

The National Federation of ALMOs

2017 Election Manifesto



Introduction

- **The National Federation of ALMOs (NFA) (www.almos.org.uk) is the trade body which represents all housing Arms' Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) across England.**
- **The NFA represents all 35 ALMOs, which manage just over 500,000 homes across 38 local authorities. The NFA represents the interests of ALMOs at the national level and provides advice and training for members.**
- **ALMOs were first established in 2002 to manage council housing through not for profit companies set up and wholly owned by the local authority.**
- **The establishment of ALMOs along with the performance regime which supported the movement led to a significant improvement in housing management services, housing conditions and a new positive working culture within council housing organisations. The model has been embraced by councils of all political colours and enjoys cross party support within parliament.**
- **A defining feature of all ALMOs is that tenants have a significant say in how their homes are managed. At least one-third of all ALMO Board members are tenants with the remaining positions filled by councillors and independents often with business and housing experience.**
- **After the self-financing reforms to council housing in 2012, which gave local councils control over their own business plans, ALMOs led the sector in delivering both new build and regeneration through their council's housing revenue accounts.**
- **We believe that addressing the current housing crisis should be a top priority for all political parties in this election. Both Councils and ALMOs could help provide many of the affordable homes that this country needs and we urge all parties to pledge their support to enable them to do so.**

New Affordable House Building



All of Britain's main political parties want to see more house building. House building creates jobs and boosts the economy as well as providing much needed homes that people urgently need but we still aren't building enough affordable homes for the country's needs. ALMOs and councils could build more if the next Government allowed them to use their assets and future rents to develop new homes.

Back in 2012 we received cross party support for council housing to become properly self-financing and as a result over the last 5 years ALMOs have been able to build over 3,000 new affordable homes across all tenures. Unfortunately plans by ALMOs to deliver a further 12,000 homes for their parent councils over the next five years have already had to be revised downwards by 3,000 homes due to the cut in council rents by 1% every year for 4 years and are likely to undergo further cuts if planned changes to housing finance introduced in the Housing and Planning Act 2016 are implemented.

At this time of high housing costs, uncertainty in the labour and housing market due to BREXIT and low levels of supply we would urge all parties to think again about the role which ALMOs and councils could play to help meet the need for affordable housing of all tenures by expanding supply across the country. To enable this, we urge all political parties to consider:

- **Unlocking the potential to invest in council housing by re-instating the principles of self-financing and allowing councils to retain all the receipts from selling any of their assets in order to re-invest in building new homes.**
- **Removing the HRA debt caps for new build purposes and relying instead on prudential borrowing rules to enable councils to invest in new homes and pay back the money from their rental income.**
- **Reversing the future under investment in social housing by putting council housing rents on a sustainable footing, recognising that these are some of the lowest rents in the whole social housing sector already.**
- **Supporting a new social housing building programme with capital grants which would save the public purse significant amounts of money through a lower welfare bill in the long term, give a boost to our national economy and help relieve our national housing crisis.**

Welfare Reform



ALMOs are currently helping their tenants to manage a wide range of far reaching changes to the welfare system. Whilst the NFA welcomes efforts to make the system simpler, fairer and easier to get back to work, we remain concerned about the impact that some measures are having on tenants and communities across the country. To mitigate some of the most adverse consequences of the reforms, the NFA urges all parties to consider:

- **Making payment direct to landlord under Universal Credit a ‘tenant choice’ reflecting the fact that owner occupiers have their housing allowance paid directly to their mortgage lender to protect their home.**
- **Removing the seven day waiting period for a Universal Credit claim to start.**
- **Paying Universal Credit in advance, instead of arrears, recognising that this is a safety net for people with no other means of supporting themselves.**

- **Resourcing social landlords to provide support to claimants on budget and debt management as well as digital and financial inclusion.**
- **Suspending the roll out of Universal Credit until:**
 - **DWP improves its processes (faster/more accurate processing of applications and payments)**
 - **There is better training for Job Centre Plus staff, to improve understanding of housing issues**
 - **Social landlords have more control over APAs (Alternative Payment Arrangements) and the Trusted Partner pilot is rolled out fully with resources.**
 - **There is better communication between landlords and DWP**
- **Reforming the under-occupation penalty to ensure it does not penalise tenants who cannot move or who need the extra space.**
- **Reversing the restriction on entitlement to payment for housing costs for those aged 18-21 which will impact on an estimated 11,000 young people.**
- **Removing the link between council rents and the outdated and unsustainable Local Housing Allowance Rates.**
- **Signing up to a period of stability in the welfare system in order that people and communities have time to adjust and a proper impact assessment is made of the outcomes.**

Tackling Fuel Poverty and Carbon Emissions



ALMOs are also keen to support their tenants to cut the cost of living and helping them to heat their homes in a more efficient manner is an obvious way in which ALMOs could help. The NFA is calling for an end the short termism that has too often existed in setting programmes to encourage and fund energy efficiency and calls on all parties to commit to:

- **A clear long term aim to make all homes more energy efficient alongside a funding programme and framework post the current ECO programme to ensure stability in the market and cost effectiveness over time.**
- **Shorter term aims to end fuel poverty by targeting funding to reduce fuel bills to the poorest in society recognising that social housing landlords house some of the most vulnerable in society and can play a key role in tackling fuel poverty.**
- **Support for social landlords to help tackle standards in the private sector by co-ordinating action in local areas and leading on deals to get the best rates for individuals from an organisation they can trust.**

Private Rented Sector



ALMOs are now offering their skills and expertise to landlords in the private rented sector. With the growth of the private rented sector there have been increasing concerns about the short term nature of tenancies for some families and the low quality of both the accommodation and the management services in some parts of the sector. ALMOs are working to address these issues through offering longer term private sector lettings services to landlords in their areas but could do more. The NFA therefore calls for all parties to consider using ALMOs as a vehicle to improve standards and choice in this sector by:

- **Encouraging private landlords to place the management of their homes in the hands of organisations (including ALMOs) capable of delivering quality services over an extended period with a choice of longer term tenancies to tenants.**
- **Supporting a nationwide accreditation scheme modelled on best practice in the social housing sector.**
- **Facilitating the development of this sector with institutional investors and promoting ALMO management as a route to managing “built to rent” stock in their areas.**

Health and Housing



Given their position at the heart of the communities that they serve and provide housing for, ALMOs are well positioned to support and enable older people and other vulnerable people to remain in their homes and be independent for as long as possible as well as promote health and wellbeing. Existing work in this area could be built upon by:

- **Supporting further joining up of healthcare and housing budgets.**
- **Making housing a statutory partner on health and wellbeing boards.**

Tackling Worklessness



ALMOs have played an increasingly valuable role in tackling worklessness. This activity has increased significantly in response to the Government's welfare reform agenda and the general economic context. ALMOs have sought to provide opportunities for training, education and apprenticeships both through direct programmes and in partnership with other providers in their area. However, more can be done, including:

- **Improving housing providers' engagement with the Work Programme and funding ALMOs and other housing providers directly by results.**
- **Initiating more effective programmes geared towards addressing individual needs rather than generic return to work packages.**
- **Providing more help for the over 24 year olds.**
- **Ensuring the quality of all work training meets a national minimum standard.**

ALMOs know the difference a safe, secure and affordable home can make to families and neighbourhoods and we would like all political parties to pledge to support our members' work building and supporting their communities across the country.

**For further information on any of these ideas, please contact
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The NFA team

Further details can be found at www.almos.org.uk/nfa_team



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