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The magazine for housing professionals

The Three Wise Men of Housing? See who's hot or not in our Review of the Year



Housing SOS
The rescue package

Profile - Richard Ennis
Kingpin of public sector finance

Soap but no flannel
Clean bill for factory regeneration

What will be the biggest single issue facing social housing providers in 2010?



Ken Morgan
PARTNER,
JOHN ROWAN & PARTNERS

With Government targets for carbon reduction coming closer and with pressure to deliver more energy efficient housing, a key issue will be financing the necessary improvements.

The argument of whether public sector spending should focus on new homes or retrofitting is still raging. As of next year, proposed new build homes put to the Homes and Community Agency will need to meet the Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4. It is therefore in improving the efficiency of our existing housing stock where the real challenge lies.

£15k TO RETROFIT A PROPERTY

Both the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Audit Commission have issued reports highlighting the need for the UK to retrofit its stock. This is a huge task and only by starting now, on a scale equivalent to the Decent Homes programme, can it be achieved. This would mean dealing with stock at the rate of nearly 100,000 per year, until 2050.

With the likely cost of retrofitting a property to be around £15,000 - £20,000, it is highly likely that the cost will fall upon providers.

If the Government is serious about meeting its targets then it needs to commit to investment. ■



Pat Hayes
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
HOUSING, EALING COUNCIL

The biggest issue for the local authority part of the sector will be developing a new approach to housing management and stock beyond Decent Homes.

This programme was well intentioned, but must now be seen as a major missed opportunity. It has cured few of the real ills of social housing and has created a number of additional problems. Its wind-up will bring two major challenges:

“ALMOS...WILL NO LONGER HAVE ANY REAL PURPOSE.”

1. Finding alternative ways to bring in the ongoing investment required to keep housing stock up to basic standards.

2. Trying to renew the social housing that has far more fundamental problems than out-moded fixtures and fittings.

The Decent Homes Programme begat ALMOs and with its demise these hybrid creatures will no longer have any real purpose. Local authorities will have to grapple with their legacy of increased costs and duplication of functions at a time when grant cuts are likely.

Most authorities face a tough choice to either bring management back in-house or out source to what is, fortunately, a developing private sector market. ■



John Clayton
INVESTMENT DIRECTOR,
SANDWELL HOMES

With sixth round ALMOs now calling for a judicial review of the decision to defer £150million of refurbishment cash to pay for new homes, the single biggest issue set to face social housing professionals in 2010 will be funding.

The Decent Homes Programme must see long term financing needs addressed. The National Federation of ALMOs has estimated the requirement for subsidy to complete the programme as £2.5 billion for the period 2010 to 2013 and a further £400million beyond that.

This is a significant investment and with no security over when money will be allocated those ALMOs that have not achieved two-star status are in a difficult position, as they have not yet met the threshold which triggers the necessary funding.

The ALMO model has demonstrated good value for the taxpayer, with better services and tenant empowerment and the NFA has long called for ALMOs to operate self sufficiently and raise their own finances.

£2.5BN TO COMPLETE DECENT HOMES

It is increasingly likely that council finance will become self sufficient through the HRA. With time pressing on, these reforms need to take place quickly. ■



Paul Diggory
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
NORTH WALES HOUSING

What's emerged for me is the threat to equality and diversity. Although we've achieved so much to improve lives, the state of our economy has created a climate that threatens to undermine progress.

This was brought home to me recently at a football match when I discovered that the two guys I've sat next to for the last 15 years voted BNP last time out and will do so again. They're otherwise decent, regular working men whose take on the current state of play is

“DIVERSITY ENRICHES LIFE AND LEADS TO UNDERSTANDING...”

based on a young son's inability to find employment. They're clearly unwilling or unable to see the wider implications of their support.

The economic forecast makes it both more difficult for us to succeed and more important than ever that we do. The communities we serve are often the most marginalised and will be the first to bear the impact of unemployment and service cuts.

Diversity enriches life and leads to understanding, ultimately changing attitudes. So if we must put people into boxes let's at least allow them to move from one box to another. Equality and diversity will need advocates in 2010. ■