



Tuesday, August 22, 2006

## **GOVERNMENT TOLD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS KEY TO IMPROVING LOCAL SERVICES**

A major public sector body is today urging the Government to assess ways in which communities can be empowered to have a direct input into the management of their local services as part of a major review of the role of local authorities.

The National Federation of ALMOs (Arms Length Management Organisations), representing 60 organisations responsible for over 906,000 council properties across England has issued its official submission to The Lyons Inquiry, demonstrating how the ALMO model can be used to improve service delivery by local government. An important part of this is enhancing community engagement and empowering residents to make important decisions about their local services.

The NFA has provided Sir Michael Lyons, whose report on local authorities is due to be presented to the Government in December, with ways in which ALMOs can be used across a broader range of services to improve standards and enhance cost efficiencies, freeing up authorities to focus on a more strategic role.

Whilst housing 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 communities they serve.

By the end of 2006, ALMOs will manage 1 million council properties – 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 having achieved this across their entire housing portfolio five years ahead of the 2010 target date.



Dennis Rees, Chairman of The National Federation of ALMOs said: “Over the past four years ALMOs have achieved unprecedented success in both improving the country’s council housing but also introducing a wider range of innovative services, from social inclusion programmes to community safety agendas. Given this success, the logical development of the ALMO concept is to look at how local authorities can develop similar, neighbourhood based vehicles to deliver other functions, freeing up the council to take on a more strategic role.

“An important feature of housing ALMOs is that tenants have real power to make decisions about their homes, holding equal, if not more weight on the Board. We have also proven that having a balance between council nominees, professional independents and customers on the main board is a much more effective way of improving services than decision making on purely political grounds.”

As part of its report the NFA has also illustrated how its own housing ALMOs could take a broader role in the delivery of wider community services including community programmes, new build and greater financial freedom.

Last month nearly 40 MPs and Peers launched an All Party Parliamentary Group to promote the benefits and further development of council housing ALMOs. The aim of the Group is to provide a forum for discussion by Parliamentarians about issues relevant to ALMOs including securing adequate funding to further enhance housing standards, enabling new build to help meet growing waiting lists and improving communities and local environments through safer, cleaner, greener neighbourhoods.

**Ends**

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**Notes To Editors:**

Ranges of case studies from ALMOs across the country are available. Contact Louise Vaughan at RAM PR on 01423 720001.