

From decent homes to decent neighbourhoods

Councils could soon be forced to follow a new 'decent neighbourhoods standard' to build upon the current decent homes standards following a Labour Party housing policy working group set up to find a way forward between the party's policy makers and the conference floor, which has delivered successive defeats to Ministers on social housing, says APSE, one of the lead advisory bodies to the Labour Party housing working group.

APSE Assistant Chief Executive Mark Bramah, stated **'With the imminent prospect of a new prime minister it is unlikely the labour party could afford to allow the new incumbent to face yet another defeat on housing policy from the grassroots of the party. Social housing policy has for too long been defined into a narrow silo when in fact it is critical to the whole of the community. By moving the debate on from issues of purely housing finance we hope that the adoption of a decent neighbourhoods standard will bring about a more joined up approach to neighbourhoods.'**

Mr Bramah announced at APSE's Housing and Building seminar that:-

- The Government needs to establish a credible successor to the 'decent homes standard' with a new environmentally sustainable 'decent neighbourhoods standard', with a target date of 2015
- The new standard to encompass issues such as communal areas, lighting, lifts, high environmental standards such as adaptations to homes to reduce carbon emissions, renewable energy sources as well as action to address the aims of other policy areas such as community cohesion, the Respect agenda, neighbourhood empowerment and sustainable construction, access to parks and open spaces, street cleansing, refuse and recycling services and healthy community standards
- Create a neutrality in funding options that gives equity to local authorities whatever route they choose to manage their Social Housing, regardless of geographic location.
- The Government should encourage local authorities to build affordable, secure social housing again in order to meet demand and meet the needs of the 1.6m on waiting lists and the 93,000 homeless households trapped in temporary accommodation, including amending financial regulations if necessary to facilitate house building by local councils.

However Mr Bramah raised concerns that the Labour Party may not go far enough in allowing councils to once again have the freedoms and flexibilities to build new homes for social housing adding **"With a need for around 50,000 more council houses the current stock famine will continue unless local authorities are entrusted with the ability to build more homes for social housing as a matter of urgency"** he went on to urge Ministers to consider **"social housing as a quality, affordable option for all, not a safety net or starter for some"**.

Ends

Notes to editors

1. APSE is the Association for Public Service Excellence and works with over 300 authorities throughout the UK
2. APSE has been a leading campaigner to integrate housing into wider social and environmental issues to ensure that all communities live in a 'decent neighbourhood' and has been one of the lead advisory bodies working with the Labour Party Working Group on the future of social housing.
3. The Barker review found that there was a need for 30,000 new council homes to meet immediate need but subsequent research has put that figure at 50,000
4. The 'fourth option' on social housing allowing councils to invest directly in social housing stock to meet housing needs has been rejected by Government in favour of the transfer of housing stock to registered social landlords or ALMOs (arms length management organisations)
5. The labour party conference has voted in favour of the 'fourth option' at successive conferences defeating the conference platform and housing ministers including Communities Minister Ruth Kelly and Housing Minister, Yvette Cooper.
6. The working group was set up to end the deadlock between the party at a grass roots level and the ministerial team responsible for housing policy.
7. APSE is a leading authority on performance management in Local Government and believes that new and existing performance measurements to map improvements on housing and wider neighbourhood issues is possible to deliver both an assurance that homes remain high on the public policy agenda but also allows for a wider improvement in the standards that apply to neighbourhoods to deliver a better deal for communities .

For more details or to arrange a media interview please contact **Mo Baines on mbaines@apse.org.uk or 0161 772 1810 or 07971 843515.**