

INSIDIE HOUSING

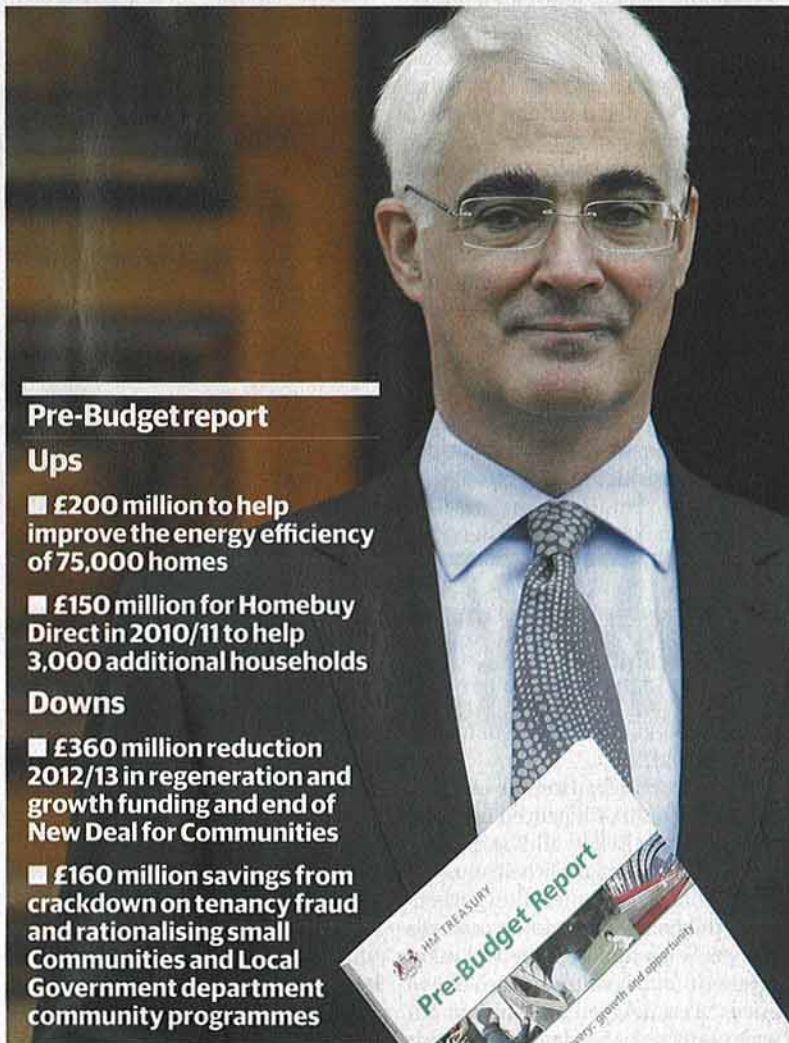
In the balance

Weighing up changes to the £2 billion legal aid system in our legal special Feature, page 26



The grapevine

Who's making a fool of themselves this week in our gossip round-up? Closed circuit, page 19



Darling orders cuts

Finance Treasury to examine council borrowing freedoms as CLG is ordered to save £500 million

Martin Hilditch

Alistair Darling has turned the spotlight firmly on councils to drive forward housing delivery in his pre-budget report.

The chancellor announced plans to improve council land supplies and confirmed the Treasury will consider allowing local authorities to borrow against revenues from new council homes to support the delivery of housing and pledged to beef up their planning role.

But Section 106 planning requirements will be scaled back and guideline local authority rents will be reduced from 6.1 to 3.1 per cent.

There are tougher times ahead for much of the housing sector. The Communities and Local Government

“These are tough choices, but they are essential if we are to stick to our plans to halve the deficit and protect the frontline.”

Alistair Darling

department has been told to make £500 million savings and its capital budget will fall from £9.1 billion in 2009/10 to £6.4 billion in 2010/11.

Savings will come from ‘refocusing regeneration spending’ and from a tenancy fraud clampdown.

→ More on pages 2 and 16

→ The deal that can save the planet, page 12

ALMOs hold key to carbon reduction

I was interested to read the comment piece from Chartered Institute of Housing boss Sarah Webb, Life after decent homes (*Inside Housing*, 27 November). No doubt, most of the housing industry would welcome the introduction of a decent homes level 2 standard as early as possible.

It is fast becoming common knowledge that the current government target for carbon reduction will only be achieved if local authorities retrofit existing housing. What is more significant is that we already have the ideal structure in place to deliver such a programme. The arm's-length management organisation set-up, its structure, governance and track record in transforming homes up to decent homes standard is a major achievement.

The future of ALMOs has already been debated and discussed at all levels and this uncertainty should not be allowed to continue. At the very least the government should let the research, strategy, planning and programming begin, so that decent homes level 2 can get underway and efforts made to incorporate local labour.

There is a high level of energy and enthusiasm among ALMOs and they

“The ALMO set-up, its structure, governance and track record in transforming homes up to decent homes standard is a major achievement for the UK.”



ALMOs can help retrofit energy saving measures such as loft insulation

are keen to continue their success and look for life beyond the decent homes programme. It is only the lack of commitment from the political parties to funding or financial incentives for retrofit or carbon reduction that is holding them back. *Ken Morgan, head of the public sector regeneration team, John Rowan & Partners*