CIH’S Response To Communities and Local Government Localism and Decentralisation of Public Services Inquiry

October 2010

‘Shaping Housing and Community Agendas’

This consultation response is one of a series published by CIH. Further consultation responses to key housing developments can be downloaded from: http://www.cih.org/policy/papers.htm
1. **Introduction**

1.1 CIH welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Select Committee’s Inquiry. CIH is the professional body for people involved in housing and communities, with a diverse and growing membership of over 22,000 people both in the public and private sectors. CIH exists to maximise the contribution that housing professionals make to the wellbeing of communities. We have a clear interest in the impact that moves to localism could or will have on the provision and management of housing; the nature of communities; and the local services used by those communities.

2. **General comments**

2.1 CIH cautiously welcomes the move towards greater decentralisation and localism which is at the heart of the coalition government’s agenda for change and its proposed legislative programme. The government has set out great ambitions around decentralisation and localism. Initial steps relevant to the housing sector have already been taken, and we expect to see more delivered through the Decentralisation and Localism Bill which will be published soon. The government has established its commitment to reducing public spending and developing trust in democratic accountability. Government is committed to providing public services which are more transparent, more effective, and cheaper; simultaneously enhancing local accountability to local people for services delivered locally.

2.2 The shift to localism is a significant change for government, local people, councillors and the whole housing sector. The new government’s commitment to localism offers some significant opportunities but it also poses real challenges around provision and management of housing and related services. The housing sector is keen to make the most of localism but also wants to be upfront about tackling any risks.

2.3 As the shift to localism is a significant departure from the current way in which governance is carried out and the way in which housing and planning is delivered, the transition is one which is likely to take time to develop and one which needs to be resourced properly so that local authorities, elected leaders and local people have the skills and capacity to ensure its success.

2.4 There is a need to ensure that those in society who are less articulate and marginalised are able to fully contribute and participate in the localist approach should they wish to and also that the housing needs and aspirations of the most vulnerable groups in communities are safeguarded.
2.5 There will not be a one-size fits all approach to decentralisation and localism as the needs and aspirations of local people will be different in different localities.

2.6 There is significant appetite for greater involvement in local decision making:

- 78 per cent of people in England said it was important to feel able to influence local decisions
- 27 per cent of people in England said that they would like to be more involved in decisions affecting the local area
- In 2008-09, 47 per cent of all people in England said they had carried out at least one form of civic engagement activity
- One in five people engaged in civic activism is a member of a tenants’ group or committee: possibly as many as three-quarters of a million people
- 65 per cent of people questioned in a recent Ipsos MORI poll favour smaller developments of up to 25 homes in their local area if it would mean more affordable housing.

2.7 Government believes that greater participation will result in better decisions. People voicing local priorities, having a say in decisions which affect their lives and neighbourhoods, the ability to influence change and a sense of control and power (participative democracy). A key measure of people’s satisfaction is the amount of involvement they feel they have in a particular decision even when they are not pleased with the outcome. It is argued that it can lead to better citizens serving as an educative function which strengthens local democratic leadership and capabilities which re-invigorates trust in the democratic process.

3. Specific issues

3.1 This section will now address the specific issues that the Select Committee has raised for consideration.

The extent to which decentralisation leads to more effective public service delivery; and what the limits are, or should be, of localism

3.2 There is the assumption that decentralisation and localism which allows for greater participation at the local level will lead to better decisions and therefore, more effective public services.
3.3 CIH believes that decentralisation and localism have the potential to result in more effective public service delivery: quality services in which local needs and priorities are addressed, which can involve innovative solutions to complex issues resulting in improved outcomes, value for money and efficiency gains alongside increased customer satisfaction.

3.4 Existing localist approaches which have been adopted regarding the delivery of public services within local government and within the housing sector illustrate the potential benefits which can come from a localist approach. These include:

3.4.1 Local government: Local Strategic Partnerships: Local authorities have a central role with funding powers to transform neighbourhoods and communities. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) provide the structure for joint-working to implementing housing and regeneration and neighbourhood renewal initiatives. Local Strategic Partnerships are overall bodies created to bring together the three sectors (public, private, voluntary) to set a ‘strategic vision’ for the local authority area, lead the drive to improve public services. In the Long-term evaluation of local area agreements and local strategic partnerships – Report on the 2008 survey of all English local strategic partnerships, respondents reported progress in joint funding of projects, services better meeting needs in priority areas, levering in additional resources and efficiency gains through joint working. Respondents also reported that barriers to aligning mainstream programmes were central government constraints around targets and priorities.

3.4.2 Local government: Total Place
The Total Place initiative, introduced by the last administration, looked to identify and avoid overlap and duplication between organisations to deliver both service improvement and efficiency at the local level. Total Place evolved from the Treasury’s Operational Efficiency Programme (OEP) which aimed at achieving greater efficiency in a number of cross-cutting areas. Total Place looks at how a ‘whole area’ approach to public services can lead to better services at less cost. There are 13 pilots operating nationally. The final evaluation report Total Place: a whole area approach to public services found that there were significant benefits from the pilots, including improved outcomes, citizens placed at the heart of service design, greater value for money and the elimination of waste and duplication.

3.4.2b The Durham Total Place pilot focused on ‘housing in relation to regeneration’. The pilot was delivered in partnership with local, regional and national stakeholders, including local communities and residents. Housing in relation to regeneration was selected because of the correlation between the housing profile of the county and its economic
performance. The final report identified the following benefits to local citizens in relation to the implementation of Total Place:

- Home energy efficiency – single one stop shop for advice and support; funding goes further due to lower overheads
- Home adaptations – simplified system that treats citizens as consumers, with quicker handling of cases, more equitable treatment
- Jobs and employment – better access to advice and training opportunities for social housing tenants.
- Improved standards of housing for those on benefits renting in the private sector
- Consistent standards of services and support across social housing providers
- Integrated place-based regeneration plans developed in partnership with local communities, with flexibility to meet local priorities ix.

Other advantages for the local authority, residents and other partners included:

- Stronger collaboration with the local authority and other providers including developers and housing providers through the Housing and Regeneration Partnership
- A opportunity for private developers to influence the local authority’s spatial priorities for development
- More flexible use of funding.

3.5 Whilst such approaches (representative democratic models) clearly demonstrate the multiple benefits of decentralisation, these approaches, however, offer limited opportunities to increase the participation and power of communities and public service users to engage in local governance and in housing and planning decisions. Key to the government’s agenda is its vision of the Big Society, one in which people have control over the decisions that affect them (participative democracy). The government’s central objectives around the Big Society and housing and planning include ‘open source’ planning, increased tenant power, community management of resources and the opportunity for communities to set up local housing trusts.

3.6 We believe that the social housing sector has much experience to share with local authorities and many public sector services due to the active role it has undertaken to develop tenant and resident involvement which is now fairly well advanced and reasonably
resourced. There is a spectrum of activities which provide involvement opportunities for tenants and residents and certainly mainstream providers integrate involvement into their daily business and deliver increasingly good results. Examples of tenant and resident involvement in the sector include:

3.6.1 **Housing: Arms length management organisations:** Arms length management organisations (ALMOs) already provide the basis for extensive tenant involvement in governance. ALMOs have one-third (or more) tenant board members and additionally involve tenants at all levels in other areas. Derby Homes ALMO, for example, has about 30 tenants involved in governance who have had training to assist them in their role. Tenant involvement has helped many ALMOs deliver efficiency savings: by having tenants involved they can make changes that might otherwise be resisted. Derby Homes has achieved £100,000s in savings e.g. in cleaning contracts and other aspects of service delivery, by working with tenants to change contracts/specifications, etc.

3.6.2 **Housing: Community Gateway organisations:** Community Gateway was pioneered in Preston and now several stock transfers have taken place on a gateway basis. This means tenants have a bigger role in governance than in a normal housing association; and also that they can elect to run estates themselves as part of the Gateway approach. There is investment in developing residents’ capacity to help them take bigger roles in governance.

3.6.3 **Housing: Resident led self regulation and enhanced tenant scrutiny:** CIH has developed the concept of resident led self-regulation which offers a model for housing organisations to let tenants at a local level influence decision making in their communities. Resident-led self-regulation is a form of organisational self-regulation, in which an organisation develops formal frameworks and mechanisms for controlling its own behaviour. Component parts of housing associations’ existing self-regulation frameworks include the business planning cycle, internal audit, setting and monitoring key performance indicators, options appraisals, and oversight and scrutiny by the board. Self-regulation frameworks are already at the heart of housing associations’ operations. Moving to resident-led self-regulation is simply about making residents central to these frameworks. Meaningful resident-led self-regulation would be where residents have a formal, strong role to assess and influence performance and behaviour and take an empowered role in their communities.

3.6.3b **Tenant scrutiny at Stockport Homes:** Stockport Homes’ tenant scrutiny structure gives tenants power in the way the business is run. Tenants’ views are fed into improvement plans developed by a customer
scrutiny panel. The plans are then presented to the executive team and the board, which must respond to these suggestions and recommendations.

3.6.3c Empowering residents at Aldwyck Housing Association: Aldwyck’s customer scrutiny panel is a tenant body which pro-actively challenges service delivery in the organisation. The scrutiny panel’s work has led to real benefits including the replacement of contractors based on tenant-led assessment of performance, and increased resident empowerment opportunities.

3.6.4 Local Tenant Panels: Government has suggested that Local Tenants Panels could form a mechanism by which greater accountability for the delivery of local services is achieved. Welwyn and Hatfield Local Tenants Panel is a structure formed in 1994, consisting of 24 tenant members and three leaseholders. The Panel monitors the performance of the housing service and discuss housing and other local issues. The Tenants’ Panel aims to develop partnerships between the Community Housing Trust, tenants, leaseholders and the council, to raise standards and improve services. It monitors the work of the Trust, the council, and their contractors; and to protect tenants’ rights and ensure that local services meet the needs of all the community.

3.7 The limitations and challenges of localism

3.7.1 Whilst there are significant benefits including effective service delivery to adopting a localist approach, there are also clear risks, limitations and challenges which must be highlighted particularly around the Big Society agenda and participative democratic approaches.

3.7.2 Firstly there is a potential tension between the place-based (Total Place) approach and the Big Society agenda. The place-based model is fundamentally strategic and collaborative in its approach to public service delivery, thereby facilitating increased efficiencies, the elimination of duplication, a comprehensive approach to complex problems as well as improved outcomes for communities.

3.7.3 Devolving decision making down to the spatial level of neighbourhoods could potentially make it difficult to adopt a strategic approach to the planning and delivery of public services including the planning and delivery for the housing needs and aspirations of a locality. There is the risk that this would result in more costly and less effective services and the housing needs and aspirations of communities not being met.

3.7.4 CIH’s submission to CLG Select Committee Inquiry into the Abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies, provides a detailed response on the key
issues raised by the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies including for levels of housing development.

3.7.5 There is risk that more challenging issues could be sidelined and resisted by local communities, for example, the development of housing in a local area and support services to marginalised groups including gypsies and travellers and people who misuse drugs and alcohol. Clearly, there is a need for strong local leadership to safeguard the needs and aspirations of such groups. How local leadership is organised may vary depending on the local area but could include a mayoral figure, elected councillors at ward level or leaders chosen from the community.

3.7.6 For tenants and communities to be able to participate in local decision-making and, if they choose, delivery of local services, they need a certain level of capacity and social capital. This capacity is known to be lacking in many areas, meaning that some communities could be excluded from the ‘Big Society’ approach. This might be especially the case for the less articulate members of a community. The success of Big Society requires all communities to participate, and therefore some financial support for communities is required to build skills and enable involvement.

3.7.7 CIH believes that the government should recognise the need to resource skills development for younger citizens of school age. Many children and young people are marginalised in terms of their ability to meaningfully participate in their communities. A Jospeh Rowntree Foundation Report in 2002 which looked at meaningful engagement initiatives with local authorities found that young people had a real enthusiasm for getting involved in decision making. Points of engagement included concerns about crime, personal safety, education, facilities for young people, the environment and housing. CIH has actively supported pioneering work in youth empowerment capacity building for the housing sector undertaken by the National Youth Agency (NYA). Their ‘Hear by Right’ scheme uses measurable standards to map the current level of young people’s participation across a wide range of service providers and then strategically develops an action plan to further this.

3.7.8 CIH consultation has highlighted concerns of tenants and residents, both working and not working, who are in receipt of social security benefits that they could jeopardise their entitlement to benefits (Incapacity Benefit/ESA and JSA) by participating in voluntary activities. For people who are not in work, current eligibility rules for JSA state that a recipient must be available to start work at short notice and defines ‘voluntary work’ as employment with charity or not-for-profit organisation. This could exclude some types of community activity.
CIH recommends a more flexible approach to benefits and volunteering; so people who are receiving benefits can still make a meaningful contribution to their community without concerns that their benefits might be stopped.

3.7.9 CIH believes that government in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review should make funding available for building skills and capacity at the local level. CIH, in its submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review Responsible choices for a fairer future\textsuperscript{xiv} recommended that government made available £2.5m per year at national level to specifically support local empowerment and capacity building in the social housing sector.

3.8 Examples of developing local skills from the housing sector

3.8.1 In its Tackling Worklessness toolkit\textsuperscript{xv} CIH shows how housing, employment, economic activity and skills community skills capacity building are interlinked. Many social housing residents currently commit large amounts of time to community activity including running community assets and participating in governance and regeneration activities. CIH supports initiatives such as ‘Off the streets and into Work’ (OSW) which provides resources and information to support homeless people and social landlords to engage with volunteering.\textsuperscript{xvi} In addition, CIH has devised the Active Learning for Residents project which recognises the skills and achievements of tenants, residents and staff involved in participation and empowerment activities. The project allows participants to achieve nationally recognised qualifications at Level 2 in Community Action, at Level 3 in Tenant Participation and Neighbourhood Renewal; and at Level 4 in Governance. Initial evaluations of the project show that in addition to improving the skills, knowledge and capacity of participating tenants and residents, it has also raised aspirations and has led to service improvements in some organisations. \textsuperscript{xvii}

3.8.2 Furthermore, it is very likely that this support will need to be extended to local officials and civil servants so they have the capacity to understand and respond to the Big Society agenda in order to fully support their citizens and local communities. This support may be critical given that the localist approach potentially presents a very different way of working and thinking which could result in either resistance or inability to respond by officials and elected leaders.
3.9 **Place based budgeting:** Local government has achieved efficiencies of £3 billion between 2004 and 2007 and is on course to make further savings of £5.5 billion in the current spending review period to 2011. Local pilot work undertaken for the Local Government Association has shown the potential for savings through sharing services assets. LGA estimates that in Leicestershire, there could be annual savings of between £3.75 million and £5.25 million from rationalising the number of public service access points of which there are 450 face-to-face service points, 65 telephone centres and 75 separate websites. In Kent, the public asset base is valued at £5 billion. LGA estimates asset disposals could generate net capital receipts of £200 to £280 million over five years, with savings of £40 million on the annual running costs of £300 million. LGA is proposing replacing accountability through multiple departmental funding streams, top-down targets and regulation through multiple public bodies, with outward-facing accountability to local people through devolved governance made up of democratically elected local councillors. LGA argues that Total Place pilots (2.3) demonstrate that devolved governance of public services, results in better value for money.

3.9.1 Other lessons to be learned from Total Place are referred to in the earlier part of this submission, under 3.4.2 Local Government: Total Place and 3.4.2b The Durham Total Place pilot.

3.9.2 Whilst there are significant benefits to adopting a whole area approach to public service delivery, it also potentially presents some challenges. The Total Place evaluation report stresses that the role of leadership is critical to the success of Total Place which will require that all public leaders take a broader view of the leadership task and new key skills including customer insight and excellent partnering skills. Local authorities can be expected to fulfil this role in many local areas. However, as we have already stated in 3.2.2 of this submission it should be recognised that there will be variability of confidence, skills and capacity across local authorities. Similarly, local partners need to be prepared and confident to take new approaches. Operating in times of financial difficulties can drive organisations to retrench and compete, rather than taking new approaches and collaborating.

3.9.3 If local authorities are to be encouraged to adopt a whole area approach then they must be supported by government. The evaluation report suggests that this could be achieved through locality-based leadership development programmes. CIH believes that this is an appropriate way forward. We have concerns that government actions do not always support local authorities to move towards a whole area approach. Some ministers have spoken critically of local authority
activities which help to build understanding of the local population and thus help local partners to target resources accordingly. It will not be possible to integrate funding and budgets without local insight.

The role of local government in a decentralised model of local public service delivery, and the extent to which localism can and should extend to other local agents

3.10 Currently, local authorities and elected councillors have the leadership role and strategic responsibility for their local area working with their partners and engaging their communities for the social, economic and environmental well-being of their local area.

3.10.1 Local authorities are also responsible for the strategic housing function working with their partners to meet the housing needs and aspirations of their local area, contributing to economic growth and prosperity as well as to other social and environmental objectives. Strategic housing is at its most effective when local leadership is strong, consistent, and focused on the needs of the whole community. Significant investment has been made in the strategic housing function within local authorities in recent years, but more is needed to consolidate and sustain improvement in the skills and growth in capacity for the function to continue to take place.

3.10.2 In the localist and Big Society agenda, local authorities are likely to continue to be responsible for providing strategic leadership. Existing structures such as LSPs and newly developing ones such as Local Enterprise Partnerships will enable local authorities to fulfil this role.

3.10.3 The Decentralisation and Localism Bill will further enhance local authorities’ leadership role as local authorities will be given a new general power of competence. The House of Commons Briefing note on the general power of competence states that the implications of this new statutory presumption are (intentionally vast) and no action except for raising taxes will be beyond local government, unless that action is preventable by law.

3.10.4 Whilst local authorities will continue to exercise a leadership role in their local area, CIH believes that the shift towards a more participative democratic approach, will mean that they are likely to be working much more closely with their citizens and communities rather than working on behalf of them. The precise way in which this is achieved in each locality will be different depending on the needs, skills and experiences of each local area and which will continue to evolve over time.
However, it is certainly likely to require a new flexibility from local authorities, a change in culture and developing new skills so that local authorities can enable ongoing dialogue and negotiation between themselves and their citizens and between citizens. Effectiveness in strategic housing can be enhanced where engagement with the community runs through all processes and is not restricted to formal consultation periods.

3.10.5 CIH believes that the localist approach should extend to other local agents in terms of localised participative decision making and accountability. As the Total Place pilots showed, the collaboration between partners has resulted in considerable benefits and outcomes. The complex and interrelated issues in an area require all agents to work together and to engage with local communities when setting priorities. For example, promoting community safety might require local authorities to work in conjunction with the police, housing providers, probation services, etc to identify and address local priorities through coordination of activity and resources.

3.10.6 Some explanations of the localist approach suggest that local authorities can be expected to play a lead commissioning and enabling role. Whilst this is appropriate, CIH believes that the role of local authorities should not be limited to this and that they should continue to be key agents and providers in the delivery of valuable, efficient and quality public services where this is desired and appropriate.

The action which will be necessary on the part of Whitehall departments to achieve effective decentralised public service delivery

3.11 As already stated in this response a critical role for government is to provide the resources and financial support to develop the skills and capacity of local authorities, elected leaders and citizens in local areas to step up to a leadership and provision role. In many places this capacity is not present, and so creating a framework where decisions and services can be made and run locally will not be enough to enable local control to take place.

3.11.1 CIH in our submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review, Responsible choices for a fairer future, commented that the costs of participation and development of skills for active social tenants are, and should be, borne by the landlord. However, there is a clear need for additional funding through the area-based grant given to local authorities to support (a) training and capacity building for
tenants/communities, (b) networks of active tenant/community members to share learning and provide mutual support and (c) members of the community to influence strategic decisions on housing supply and investment. The value of a government funded programme is that it makes resources available to tenants without them having to rely directly on their landlord.

3.11.2 A key role for Whitehall departments is to diffuse innovation and learning across boundaries so that local authorities, elected leaders, their partners and local people recognise and understand what good effective public services might look like and how they might be achieved. This will be a valuable resource in the absence of government issuing any guidance, performance indicators or detailed frameworks. The government has given an indication of its intention to do this for example, in a briefing note to Members of Parliament on local authorities: the general power of competence states, ‘A Conservative Government will disseminate case studies of the use of the power to all councils to illustrate its scope and publicise its potential impact, so that – at all levels of local government, and among people at large – there is an awareness of the new found freedom of action for local communities. CIH believes this should apply across all public sector services including housing and planning.

3.11.3 Whilst centrally imposed targets and performance indicators will be removed, CIH believes that there should be some mechanism by which outcomes in local areas and at national level can be measured to allow local people and government to be able to assess the impact of localism and whether local priorities and national objectives are being met. The simplest way in which this might be achieved is by local areas setting local targets against identified priorities and reporting on them. However, whilst this might allow assessment at a local level, this would not enable comparison across local areas.

3.11.4 Whilst government has made it clear that it is no longer going to issue guidance and prescriptive frameworks or procedures as to how local areas conducts its business, CIH believes that government still needs to articulate a vision for the country and be responsible for setting out a national strategic overview of national priorities and national frameworks to help achieve the vision where necessary.

3.11.5 CIH believes that there needs to be some consideration by government as to how a situation might be dealt with in a local authority area in which local actions and decisions significantly jeopardise achieving national and local objectives. For example, if local communities and local people are still resistant to the development of new housing in their area despite the New Homes Bonus, how might this situation be
resolved? CIH would welcome further clarity by government regarding this.

What, if any, arrangements for the oversight of local authority performance will be necessary to ensure effective local public service delivery.

3.12 Current partnership working facilitated through the operation of Local Strategic Partnerships have acted as a mechanism to assist local authorities and their partners to focus on meeting objectives and targets. In the localist approach, there will be few centrally driven targets and objectives but CIH believes it is important that there is some arrangement in place to enable synoptic and comparative assessment of local authority performance. This will be particularly important in areas of thematic risk such as health and safety and equality and diversity. In addition, this will enable local authorities and local people to identify priorities at a local level; and for local authorities, local people and government to judge performance locally. The removal of the CAA reporting website, which provided information to the public in a clear and comparable format, is unfortunate in this regard.

3.12.1 There are some areas which need additional national oversight even where decision making is devolved, because they are so important for the country’s economic and social wellbeing. For example, CIH believes that to ensure that investment decisions are transparent and focused on priority areas the number of rural, supported and family sized homes that are funded should be reported at both local authority and national level.

3.12.2 In the localist approach there needs to be robust accountability in place that allows local people to hold public services to account over and above local elections. It is worth noting that in many areas structures for local people to hold local leaders to account beyond council elections are still poorly developed. Often, the only recourse is the ability for an individual or a group to lobby an elected member around a perceived problem. Although the right to petition adds some formality to articulation of local opinion, additional mechanisms are needed which give real power. Local people should know their rights to be informed and to challenge, and local people should have formal processes to follow that mean local leaders must account for themselves publicly and be responsive to queries and concerns. The mechanisms for this will be different in each local area depending on the arrangements that are agreed. It is critical that whatever accountability arrangements are agreed these are clearly set out so that it is understood who is to be
held accountable. For example, would and should an identified leader be held accountable for every major public governance and community issue in their area or would accountability rest at a lower level?

3.12.3 Given that the Big Society approach may potentially result in the voluntary provision of public service delivery, there also needs to be accountability in place around the quality of voluntary delivered services. A potential issue around this is how accountability might look like given that the nature of the service delivery is voluntary: it seems unlikely that local people and communities delivering such services could or should be subject to the same stringent accountability as non-voluntary delivered public services.

How effective and appropriate accountability can be achieved for expenditure on the delivery of local services, especially for that voted by Parliament rather than raised locally.

3.13 Robust regulatory and audit architecture has historically acted as a guarantee of accountability for expenditure on the delivery of local services. In social housing, the Housing Corporation (Tenant Services Authority) and the Audit Commission has exerted strong regulatory impact on the sector; with a focus on financial viability and the delivery of services to local people which provide value for money. The Audit Commission has acted to ensure value for money in public service delivery across 11,000 local authorities to the value of £200 billion. Effective regulation has also brought significant financial benefits to the housing association sector: registered providers have borrowed £40 billion at interest rates that are often 1 to 1.5 per cent cheaper than those for non-regulated housing developers. In addition, a secure approach to regulation could level £20 to £25 billion of lending into the social housing sector over the next five years. For this reason, it is important that in the absence of historic regulatory architecture effective and appropriate accountability can be achieved for expenditure on the delivery of local services.

3.13.1 The government has introduced measures requiring local authorities to publicly publish all expenditure over £500, with the aim of enabling audit by local people. CIH believes that this mechanism should not be relied on to ensure accountability and regulation of local authorities. The publication of such data only provides a ‘snapshot’ of a given situation and can be easily open to misunderstanding and interpretation. Without the availability of additional information and insight, the practice of ‘armchair audit’ risks being very subjective and
divorced from strategic approaches to long term vision and decision making, and thus detrimental to local communities rather than beneficial. Furthermore, there is real potential for inconsistency in this approach as it will be difficult to compare one public body with another and across local authorities. CIH believes that the publication of data could form an element of the need for a comprehensive and robust regulatory architecture and accountability mechanisms but it should not be the main element.

4. Conclusion

4.1 In terms of achieving a more local approach, CIH believes the role of tenants and residents should be recognised, resourced, promoted and skilled. This should be a core element of government’s commitment to localism and increased local accountability. Developing the skills and capacity of local communities is integral to CIH’s vision for strong communities. Individual and community empowerment provides opportunities for people to influence and shape decision making processes. Individual and community empowerment can foster a more genuine sense of ‘community’, social cohesion and collective responsibility. For service providers, it can lead to better knowledge and awareness of the needs of local communities and the impact of current service provision. It can also lead to the development of more informed and responsive services for the future. xxii

4.2 Whilst there can be significant benefits to adopting a localist approach, CIH believes that the move to localism also presents some real risks which we have articulated in this paper. Of particular concern are the variability of leadership, capacity and skills at local authority level, and the need for cultural change to make localism happen. CIH has some real concerns that the potential lack of cultural change and strategic leadership could result in the failure of public service provision, in particular housing supply and services to support residents. .
The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the professional body for people involved in housing and communities. We are a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation. We have a diverse and growing membership of over 22,000 people – both in the public and private sectors – living and working in over 20 countries on five continents across the world. We exist to maximise the contribution that housing professionals make to the wellbeing of communities.

CIH provides a wide range of services available to members, non-members, organisations, the housing sector and other sectors involved in the creation of communities. Many of our services are only available to CIH Members, including discounts. Our products and services include:

- Training
- Conference and events
- Publications
- Enquiries and advice service
- Distance learning

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1. The main proposals of the Bill include:

- Abolish Regional Spatial Strategies. Return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils.
- Abolish the Infrastructure Planning Commission and replace it with an efficient and democratically accountable system that provides a fast-track process for major infrastructure projects.
- New powers to help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and give communities the right to bid to take over local state-run services. Abolish the Standards Board regime.
- Give councils a general power of competence.
- Require public bodies to publish online the job titles of every member of staff and the salaries and expenses of senior officials.
- Give residents the power to instigate local referendums on any local issue and the power to veto excessive council tax increases.
- Greater financial autonomy to local government and community groups.
- Create Local Enterprise Partnerships (to replace Regional Development Agencies) – joint local authority-business bodies brought forward by local authorities to promote local economic development.

- Form plans to deliver a genuine and lasting Olympic legacy.

- Outright abolition of Home Improvement Packs.

- Create new trusts that would make it simpler for communities to provide homes for local people.

- Review the Housing Revenue Account.

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ii LGA (2010) Place Based Budgeting, London, LGA


vi LIGU (2010) People, places, power: how localism and strategic planning can work together, London, LIGU

vii http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/vfm_operational_efficiency.htm

viii http://www.localleadership.gov.uk/totalplace

ix The Total Place Pilot: Housing and Regeneration in County Durham, Final Report, February 2010

x CIH (2008) Resident led Self Regulation: Potential and Prospects, CIH

xi Combe V (2002) Up for it: getting young people involved in local decision making, York, JRF

xii http://hbr.ny.a.org.uk/pages/about_hear_right


xiv CIH, NHF, NFA (2010) Submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review: Responsible choices for a fairer future


xvi http://www.crisis.org.uk/pages/merger-osw.html


xviii http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/total_place_report.pdf

xix http://www.parliament.uk/briefingpapers/commons/lib/research/briefings/snpc-05687

xx TSA (2010) www.tenatservicesauthority.org/server/show/nav.14451

xvi Cooper C and Hawtin M eds. (1998) Resident Involvement and Community Action, CIH, Coventry