- enhancing the opportunities for our staff to ensure that projects deliver the highest quality outputs; and
- ensuring our programme is effectively managed and delivered.

During 2005 we laid the foundations for a new way of working in order to achieve these objectives, radically reducing the number of projects we were supporting and ensuring that where we did invest funds there was a clear link to overall corporate objectives. In 2006 we fundamentally reorganised our business, establishing the Centre for Research

and Market Intelligence in Cambridge. This provided a new focus and consolidated our research, innovation and good practice activities along with the analysis and management of our extensive housing data sets. Additionally the management of the Tenant Empowerment Programme, which is aimed at enabling local authority tenants to have the capacity to manage their own homes, has been delivered by CRMI since 1 July 2007.

As a result of these key changes, we have delivered significant improvements in delivery – although there remains a lot yet to be done.

Key achievements include:

- the integration of our research programme development into our operational planning process;
- an Innovation and Good Practice bid round focused on funding a much smaller number of projects clearly linked to our key policy and delivery priorities;
- increased quality and visibility of outputs while reducing overall investment in research, innovation and good practice – from £8 million to £4.5 million a year;
- an increase in the leverage achieved by our investment in research and good practice – with 57% additional funding secured from external sources in our most recent IGP round, exceeding our target of 30%;

- stronger links with partner organisations including English Partnerships, the Four Nations Housing Research Group, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Housing Studies Association;
  - improved communication of research and IGP outputs both internally and externally, including:
    - incorporation into all approved applications for funding the requirement for a dissemination strategy and impact report, an abstract and a summary;
    - improvements to the IGP website to promote and enable better access to completed projects;
    - an ongoing publications and events calendar to raise awareness of forthcoming project outputs;
    - close co-operation with the Communications team to maximise promotional opportunities;
  - more effective financial, programme and project management, including:
    - a dedicated programme team managing a redesigned project management and finance system;
    - a training plan, now underway, to ensure that staff who manage research and innovation projects can maximise project outcomes;
    - incorporation of project management responsibilities into the Corporation's staff appraisal system;
    - more effective management of available resources (spending some 97% of available funds in 2006-07);
  - the launch of our Gold Award for Excellence, representing a concentrated investment of a significant proportion of our good practice resources into a single initiative, reflecting the Board's priority that investment be more focused and capable of delivering greater impact; and
  - effective use of our Residents Panel to contribute to policy development both within the Corporation and in Communities and Local Government, and agreement to extend its reach to local authority tenants during 2007-08.
- This strategy sets out how we intend to move forward from this strong base, setting a clear vision and ensuring that our investment in research, innovation and good practice supports the effective delivery of affordable housing both now and in the changing environment of the future. For the first time, it also seeks to integrate data and analysis into the strategy, reflecting the new integrated approach being taken forward within CRMI.

# Vision and objectives

We want to ensure our investment in research, innovation and good practice, and data analysis provides the knowledge, information, expertise and best practice examples needed to help inform policy development, improve performance across the housing community and support our own staff to carry out the Corporation's business effectively.

Our objectives are to:

- establish a position at the leading edge of new, developing housing thinking;
- support the development of innovative solutions to housing challenges;
- promote excellent practice in housing delivery;
- ensure that the data and information we hold are fit for purpose and accessible;
- ensure the highest quality evidence base is available to inform policy and operational decisions;
- promote and share our knowledge effectively with the sector;
- build and exploit partnerships; and
- help create the knowledge base necessary to support the work of the new homes agency and the post-Cave regulatory settlement, when they are established.

We will achieve this by:

- continuing to strengthen links between our policy and delivery functions and our investment in research, innovation, good practice and data analysis;
- focusing on delivering the highest quality outputs with real impact, while ensuring we achieve value for money;
- working to expand understanding of the housing sector and the challenges it faces;
- transforming the data and information we collect into knowledge, and then sharing this knowledge to ensure that business delivery is informed by the best quality information and analysis;
- developing the Corporation as an acknowledged centre of expertise for social housing and supporting our staff to be recognised as such.

# Our strategic approach

The next two years promise to be exciting and challenging for the Corporation and the social housing sector in England. The Government is fundamentally reviewing approaches to housing policy; and preparation for the new homes agency and the post-Cave regulatory settlement will start to accelerate. But alongside that, the Housing Corporation will need to continue to deliver its core business. Research, innovation and good practice will continue to be of critical importance during this transitional period.

Our strategic aims for research, innovation and analysis reflect this context, focusing on three key priorities:

- **delivering our core business;**
- **responding to emerging priorities;** and
- **preparing for the future.**

## Delivering our core business

An important focus of our investment in research, innovative best practice and high quality data and analysis will continue to be the provision of support to the Corporation's core business functions. These are to:

- invest in more high quality affordable homes;
- regulate the landlords receiving funding so that they provide the best services to residents; and
- enable our published strategies to be implemented.

We will continue to support our investment and regulation functions by commissioning research and good practice projects to enable the delivery of well-designed, environmentally sensitive homes through modern approaches to construction and improved delivery mechanisms that will contribute to sustainable communities in the 21st century.

We will continue to collect, maintain and manage the Corporation's key data sets: the Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR) survey and the Continuous Recording of Lettings and Sales (CORE) so that they are fit for purpose and contribute to in-depth analysis of social housing trends and landlord performance. We will work with our Investment colleagues further to develop our analysis potential in relation to our investment programme data.

At the same time we will work closely with Communities and Local Government to develop the National Register of Social Housing (NROSH) which will bring together local authority and housing association stock data, replacing several data sets currently used by government and the Corporation.

We will also focus our Innovation and Good Practice (IGP) grant programme on supporting the development of the best innovative practice, including building on the success of the Corporation's Gold Award for Excellence to drive up performance across the sector.

In addition to our investment and regulation activities, we will use our research and IGP programme funds together with focused analysis of our statistical resources to support the sector to implement our policy expectations. We will direct our resources in particular towards delivery of our strategies on rural housing, tackling homelessness, neighbourhoods and communities, and vulnerable people, plus our forthcoming strategy on community cohesion.

## Responding to emerging priorities

We want to make sure that the Corporation is well placed to respond to new and emerging thinking. Professor John Hills' review of the future roles of social housing has set the scene for significant changes in national housing policy.

The Corporation is working closely with Communities and Local Government on the development of new proposals around the right to own, access and allocations, tackling worklessness and increasing the tenant voice.

We will commission research, make use of our Residents Panel and contribute information from our data sets to ensure that emerging proposals are based on the best possible information. Where appropriate, we will also commission best practice research to help the housing sector respond quickly and effectively.

We will stand ready to respond to the challenges of climate change, fulfilling the needs of vulnerable people and the aspirations of an ageing population, black and minority ethnic communities, and gypsies and travellers. To ensure we are in a position to face these new challenges, we will balance our investment in our ongoing research, innovation and data programmes.

## Preparing for the future

The new homes agency, combining the investment roles of the Corporation and English Partnerships with the housing and regeneration functions of Communities and Local Government, is likely to be established in April 2009, subject to Parliamentary approval.

At the time of writing, ministers have not yet made a final decision on how the Government's approach to housing regulation will change, in the light of the review of social housing regulation by Professor Martin Cave nor what the delivery agency will be. Nevertheless the Corporation must be prepared, whatever the outcome.

As a consequence of these changes, the nature of the research, innovation and good practice we commission over the coming two years will – increasingly – shift towards preparing for the new homes agency and the new post-Cave regulatory environment. We are therefore already considering how research, innovative good practice and data collection, management and analysis should be directed for the future.

Regeneration and sustainable growth, as well as long-term communities, will be a key focus for our research investment. We are already engaged in a substantial programme to examine the demands and aspirations of future social housing consumers, as well as in studies to provide insight into estate renewal and cohesive sustainable communities.

We know that we will need to commission research to support the work of the transition team, particularly around the new and innovative approaches to investment and delivering estate transformation. We will ensure that the highest quality data and analysis is available to inform the decisions of the new homes agency once it is established.

# How we will deliver

In this context, we have identified a small number of priorities which we will focus on delivering over the course of this strategy.

## Continuing to improve systems and relationships

- Develop a programme of analytical work and both internally and externally commissioned research to support policy formulation, implementation and evaluation across the Housing Corporation's activities;
- Deliver effective data collection arrangements and analytical services both to meet the business requirements of policy and operational staff and to support business analysis among our stakeholders;
- Explain and communicate research and statistical evidence to Corporation staff and more widely to stakeholders and members of the public;
- Build strong links to external research bodies so that partnership produces high quality, relevant information that is value for money; and
- Consolidate process improvements to the Innovation and Good Practice programme to ensure efficient and cost-effective systems and processes are in place.

## Top quality research: developing a distinctive voice

We will commission research, good practice and analysis to develop our distinctive voice,

ensuring we are well placed to contribute to future approaches to the delivery and management of affordable homes. In particular we will prioritise:

### Vulnerability and diversity

- meeting the housing needs of vulnerable people and diverse communities;
- ensuring we are responding effectively to the challenges of an ageing population;
- better understanding the extent to which current approaches are meeting the needs of black and minority ethnic communities;
- continuing to promote a better understanding of and innovative solutions to tackling anti-social behaviour and the Respect agenda; and
- a focus on the housing resources available to gypsies and travellers;

### Sustainability

- strengthening our understanding of future demands on affordable housing to inform our future investment strategies;
- developing the tools needed to deliver effective and sustainable estate renewal, and to promote the development of mixed and cohesive communities; and
- responding to the distinctive characteristics, housing needs and aspirations of rural communities;

### Design, technology and the environment

- addressing climate change by driving forward a reduction in the carbon impact of existing and future affordable homes;

- promoting the engagement of all our delivery agents in modern approaches to construction; and
- advising on and promoting innovative and efficient methods of procurement;

### **Involving neighbourhoods**

- supporting the implementation of our Neighbourhoods and Communities Strategy;
- responding to the demands of residents to increase their involvement in the delivery of housing services; and
- regularly sounding out the views of and seeking comment from residents on our approach to policy development;

### **Community cohesion**

- taking forward commitments in the forthcoming Community Cohesion Strategy;

### **Demand and need**

- examining the factors underlying worklessness and its effects and impact on housing need; and
- maintaining the momentum of our tackling homelessness strategy to assist people in temporary accommodation into settled homes;

### **Partnerships**

- setting up partnerships with leading policy and research organisations, such as the Economic and Social Research Council and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, to identify material gaps, avoid duplication and achieve greater value for money.

## **Innovation and Good Practice bidding round**

We will continue to support the development of innovative responses by housing associations and the promotion of best practice through our annual IGP bidding round. In doing so, we will maintain our recent approach of funding smaller numbers of projects which address themes aligned to corporate priorities, with the aim of ensuring high quality outputs and maximising impact.

Themes for the prospectus to be launched in autumn 2007 will include:

- tackling worklessness;
- promoting community cohesion;
- tackling climate change;
- efficiency in housing management; and
- transforming estates.

During the course of the year we will also be receptive to proposals and commission projects that reflect our wider corporate priorities and that will contribute to our business focus. We will ensure that the projects we select for funding reflect current and emerging policy concerns so that they inform and contribute to improved operational practice by being innovative and replicable.

## The Gold Award for Excellence

Following its successful launch, the Gold Award has established itself as a flagship programme for the Housing Corporation. The Gold Award's 2006 dissemination programme continues to drive replicable best practice initiatives through the sector for the benefit of residents. We will evaluate the impact of the 2006 Awards and identify lessons for future rounds.

The Gold Award 2007 saw an increase in applications of 43%, with entries received from all regions. Over the next 12 months we will promote the excellent practice identified through the two themes of Environmental Sustainability and Empowering Communities. We will launch a new competition round with three themes, which are: Building Cohesive Communities, Delivering Joined-Up Development and Tackling Worklessness. For the third year running, resources for Gold will increase, reflecting our commitment to and the impact achieved by our core good practice brand.

## Developing our evidence base and providing insights

We will maximise the value of our and others' data to the Housing Corporation and to the housing community, through rigorous management, targeted analysis and high impact communication. We will ensure that the data sets for which we have responsibility have integrity and are fit for

purpose, reviewing the contracts we hold with our specialist contractors and our policy requirements. The data sets are as follows:

- **Regulatory Statistical Return (RSR)** – provides an annual snapshot of the overall characteristics of the social housing stock for each housing association, covering two million properties;
- **Continuous Recording of Lettings and Sales (CORE)** – provides an ongoing insight during the year of the household characteristics of those to whom properties are let or sold, totalling 270,000 transactions a year; and
- **National Register of Social Housing (NROSH)** – we will continue to work with Communities and Local Government and social housing providers to develop this new data set, building and populating a single database of all four million social housing properties. We will lead and co-ordinate this joint project and secure the business benefits for ourselves, government and other stakeholders.

We will further develop our reporting and analysis capacity, exploiting our contracts with analysts and expanding our web-based sector publications to provide segment detail. We plan to expand our Geographical Information System capacity to be accessible to a wider range of Corporation staff and other stakeholders, enhancing statistical and spatial understanding. As part of our drive to improve the quality and accessibility of our data, we will undertake a strategic audit of our data

focusing on quality and policy alignment. The review will ensure that the right data are being collected in the light of operational and policy decision making, that they are of sufficient quality and that they can be accessed and used to best effect.

## Making best use of our information

We will ensure that the data, information and knowledge that we hold, develop and commission is used to best effect, not only to better inform our delivery decisions but also to drive forward improvements in operational performance across the social housing sector.

As part of our enhanced approach to promoting and disseminating good practice, research and data analysis we will:

- overhaul our library of best practice and improve access to information for housing associations and other key stakeholders;
- publish quarterly bulletins of high-level data analysis, tailoring them to individual organisational needs;
- aim to maximise the use of our investment data to inform analysis;
- deliver a programme of training for staff and stakeholders to make better use of RSR and CORE data;
- raise awareness among our staff and stakeholders of the business and performance benefits of the developing NROSH database;
- ensure that future publications funded through the IGP grant are accompanied by a summary digest of findings and recommendations through our new In Brief series; and
- require all IGP grant outputs to be disseminated according to a contractual plan with impact reports.

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## Research, innovation and analysis strategy 2007-09

This strategy sets out how the Housing Corporation, through its Centre for Research and Market Intelligence, intends to develop its research voice on housing-related issues and maximise the value from its unique data sources.

It explains how we will drive and celebrate innovative approaches, best practice and excellence through our Innovation and Good Practice and Gold Award schemes. It also sets out how we will make this work accessible, both internally and externally.