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MPs recognise success of tenant empowerment in improving council housing and communities

Over 40 MPs including Yvette Cooper MP, the Housing and Planning Minister met with council house tenants from across England in parliament this week to recognise the successes and importance of affordable community housing programmes that put tenant empowerment at the heart of their operations.

The event was organised by the National Federation of ALMOs, the body which represents individual Arms Length Management Organisations managing council properties around the country. Over 40 tenants from 12 of the country's 59 ALMOs met MPs at the Houses of Parliament to promote the importance of genuine tenant involvement in both council housing programmes and wider community regeneration.

Yvette Cooper MP, Housing and Planning Minister gave the keynote speech at the event, in which she commended the action ALMOs have taken to improve some of the country's poorest neighbourhoods. Caroline Spelman MP, Shadow Secretary of State for the Department for Communities and Local Government and Dan Rogerson MP, Liberal Democrat Housing Spokesperson also spoke at the event, giving positive endorsements on ALMO's work to deliver the highest quality of housing management for their tenants.

ALMOs, the council housing management option that empowers tenants, currently manage 895,000 council properties. This figure is set to grow to one million by the end of this year, which will then include half of all council dwellings in England. In the four years since they were established, ALMOs have brought over 100,000 homes up to the government's Decent Homes Standard. The first ALMOs have achieved this across their entire housing portfolio five years ahead of the 2010 target date.

Whilst ALMOs are accountable to their local council, day-to-day management of council housing stock is handed over to boards made up of tenants, who constitute at least a third and more in some cases, councillors and independent members. This ensures that services directly meet the needs and aspirations of residents and the individual needs of the communities they serve.

From improving the fabric and facilities of council homes, since they were introduced in 2002 ALMOs remit has grown to encompass innovative social inclusion and community safety agendas including the government's Respect Agenda.

Representatives from Stockton, Kensington and Chelsea, Hounslow, Derby, Kirklees, Rochdale, Sheffield, Carrick, Bolton, Wigan & Leigh, Brent and Solihull

attended the event which also included speeches from two tenant representatives, including the Chairman of the NFA, tenant and Chair of Derby Homes, Dennis Rees.

He said: "We had a fantastic level of support from MPs at the event and the comments made by Yvette Cooper, Caroline Spelman and Dan Rogerson both celebrated the achievements ALMOs have made since their inception just four years ago and underlined the potential to grow this remit to include wider community improvement programmes.

"ALMOs have been responsible for improving the lives of over a million tenants, whilst at the same time contributing two thirds of all local authority housing efficiency savings and we now hope to work closely with the Government to secure ALMOs a greater role in the long term sustainability of their local communities."

Yvette Cooper MP, Housing and Planning Minister said: "ALMOs now manage every one in three council homes and through their improvement programmes and success in meeting the Decent Homes targets have demonstrated the importance of involving tenants in critical decision making.

"A number of ALMOs have already introduced innovative programmes to address the needs of their wider communities including tackling anti-social behaviour and enhancing employment skills and opportunities. Looking forward, we are now working with them to identify how they can have a broader role in improving neighbourhoods and help address the current housing shortage through new build."

To ensure that ALMOs and their residents continue to have a voice in the housing debate at Westminster, an All Party Parliamentary Group for ALMOs is set to be launched. Its aim will be to promote the benefits and further development of ALMOs.

The Group will provide a forum for discussion about issues relevant to the development of ALMOs, including securing adequate funding to further enhance housing standards after 2010, increasing the amount of social housing available after new build and improving communities and local environments through safer, cleaner, greener neighbourhoods.

Ends

For further information please contact Louise Vaughan or Cas Park at RAM PR on 01423 720001 or by email at louisev@ram-pr.co.uk or casp@ram-pr.co.uk

Notes To Editors:

A range of case studies from ALMOs across the country are available. Contact Louise Vaughan or Cas Park at RAM PR on 01423 720001 or 01423 720005.

10 Facts About ALMOs

There are currently 59 ALMOs in operation across 54 local authorities managing 895,000 council properties. By the end of 2006 this will have grown to one million council homes - half of all council properties.

Since their introduction just four years ago, over 100,000 homes have been brought up to the Decent Homes Standard by ALMOs – equating to one every 15 minutes.

ALMOs not only improve properties, but the lives of tenants. In the four years since ALMOs were established, 77% of ALMO tenants have reported satisfaction with their housing management – more than achieved either by local authority owned council housing or housing associations. (Housemark Survey 2005).

The first ALMOs have already achieved the Decent Homes Standard across their entire housing stock five years ahead of the target date of 2010.

ALMOs are cost effective - although they currently only manage less than half of council housing stock they contribute to two thirds of all local authority housing efficiency savings.

Tenant involvement – both at board and operational level – is key to ALMOs' success. Three out of the four local authorities recently awarded Beacon Status for 'improving housing services by involving tenants' are ALMOs – Bolton at Home, Carrick Housing and Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing.

Properties remain council owned with rents and key policies like lettings set by the local authority.

ALMOs deliver much more than improved housing. They are important and proactive partners in delivering innovative social inclusion and anti-social behaviour programmes which enhance safety in their communities, including combating domestic violence and racial harassment.

Of the 45 ALMOs inspected by the Audit Commission, ten have been awarded three stars (excellent) and 29 have been awarded two stars (good) for performance and service delivery. No traditional local authority and only one housing association has achieved the three star standard in the last three years.

Funding for ALMOs is directly linked to their success, not only in delivering high quality housing, but tenant empowerment and efficiency. The results speak for themselves; over four billion pounds has been secured by ALMOs to bring houses up to the Decent Homes Standard and improve the lives of over a million tenants.