

Update London



Message from the Field Director — London

Following the recent restructuring of the Housing Corporation's senior management team, I am pleased to have taken the helm as the Field Director for London with effect from 1 October 2004. I am also pleased that I will be supported in this role by Derek King, who will continue to have lead responsibility for Regulation, and Fiona MacGregor, who will have lead responsibility for Investment and Regeneration.

WHAT WILL IT MEAN?

As the Field Director, I will have overall responsibility for London policy on both Regulation and Investment. My role will be to ensure that national policy is implemented at a regional level, and that national policy reflects the regional and local dimensions and more local circumstances.

I will also aim to ensure that our contribution to regional housing policy is maintained and indeed enhanced. This is particularly important given our concentrated and extensive expertise of investing in and regulating the affordable housing sector.

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES?

My immediate priority will be to make co-location more real, and for it to feel real for both Corporation staff within London and to our external stakeholders.

We have already begun good work in this area. For example: quarterly partnering meetings with housing associations are now attended by HC representatives from both Regulation and Investment; our Housing Corporation Assessments give as much weight to housing service delivery as they do to investment performance; and our investment programmes are as much about long term sustainability and quality as they are about numbers and cost. But we are also aware that there is still more that can be done to ensure that our stakehold-

ers see the two functions as having a common goal.

FUTURE ACTIVITY

Over the next few months a number of national policies and procedures will flow from the Housing Corporation. It will be vitally important that we engage stakeholders in the consideration and implementation of these policies and procedures at a regional level.

These will include, for example:

- development of our risk based approach to regulation;
- developing our policy on grants to non-RSLs;
- development of a new BME policy and the need to ensure a continued and supported role for BME communities and BME housing associations;
- development of our relationship with English Partnerships in delivering added value in procurement, particularly in high demand areas such as London;
- an updating of the memorandum of understanding between the Corporation and the Audit Commission, confirming housing inspection as an important strand of regulation, integral to and not separate from our overall regulatory view of an association;



- developing our approach to longer term volume programmes to achieve economies of scale and more cost effective procurement;
- and of course development of the operating cost index and its relationship to the efficiency and effectiveness agenda.

With such changes and developments we expect there will always be a wide range of views and not always universal agreement. We are, however, committed to full and inclusive engagement as policy is developed.

It is an exciting time to be in housing, and London has a fantastic opportunity to drive much of the policy debate on solutions to many of the big housing issues we face. My new role will enable the Corporation to play its full part in contributing ideas and possible solutions, working in partnership with our many regional and local stakeholders.

Steven Douglas

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The new Innovation & Development Team

Earlier this year the regional technical teams were restructured, and since April have taken on a new role as the regions' Innovation & Development Teams. The changes put in place are as a result of the Corporation refocusing the work of its technical staff in response to the introduction of its reinventing investment agenda, partnering (self-regulation replacing compliance audit) and its drive to improve quality.

In London, the team has been given a very open remit to work with the major developing associations to develop continuous improvement in procurement efficiency and deliver high quality housing.

As part of this process, the team need to have access to the best available information on how associations are doing with a whole range of agendas involved with procurement: sustainable development, client's charter, Housing Quality Indicators (HQI), Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), etc. The emphasis has switched from checking completed schemes to ensuring that the Corporation is investing in associations who are capable of delivering the required standard and helping associations maintain and improve their performance.

In response to this, the team has divided up the 35 main London based developing associations (including our 26 partnering HAs) into three portfolios, and each member of the team has started to liaise with the housing associations over the quality agenda. In the spirit of partnering, this is a two way process of exchanging information and highlighting Corporation priorities and examples of good practice. Over the course of the year, the team will be

looking to communicate additional guidance on such issues as the interpretation of Scheme Development Standards (SDS) and highlighting training events and useful publications. As part of this work, the team will start visiting a sample of Challenge Fund and Partnership schemes as they reach completion in order to assess quality and provide each association with constructive feedback. Information gathered by the Innovation & Development Team during the course of this process will be used to help inform future funding decisions.

In addition to the new role, a number of more familiar tasks will still be carried out by the team. These include the provision of general advice on SDS, eligibility for grant, and compliance audit for traditional funded associations. So while the focus of work is now directed at the main developing associations, there still remains a work programme for all other associations.

The team is headed by David Norris as the Innovation & Development Manager,

with support being provided by Daljinder Bhamra and Robert Taylor as Innovation & Development Advisors. A fourth member of the team is to be recruited.

In one of his first public appearances in his new role, David Norris told a recent Modern Methods of Construction conference that for the Corporation to increase the number of homes delivered by MMC suppliers had to be involved at an early stage. "We need to move away from going out, getting planning permission, and only then deciding how we are going to build the scheme," he said. "We need to get the suppliers in before the scheme is designed. We want more collaboration between associations, private sector suppliers and manufacturers."



David Norris, Innovation & Development Manager, addressing a recent Modern Methods of Construction conference

Changes to London board members

Two of the London board members have stepped down this autumn. Richard Arthur had been with us since October 2000, and Geraldine Huka had been with us since October 2002. A third member, Yvonne Hutchinson, has changed her responsibilities to the Corporation's Yorkshire and Humberside region. The London Field would like to take this opportunity to thank Richard, Geraldine and Yvonne for all their hard work and dedication in their time on the board in London. The remaining London board member, Sandi O'Neill, is joined by new board member, Chris Holmes, former chair of Shelter.



Richard Arthur



Yvonne Hutchinson



Chris Holmes



Geraldine Huka



Sandi O'Neill



Since his appointment earlier this year, new Housing Corporation Chief Executive Jon Rouse, has made a number of visits to associations across London. Here he is on the roof of Toynbee's Maryland development in Stratford, East London, surveying the Thames Gateway.

Meeting the Decent Homes Standard — regulating asset management

In 2000, the Government committed itself to the initiative that all social housing in England 'meets set standards of decency by 2010'. The definition of a Decent Home is one that meets the current statutory minimum for housing: it is in a reasonable state of repair, is wind and weather tight, is warm and has modern facilities. The 1996 *English House Conditions Survey* suggested that around one third of housing association properties would fail to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

The Housing Corporation, in partnership with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the National Housing Federation, has been working to assess the number of housing association properties which would fail the Decent Homes Standard. As a result the Decent Homes Standard and, more widely, asset management strategies were identified as the key theme of the 2003/2004 *Regulatory Plans*. During the summer, Lead Regulators carried out desktop reviews of their associations' asset management strategies, including their work towards achieving the Decent Homes Standard.

These reviews were mostly desk-based assessments with Lead Regulators working closely with their Financial Appraisal colleagues to assess the housing association's strategic approach to asset management

and its achievement of the Decent Homes Standard. Both the Corporation's financial and regulatory data, and its knowledge of the housing association from normal regulatory contact informed the assessment. This assessment of asset management forms part of a risk based approach to indicate what further regulatory work is necessary for lead regulated associations. Of the 100 housing associations reviewed in the London field, over 80 per cent were given a green light on their asset management strategy and therefore expected to meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2010.

The 20 per cent who were given amber or red lights are due to have further regulatory work on their asset management strategy in the coming months, either in the form of more in-depth desk top reviews or visits.

Update on the key workers programme

Response to the programme has been positive, and as of the end of September Zone Agents had received 6,800 applications. Of these, 380 key workers have completed their purchases and an additional 500 are at an advanced stage. Almost 150 London Key Challenge teachers are on their way to a new home. For the rest, the Market Purchase option is proving popular but there is also interest in the New Build side of the programme.

We are continuing to review the programme with the ODPM on a half-yearly basis to ensure its smooth delivery throughout its two-year span.

Protocols

In the coming months we will be publishing a number of protocols. These have been drawn up in the spirit of partnering with some of our main stakeholders, and set out recommended models for dealing with a variety of different processes and policies. The first three protocols, already available on our website, are as follows:

Social Housing Grant and s106 Agreements — an agreement between the Housing Corporation and the Greater London Authority; *Sub-regional Housing Allocations and Lettings in London* — an agreement between the Housing Corporation, the ALG and the LHF; and the *Development and Sales Agreement Relating to SHG Agency Schemes for BME RSLs with Option to Purchase*.

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The Corporation's 40th anniversary

As part of the Housing Corporation's 40th anniversary celebrations, earlier this year the London field hosted a lunch to celebrate 40 years of regeneration in the capital.

The event brought together some significant developing HAs in London with people from the ODPM, the Home Office, the London Development Agency and the London Housing Federation. A debate chaired by Joe Montgomery, Director General of the Tackling Disadvantage Group at the ODPM, covered a wide range of current topics that included: the short-term nature of initiative funding and the problems of sustaining working projects on the ground; the important role of associations in light of their successes as both developers and social providers; and the Corporation's continuing emphasis on social cohesion and consultation.

As part of the internal celebrations, in November we will be publishing *Agency for change: 40 years of Housing Corporation fund-*

ing for regeneration in London. The staff will also be celebrating the occasion with a social event at the Museum of London.

This year also marks the 40th anniversary of The Kinks' first number one single, *You Really Got Me*. Less well known, however, is that The Kinks' leader Ray Davies was one of the first people to, literally, sing the praises of sustainable communities. In the title track of the band's 1971 album, *Muswell Hillbillies*, Davies sang of the heartbreak and isolation suffered by his 90-year-old grandmother when she was forced to relocate from the central London home she had lived in all her life to the leafier suburb of Muswell Hill during the slum clearance programmes of the late 60s.

This autumn also marks the 30th anniversary of the first public performanc-

es by The 101ers, the first band of the late Joe Strummer, legendary frontman of The Clash. Strummer's first band took its name from the squat they were living and rehearsing in at the time, 101 Walterton Road in Maida Vale. Back then, the area was at the centre of the squatters' movement that emerged in West London during the mid '70s in homes run down by the likes of notorious slum landlord Peter Rachman.

Now owned by Walterton and Elgin Community Homes (WECH), a spokesperson for the association said that Strummer had been an inspiration to local people, not only because he fought against social injustice, but also because he incorporated music from different ethnic backgrounds into his work.

WECH hope to incorporate the words 'Joe Strummer Was Here' into the site of 101 Walterton Road.

Staff news

STARTERS

We are pleased to welcome a number of new recruits to the London office. The range of skills and backgrounds has been impressive: Colette Bailey (Regulation) from a private property service; Craig Darwen (Regulation); Anthony Green (Investment) from LB Hillingdon; Madeline Homer (Regulation); Natalie Jarrett (Regulation) from Peabody Trust; Jeff Stratton (Investment) from St Pancras & Humanist HA; Engin White (Investment).

LEAVERS

We say goodbye and wish well the following people who have left the London office in the past months: Derek Bailey (Administration); Stephen Bull (Regulation) secondment to LHF; Michelle Hegarty (Information); Berwyn Kinsey (Regulation) to head the London Housing Federation; David Matthews (Investment) to Acton HA; Natalie Mitchell (Investment); Kerry O'Driscoll (Investment) to Southern Housing Group; Belinda Porich (Investment) secondment to East Thames Housing Group; Beverley Williams (Regulation).

Update talks to Anthony Green and Jeff Stratton, two new members of the Investment Team

Where have you been before and what are you bringing to the Corporation?

AG: I did a degree in Housing and Development at the University of the West of England, which included a sandwich placement at Stroud DC. After graduation, I returned to work for Stroud DC as a Development Officer. I then moved to the LB Hillingdon as a Senior Development Officer before realising that LA SHG was disappearing and deciding that it was time to follow the money, i.e., to the Corpy.

JS: I previously worked for St Pancras & Humanist HA, most recently as an Area Housing Manager for Sheltered Housing. I also achieved a housing degree at South Bank University on day release while working for them. I have 14 years' experience of working in 'front-line' housing, which includes experience of how HC funded schemes have fared once the tenants have moved in, and issues such as anti-social behaviour, tenant participation, and providing support to vulnerable people against



Jeff Stratton and Anthony Green

the background of the new Supporting People regime.

I feel I am bringing experience and knowledge of issues facing tenants, associations and the sector generally.

What attracted you to the job?

AG: The Corporation looked to be taking on a more enhanced role, and it was a great opportunity to broaden my experience.

JS: I was attracted by the opportunity to widen my experience within the sector

What are your own goals?

AG: Perhaps a spell in Regulation would be interesting...

JS: For now, just to further develop the experience I have already gained. I certainly feel there is still plenty to learn!