The impact of national housing policy

This briefing shows how the Government's Housing Policy is performing in the South West. At a glance it shows achievement to date, latest statistics, the highs and the lows and how to tackle the key issues.

Housing Supply

Despite an 18% increase in homes built by SW housing associations - 13,220 new homes were built in the region in 2010/11 - this is nowhere near enough to meet the demand of the 27,345 new households predicted for the region (Source: National Housing Federation (NHF) SW Home Truths 2011).

**Taking action:**

Local authorities are working with Registered Providers and developers in the SW to devise innovative ways to fund more new homes.

Homelessness

Homelessness has increased in the SW for the first time in three years.

Homelessness acceptances in the SW increased from 780 in the first quarter of 2011/12 to 940 by the third quarter of the year (Source: Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) Homelessness Statistics).

However, there has been a significant and continuing fall in the use of temporary accommodation over the last five years from 23,370 (2006) to 8,450 (2010).

**Taking action:** CIH SW continues to encourage Registered Providers to work with local councils and private landlords, to provide permanent accommodation for homeless households.

Planning

Since the abolition of the SW Regional Spatial Strategy local authorities in the region have cut plans for new housing by 13% - a reduction of 81,256 new homes (Source: NHF SW Home Truths 2011). In the long term the government's proposals to reform the planning system may have a positive effect, but the delay and indecision waiting for the reforms is having an adverse impact in many parts of the SW region.

**Taking action:** CIH SW is working with planners and other organisations in the South West Housing Initiative (www.southwesthousing.co.uk) to promote good practice and keep things moving during the reform period.

Overcrowding

Overcrowding is a national problem, but the SW has the lowest rate of any region in the UK with only 1.7% overcrowding against an average in England of 2.9% (Source: English Housing Survey 2009/10). In fact, under occupation is significant and with 41.1% of properties across all tenures under occupied - the SW has 906,000 bedrooms more than we need.

**Taking action:** CIH is working with local authorities to make the best use of our stock and CIH SW will promote this as a regional initiative.
EVICITIONS, REPOSSESSIONS AND ARREARS

The SW has the lowest number of mortgage possession claims and possession orders in the UK. Landlords’ possessions claims and orders have been on a downward trend since 2002. Once again, the SW has the lowest number (Source: Ministry of Justice).

The figures for the SW show a better picture than any other region, but a lot will depend on interest rates, household incomes and what the government decides to do about welfare reform.

Taking action: CIH SW’s work on financial inclusion will continue to offer advice for landlords and tenants.

HELP WITH HOUSING COSTS

The high number of people claiming Housing Benefit reflects a lack of affordable housing as well as unemployment and pensioner poverty. At September 2011, the total number of people receiving Housing Benefit in the region was 367,850 with 445,110 claiming Council Tax benefit (Source: Department of Work and Pensions).

These figures have increased by 12,000 and 8,000 respectively since September 2010, showing deterioration in some people’s circumstances, indicating that government policy is not working in our region.

Taking action: CIH SW continues to offer briefings on Housing Benefit changes to keep housing professionals in the region up to date.

HOME OWNERSHIP

The SW has high house prices and low average earnings, a problem exacerbated by restricted mortgage lending in the UK during the current recession.

Latest figures show that the average house price in the region is £228,940. This is 11.6 times the average regional income and despite the recession, house prices have increased three times faster than incomes in the past 10 years (Source: NHF SW Home Truths 2011). In addition, prices for first time buyers have continued to increase, reaching £171,919 in 2010 (Source: DCLG).

Taking action: CIH SW urges the government to tackle this affordability issue by increasing the number of new affordable homes being built in the region.

EMPTY HOMES

In October 2011, the number of long term empty homes, unoccupied and substantially unfurnished in the SW for over 6 months was 23,106 (Source: DCLG October 2011).

Although this figure shows a reduction in around 1000 properties in the last year, the fact remains that if they were brought into use, these properties could assist in providing accommodation for the 27,345 new households expected to form in our region this year (Source: NHF SW Homes Truths 2011).

Taking action: CIH SW calls on the government to keep the pressure on landlords and neighbours, using their Empty Homes Toolkit, to bring more properties back into use.