

Social Housing and the active Council

With over four million people in England now waiting for social housing the challenges for public policy and local government are both urgent and acute. Social housing provision has failed to keep up with demand and the recessionary impact of unemployment and hardship is likely to push home affordability even further up the political agenda.

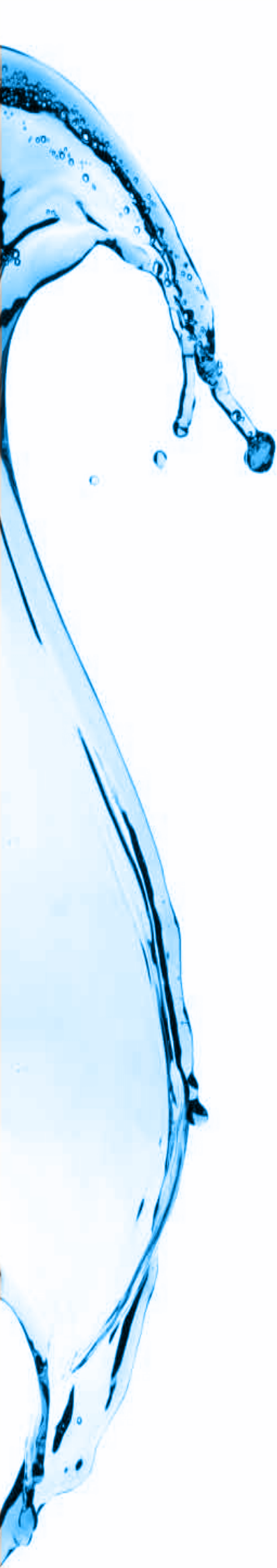
Having been marginalised from active social housing construction since the 1980s, policymakers are beginning to look again to local government as a provider of affordable homes. But what needs to change in order to revive council activity in the housing market? With construction industry redundancies up 380% on the past year, will there be sufficient ability to deliver new build social housing even if resources are made available? And should there be an improved framework in which local authorities operate in this new era?

In this research project, NLGN intends to go beyond the analysis of the story so far and make recommendations for reforms intended to unlock a new role for local democracy in the delivery of quality social housing. In order for supply to have any chance of matching demand we will focus on:

- (a) Financial reforms: how could local authorities find prudent capital funding means which deliver new homes swiftly while recognising the pressures on the Treasury's balance sheet?
- (b) Capacity and Momentum: are councils sufficiently motivated and skilled to drive new housing delivery and what form of partnering arrangements might emerge in the future?
- (c) Governance: can the logic of RSL and ALMO structures be squared with the urgency of the current climate, where new construction has fallen by 24% in the final quarter of 2008? How can the mistakes of the past be avoided in any modernised direct role for local government?
- (d) Growth: will the next decade see a settled course for planned development on a nationwide basis, or will a combination of market-led drivers and parochial concerns allow councils scope to act?

Methods and Outcomes

Having pulled together a snapshot of the current state of social housing provision and public policy, the research will speculate on alternative vehicles for social housing finance; test opinion and enthusiasm within the current local government community for social housing intervention across an array of councils; distil the expertise of specialists and those leading the various social housing



agencies in order to consider alternative options for local government; and make recommendations with appeal across the political spectrum.

In the short term the project will:

- bring together policy makers, technicians and finance specialists to explore an alternative framework aimed at freeing councils to build new homes
- publish a fully-evidenced researched report with recommendations for Government and the local authority community, complete with sponsor branding and case studies
- dedicate a launch at a central location attracting a specialist audience offering a high profile for sponsor involvement

In the medium term the project will:

- Highlight regulatory and local policy reforms to Ministers and the Opposition
- Promulgate the case made in the report findings in the specialist and wider media
- Identify opportunities to showcase the project recommendations on platforms, at conferences and events across the policy community

In the longer term the project will:

- add evidence to the case for empowered local leadership on housing policy in a decentralised structure
- Identify leading local authorities interested in a coalition for new social housing construction
- Pinpoint areas for longer term reform and make the case to decision-makers

Budget

Beginning in late Spring 2009, this report will take around four months to complete and will be launched at a dedicated event in the autumn of 2009, to maximise impact in the period preceding the Pre-Budget Report.

Budget

The total budget costs for this project will be £40,000+VAT, with cost and timescale breakdowns available on request. Co-sponsorship and association with the report is available for around £20,000 with the opportunity to input sponsor expertise into the project's research events and Steering Group.

To find out more about the NLGN and our previous work, please contact James Kirkland (020 7015 1384, jkirkland@nlgn.org.uk) or visit www.nlgn.org.uk.

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