

## Do the decent thing

*By Phil Brennan, APSE Principal Advisor*

It is a time of huge upheaval in social housing. Higher demand than ever, reform of council housing finance, a new regulatory framework, uncertainty over the future of ALMOs and drastic spending cuts are all raising big question marks while a General Election looms. And within this context, some social landlords have missed the Decent Homes deadline and others are asking what lies beyond.

All these factors will impact on future housing policy. As that develops, APSE would suggest key principles are adopted by any political party wishing to use the power of affordable housing to its potential for whole communities – and not just tenants.

The first of these is that housing policy objectives should be separated from arguments around ownership, management and tenure. APSE has long argued for a level playing field upon which councils and residents can make choices on which housing model suits their particular needs and circumstances.

The second is that good performance should be incentivised with freedom from excessive bureaucracy and local control over resources to meet local need.

The third is that the essential contribution of housing to wider sustainable communities, regeneration and environmental aims must be recognised. The well-documented role of decent housing in health, employment and education should also be built upon.

This brings us back to Decent Homes. The National Audit Office found 92% of homes will meet the standard by this year's deadline, with the remainder not finished until 2018.

Meeting Decent Homes has been more readily achievable by some landlords than other due in part to the iniquitous regime under which they have been operating. The new 2018 deadline might be the end of the programme but not the end of the task. APSE has developed the 'Decent Neighbourhoods' standard, which moves beyond bricks and mortar and takes the wider benefits of housing – such as energy efficiency, play provision and addressing anti-social behaviour into account.

With a level financial playing field, less bureaucracy and greater recognition of the fundamental role housing plays in meeting much broader community-wide needs, social housing could emerge from current changes all the stronger. Without such principles underpinning any new policy, a vital opportunity to embed social housing in successful communities will be missed.

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