



## APSE report calls for 'a new generation of council housing'

A new report launched at the House of Commons with Communities Secretary John Healey, calls for a 'new generation of council housing'. The report, researched and written by APSE for UNISON, shows local authorities are well placed to be providers of affordable, eco-friendly homes that meet local needs and boost local economies

The report *A New Generation of Council Housing: An analysis of need, opportunity, vision and skills* examines how councils are responding to recent opportunities that are enabling them to build homes for the first time in decades. It provides case studies of trailblazer councils across the country that are leading the way, such as Broxtowe, Exeter, Greenwich and Midlothian.

Unison's general secretary, Dave Prentis, said: "Council housing is good value for money. There are huge benefits to the wider economy and to local economies by employing building workers. It can also help prevent another housing and debt bubble by providing more affordable homes.

"Housing is one of the key components of our Million Voices for public services campaign. Decent homes are a pre-requisite for decent health, decent education and a decent quality of life.

"We want to see a million affordable homes built in the lifetime of the next Parliament with local authorities having a far bigger role in delivering those new homes. The APSE report shows that with the political will, council housing can deliver a significant number of the homes we need."

The research found that:

- **Need.** There is a clear need for affordable housing, with one million fewer homes available for rent from councils and housing associations than in 1979. Councils are well placed to deliver homes in a way that meets local needs.
- **Opportunity.** There has been progress of late on addressing barriers to council building. Recent opportunities for council building in the form of the Homes and Communities Agency Local Authority New Build programme and the Scottish government's programme are providing welcome resources for the first time in decades. But councils are well placed to be building in much more significant volume. They are democratically accountable, have land available, are familiar with planning policies, are credit worthy and can deliver new homes in a way that meets a range of holistic community needs and aspirations.
- **Vision.** It is important to have political commitment and a vision of what council building can deliver in terms of community leadership and cohesion, sustainability and boosting local economies, as well as providing much-needed affordable housing. Programmes that are getting under way are high-quality, eco-friendly developments in sustainable communities rather than high-volume, low quality estates of the past.

- **Skills.** Lack of skills and capacity is not an insurmountable barrier as local authorities have vast experience of generic skills that can be applied to house-building; such as project management, sustainable development and partnership working.

The report recommends:

- The government should place a duty on councils to provide homes in the communities they serve, in partnership with other bodies where appropriate.
- Remaining legal and financial barriers should be tackled.
- The reversal of policy in allowing local authorities to become significant housing providers once again should allow council housing to grow to become a quality affordable option for all, not just a safety net for some.
- Councils need clear guidance and support in developing their house-building capacity after decades during which they were denied resources and opportunities to build.
- A sustainable long-term approach to a new generation of council housing is required, with adequate ongoing funding rather than a 'quick fix' approach.
- The economic benefits of a new generation of council housing, such as using Community Benefits Clauses to maximise economic benefits and training opportunities, should be fully explored.

Paul O'Brien, chief executive of APSE, said: "We have been campaigning for years for councils to fulfil their house-building potential and are pleased to see that politicians are finally listening. While new funding opportunities offer a promising start and a chance for councils to show what they can deliver, we would like to see a more substantial programme to enable a whole new generation of sustainable council housing in the future."

## **Ends**

- APSE is the Association for Public Service Excellence. A not for profit local government association working with over 300 local authorities throughout the UK
- APSE has campaigned for changes to allow local authorities the ability to directly invest in council housing both in terms of home improvements and for new build council house schemes.
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