



## **Housing Bill changes could mean 26,000 new council homes a year says coalition**

APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) has joined with other organisations to form a coalition that is calling for changes to the Housing and Regeneration Bill that would enable local authorities to contribute 26,000 homes a year towards Government targets to build three million properties nationally by 2020.

The coalition, which includes APSE, public sector unions, including UNISON and Unite, and the Local Government Information Unit, is urging amendments to Section 80 of the Bill that is currently before Parliament that would overhaul the housing finance system, including creating enough head room in housing finances to invest in existing council housing stock to bring it up to decent homes standards and enable councils to build much-needed new homes.

UNISON's Head of Local Government, Heather Wakefield, explained the need for changes to the housing finance at an APSE fringe debate on the future of council housing at the Labour Party Spring conference.

Ms Wakefield said: **'We welcome the Bill, but believe that councils should play more of a key role in meeting housing targets. The Housing Revenue Account is in massive surplus – £194m at the moment, which is projected to rise to £200m by 2020. We believe that if councils were allowed to use that surplus to borrow against that councils could build 26,000 new homes a year.'**

Joined by Jack Dromey, Assistant General Secretary of Unite (T&G) and Councillor Bill Dixon, Executive Member for Housing at Darlington Borough Council the speakers were unanimous in calling for sweeping changes to housing finance to enable councils to deliver more and better council housing.

Mr Dromey said **"The vision should be for a street of mixed housing supply where the quality of council housing is so good you cannot tell it apart from that which is a privately owned property"** with Cllr Bill Dixon adding **"The housing bill provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to get this right if we get it wrong we run the risk of losing council housing as a major public service forever"**.

Mark Bramah, Assistant Chief Executive at APSE told delegates: **'A failure of market supply has led to the current affordability crisis, with 1.6m on councils' waiting lists, chronic overcrowding and a skills crisis in the building sector'**. Mr Bramah added **'Local authorities, with their excellent apprenticeship schemes, are perfectly placed to meet the skills gap, deliver**

**new homes to ease the housing shortage and ease overcrowding.  
Government has missed a trick in failing to recognise these linkages when  
developing the Housing Bill’.**

### **Notes to Editors**

1. APSE is the Association for Public Service Excellence working with over 250 local authorities throughout the UK developing excellence in public service deliver and advocating continuous improvement

2. The fringe event took place at the Labour Party Spring conference on Saturday 1 March 2008

3. The Housing Bill is currently going through the parliamentary process and the coalition of APSE, UNISON, Unite and LGIU is lobbying for changes to the Bill to permit greater financial freedoms for local authorities to support direct investment in council housing and the opportunity for councils to help build new homes and assist in the delivery of quality affordable housing for all.

4. It is estimated that HRA surpluses of £194m this year could support new build of 26,000 assuming 6 per cent interest rates and £100,000 per property build costs

5. For further information or to arrange for interview please contact Mo Baines on 0161 772 1810 or mobile 07971 843515 or email [mbaines@apse.org.uk](mailto:mbaines@apse.org.uk)