

## **HOUSING LIN POLICY BRIEFING**

### **Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities'**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

*This briefing has been prepared by the Housing Learning and Improvement Network which is part of CSIP Networks:*

The purpose of this briefing is to offer a summary of the key changes proposed and their significance for individuals and organisations working in housing

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Local Government White Paper was published at the end of October, 2006.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill in support of this, was published in December, 2006 and places a legal duty of partnership upon councils and service providers including Primary Care Trusts to cooperate.

CSIP will provide further briefings and updates on the progress of the White Paper and legislation from time to time.

The following offers a summary of the main policy direction.

#### **THE WHITE PAPER**

The White Paper is an extensive document set out over 2 volumes:

- Volume 1 covers the proposals for change in detail
- Volume 2 describes how these will relate to major public service areas. Housing issues are seen as cross cutting and dealt with in the section entitled 'Economic Development, Housing & Planning'

#### **KEY POLICY THEMES**

- Responsive services and empowered communities – consultation, involvement and participation in running services, neighbourhood charters, simplified process for setting up tenant management organisations

- Effective, accountable and responsive local government – executive powers to be vested in the leader of the Council, three leadership models (mayor, executive of Councillors or single leader),
- Stronger cities, Strategic Regions – strategic leadership, economic development, devolved powers and resources, Local government as a
- Strategic Leader and Place Shaper – Local Strategic Partnerships, Local Area Agreements (LAA's) as the delivery plan for Sustainable Community Strategies, duty for local authorities and other partners to work together to agree LAA priorities
- A new Performance Framework – radical simplification of the performance framework, new arrangements for monitoring, support and intervention called Comprehensive Area Assessment
- Efficiency, Transforming Local Services – ambitious efficiency gains, three year funding settlements
- Community Cohesion – addressing the potential problems of migration and diversity on community cohesion

## **VOLUME ONE THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS**

### **CHAPTER TWO Responsive Services & Empowered Communities**

This chapter is about improving the speed and efficiency of public services and making them personal to individuals. Examples include having a choice of housing and neighbourhood, extending choice based lettings to all social housing, shared ownership, low costs homes and private rented accommodation, extend choice beyond local authority boundaries recognising that housing markets operate regionally and sub regionally and plans to expand direct payments to include supported housing,

There is an example of One-Stop Shops – Libraries in Gateshead and Warwickshire  
Gateshead Council extended and refurbished two libraries in the city in 2001 to provide accommodation for area housing offices. Gateshead Library was the first library in the UK to serve as a 'one-stop shop' for both library and local authority services. A single service desk was created to ensure that customers entering the building would report to one area where their query would be dealt with by a member of staff. The service was developed over time based on customer demand.

By April 2007 all communities in England and Wales will have neighbourhood policing and these teams may include neighbourhood wardens, housing management staff and youth workers.

Neighbourhood management is encouraged for deprived areas. The example provided is North Benwell in Newcastle upon Tyne, where a partnership of the Home Office, Newcastle City Council and Northumbria Police is funded by the Newcastle Gateshead Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder. The neighbourhood manager has consulted with local residents on empty properties and street

cleaning. They have also met the Council to agree how money is spent, targets are set and progress monitored. The results are impressive with a drop in crime, residents, the management office and RSL's have worked together to clear the streets of rubbish, empty homes have been reduced and assistance and support is provided to newly arriving communities.

Tenant management organisations (TMO's) allow residents living in social housing to come together to take direct control of their housing and housing related services. The plan is to build on this success and provide opportunities for tenants to get involved in the management of their housing, community buildings and other neighbourhood environmental services. The process for TMO's will be simplified, an easier route in beginning with limited responsibilities rather than full management, provide opportunities for residents to manage other services such as caretaking and grounds maintenance, make it easier for successful TMO's to take on other responsibilities in their local area, explore new ways for tenants of RSL's to become more involved in decision making.

The example provided is Castle Vale Housing Action Trust Partnership

Castle Vale was one of Birmingham's largest post war high rise estates, built to take the families displaced from the clearance of the inner city. In the late 1980s it suffered from high crime rates and unemployment, poor health, education, housing and environment and a lack of local facilities. A 12 year regeneration programme, through a Housing Action Trust, turned around the fortunes of the estate. In the two years since the end of the programme, the estate continues to go from strength to strength with residents in the driving seat. A Neighbourhood Management Board brings together the statutory agencies to co-ordinate activities on the estate with the priorities set by the elected resident members. Residents are trained and supported to develop negotiation skills, decision making and confidence building to be able to effectively govern their neighbourhood organisations. Unemployment is lower than that of Birmingham, with the unemployment rate in June 2004 at 5.4% compared to a Birmingham average of 8%, it has been one of only two areas in Birmingham where residents' fear of crime has dropped, the area has gone from suffering low demand to being one of the most popular neighbourhoods in the City.

There is support for community groups to play a bigger part The example provided is Blyth Valley in Northumberland.

Following a period of high unemployment, poor conditions and the deaths of a number of young people through drug abuse, Blyth Valley council reshaped itself as 'a community based council'. They invested £1m out of their £10m budget in community development, drawing in complementary resources from other organisations and built up a 'hub and spoke' network of 25 community centres, with at least one in each ward. The aim was to increase the capacity of the community both to solve its own problems and to draw in extra resources. Between 1995 and 2005, the number of voluntary and community organisations doubled and Blyth changed from a low housing demand area with major social problems to an area with demand for new housing leading to investment by property companies, bringing further money into the area.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Stronger Cities, Strategic Regions**

Recognition of the role of Regional Development Agencies and Regional Assemblies to bring together land use, economic and social development, transport, housing and the environment. They also provide advice to central government on their priorities for housing, transport and economic development.

The section on managing supply and demand looks at housing markets and recognizes that good quality affordable housing is important to the development of cities to attract workers and to secure labour mobility. Housing investment and regeneration programmes are aligned with wider economic and social outcomes for regions and/or sub regions because housing markets do not operate within individual local authority areas. Regional assemblies now have the responsibilities of Regional Housing Boards, including the development of a regional housing strategy based on sub regional housing markets. They will be supported by the new National Housing and Planning Advisory Unit.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Local Government as a Strategic Leader and Place Shaper**

The paper makes clear that in two tier authorities County Councils must consult and involve their District Councils and that LAA's should be flexible enough to include district level priorities for such things as economic development, housing, planning and community safety.

To improve integration of strategic planning arrangements local authority housing and homelessness strategies should be incorporated into unitary or district Sustainable Communities Strategies

There is recognition of the need to strengthen partnerships working on housing and regeneration. The Housing and Regeneration Review was set up in April 2006 to consider the following:

- providing more effective delivery support to local government and regional bodies;
- strengthening and simplifying institutional structures for delivery; and
- maximising use of assets such as land.

Building on the comments received from stakeholders, the review is considering a range of options, from modernising existing structures to establishing a new body encompassing the functions of English Partnerships, the Housing Corporation and key elements of the department's delivery role.

The outcome of the review is expected shortly.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Efficiency, Transforming Local Services**

<p>The examples of smarter procurement are two Supporting People programmes at Leeds and Plymouth Leeds and Plymouth City Councils through two Supporting People Value Improvement Projects, have collaborated on the development of a step by step</p>
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guide to the procurement of services for vulnerable people. This has involved applying a range of mainstream procurement tools and techniques to housing related support and social care services for the first time. The results have been compelling: significant improvements in the quality and availability of those services and substantial improvements in value for money.

[The procurement pack](#) has been launched in partnership with the Care Services Improvement Partnership and is available at: [www.spkweb.org.uk](http://www.spkweb.org.uk) and on CSIP website at: <http://www.cat.csip.org.uk/library/docs/BetterCommissioning/Publications/AGuidetoProcuringCareandSupportServices.pdf>

## **VOLUME TWO**

### **Annex A – Community Safety**

This includes good practice to reduce re-offending through the development of an accommodation pathway to provide appropriate housing for prisoners and offenders subject to community orders, prior to and following their sentences in order to prevent homelessness and re-offending.

### **Annex C – Vulnerable People**

This includes references to the Link Age Plus pilots to bring together a range of services to extend beyond the benefits and care agenda to housing, transport and leisure and the forthcoming national housing strategy for an ageing society due in 2007.

### **Annex E – Economic development, housing and planning**

There is recognition that local housing strategies have been a lever for economic and social change, taking a broader approach to ensuring that local housing markets meet local demands rather than just the provision of social housing.

There is an expectation of building upon successes to date in helping people maintain independent living including more support through a Housing Strategy (housing and services) for an ageing society to be published in 2007. This will also be complemented by a new Supporting People Strategy that draws upon valuable Third Sector expertise in housing support services.

Supporting People will be managed through the LAA and will form a core element of the new national outcomes and indicators for performance assessment.

There is encouragement for authorities to use their housing, planning and regeneration powers to drive forward economic development and prosperity.

More decision making will be devolved to local level. There are plans to:

- review the level of planning resources available to local authorities, and exploring whether to make changes to the national planning fees system, or to delegate to local authorities the power to set their own level of planning fees; and

- consultation on proposals for a new Housing and Planning Delivery Grant to be awarded to local bodies for delivering additional housing and resource improvements in planning

The forthcoming planning policy (PPS3), will provide an enabling framework for local authorities, working with the private sector, to deliver the right quality and mix of housing for their communities. There will be a greater emphasis on a proactive role for local authorities in facilitating housing delivery and with this will go greater flexibility to determine the local policy approach.

Local authorities will be taking a more strategic housing role. Through the *Decent Homes to Sustainable Communities* discussion paper views were sought on how local authorities might increase the supply of affordable housing for rent. Six self financing pilots have been set up to explore how local authorities might take a longer term view of social housing in their areas, to see if coming out of the housing revenue account subsidy system will provide better value for money.

Local authorities will need to deliver quality housing management services across all tenures. This includes making sure landlords are responsive to their tenants, and active involvement in the Government's Respect agenda.

Local authorities work with a range of local and regional partners on housing. For example, RSLs already have a statutory duty to co-operate with local authorities to fulfil homelessness duties. RSLs should be responsive to their economic and social environment, and to ensure that their strategies and policies are responsive to local and regional priorities. Government will be considering the wider roles and accountabilities of the RSL sector.

### **Other Useful Information**

CSIP networks have published a general briefing paper on the White Paper which can be downloaded from the Integrated Care Network website <http://www.icn.csip.org.uk/index.cfm?pid=10&catalogueContentID=887>

The Housing LIN will shortly be publishing a paper on Local Area Agreements (LAA's) and housing care and support services.