

## Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny

### Policy Update

FEB/MARCH 2012

#### **Councils are central to tackling the housing crisis**

- The challenging housing situation in the country will be improved if councils have greater involvement, according to a new report from the LGA and the HCA
- The report, entitled 'Meeting local housing demand', lays out many of the options available to councils. It makes some suggestions as to how they could go about delivering new homes, improving existing ones and making housing central to local areas
- Councils recognise that good and well designed homes that stand the test of time can transform communities, improve outcomes for families and promote social mobility. Councillors are best placed to deliver on this for the communities they live in and represent. Examples of what councils are already doing include:
  - Manchester and Birmingham councils are using public land and new policies to start a build-to-rent market, increasing the numbers of houses, and providing those renting with more flexible terms
  - Cherwell Council in North Oxfordshire is bringing together its land, funding, powers, welfare policy and community programmes into a housing plan driven by local people and the community
  - Leicestershire County Council has committed all of its New Homes Bonus received in 2011/12 to support the building of rural, affordable homes. These are available to rent or for shared ownership
  - On the Byker Estate in Newcastle, they have developed a model of community control, with a trust running the estate, with the Government writing off local housing debt of £42 million. The plan will unlock further investment for repairs and improvements, as well as providing training opportunities for local people
  - In Tarporley, Cheshire West and Chester Council worked with the parish council and local people to develop a new vision for the village, with high-quality design. Initially there had been public scepticism, but the plans made Tarporley a vibrant and attractive village to live, work and visit
- Some of the key suggestions to councils in the report include:
  - Councils should have strong local plans in place to decide what development their local areas need. These should provide detail on the required design, quality and style of buildings, and the number of developments allowed. Working with communities is vital if local people are to be persuaded of the benefits of developments occurring in their local areas. A clear vision is

needed by councils to achieve this, and private companies should also explain the schemes to local people

- Investigating what public land in the local area is suitable for development. This clearer picture could result in more land being given to community land trusts for them to manage
- Adopting new approaches to delivering affordable housing in local areas. Options could include build-to-rent, cooperatives and community right-to-build. HCA funding may also be available for many of these approaches
- The Green Deal represents an opportunity to make existing homes more energy efficient and may attract up to £15 billion by 2020. this is a substantial sum of money and could also contribute to other local priorities e.g. carbon reduction, town centre renewal and fuel poverty

### **Communities have a chance to revive their neighbourhoods**

- Communities Minister Andrew Stunnell has invited community and voluntary organisations to apply for a share of £100 million that will help revitalise communities and bring the empty homes blighting their areas back into use
- Mr Stunnell said that the Government cash would help tackle this national scandal, creating more affordable housing and giving a new lease of life to homes and communities
- Around 720,000 homes are sitting empty across the country – with 280,000 unused and under-maintained for 6 months or more
- Assisted by the New Homes Bonus which rewards councils for getting empty homes back into use, more than 21,000 long-term empty homes have been brought back into use in the last year, and the community grants programme is the next step in the Government’s strategy for tackling the problem
- The Minister has appointed fund manager Tribal – who have a wealth of experience in dealing with voluntary and community groups – to manage distribution of funding to successful applicants. Tribal will also assess applications and report back to CLG according to the criteria set out in the guidance
- Successful applications will:
  - Bring empty homes back into use as affordable housing
  - Deliver value for money
  - Have support from their local authority
  - Expect to be complete by 31 March 2015
- Mr Stunnell encouraged innovative and ambitious applications, expressing his hope that successful projects would not only bring much needed empty homes back into use but also provide extra opportunities for local jobs and training
- The fund is part of the Government’s Affordable Homes Programme to build up to 170,000 new affordable homes over the next 4 years. It is expected that up to £30 million of the total £100 million could be given over to community groups