



Government shift from Decent Homes to sustainable communities welcomed by national council housing body

Press release

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The National Federation of ALMOs (arm's length management organisations) is today applauding the Government's policy shift from Decent Homes to sustainable communities to help deliver better standards for council house tenants across the UK.

The NFA has issued its official response to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) discussion paper on Decent Homes and sustainable communities. In the paper, the DCLG emphasises the need to broaden council housing improvement programmes to encompass wider communities, saying this is key to ensuring that long-term, sustainable benefits are delivered to tenants.

The Government's proposed shift in policy reflects the work already being carried out by a number of the NFA's member organisations to include innovative social inclusion and community safety agendas including the Government's Respect Agenda.

However, in order to deliver on national and local policy agendas, the NFA says it is crucial that ALMOs are given longer-term stability and financial freedoms, citing the current "erratic annual subsidy system" and short, five-year contracts as hampering their ability to build new homes or manage existing assets effectively. The NFA also flagged up the need for the Housing Corporation to resolve internal rules that currently prevent ALMOs accessing social housing grants, and to place them on a level playing field with housing associations.

Dennis Rees, Chairman of the NFA said:

"We welcome the Government's shift towards growing and maintaining sustainable communities. Our member organisations have, for some time, been focusing on wider community issues, as well as bringing properties up to the Decent Homes standard, often ahead of schedule. The programmes already in place, such as youth training schemes and neighbourhood security initiatives, have transformed and reinvented the way in which council housing is delivered. Our members demonstrate innovation and engagement in initiatives that go beyond maintaining housing stock and put the quality of life of our tenants at the top of the agenda.

"We need to do all we can to ensure that tenants live in safe, accessible communities and ALMOs combine this goal with a business-like, entrepreneurial attitude. Their local focus means they are embedded in their communities, but by operating at arm's length from local authorities they are able to progress new and innovative projects, delivering sustainable benefits beyond pure housing management."

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Notes to editors:

- By March 2007, ALMOs will collectively be responsible for managing one million homes – 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, with the first ALMOs achieving this across their entire housing portfolio five years ahead of the 2010 target date.
- Council housing is still owned by the local authority and tenants are council tenants. ALMOs are responsible for the day-to-day management of council housing. Boards, made up of tenants, (who constitute at least a third and more in some cases), councillors and independent members lead, direct and govern the ALMO. This ensures that services directly meet the needs and aspirations of residents and the individual needs of the communities they serve.