

**INFLUENCING / INFORMING / NETWORKING**



CEO FORUM - HELD BY THE HOUSING FORUM AND WATES LIVING SPACE - BIRMINGHAM MARCH  
2015

TOPIC: "SMARTER HOUSING STRATEGIES"



**Paul O' Driscoll**, Business Development Director, Wates Living Space hosted the first 2015 Housing Forum in Birmingham and explained the significance of the affordable housing sector to the overall business and the contribution made by Wates through social value in the communities

in which they work.

In the pre-election period, delegates have given their overall view on the priority areas for housing under the next government as:

- 🏠 A long term strategy to underpin and enable housing delivery to plan for more than 3-5 years ahead
- 🏠 Co- ordinate short term plans and initiatives which are launched for political reasons into an overall annual plan
- 🏠 Turn benefits into buildings by diverting £5bn from the annual £23bn housing benefit bill into grant aid for affordable new homes; £55,000 per unit in grants would build 100,000 affordable homes a year.

The current housing market in Birmingham was covered by **Clive Skidmore** - the city is experiencing the first significant recovery of the housing market since the 1970s, with council house building scaled up from 100 homes p.a. to 500 homes p.a. The council have a £20m programme to increase housing supply. To sustain this growth, Clive argued for high priority for long term housing programmes; not a series of initiatives announced throughout the year. This will have a direct economic benefit, as when councils start to build in their communities, others take notice. Birmingham City Council have launched the [Housing Prospectus](#) listing all the major housing development opportunities in Birmingham to stimulate the building of at least 80,000 new homes with an economic benefit of around £9bn for developers and house builders.



Large sites are now being built out, which would not have happened 5 years ago. The Curzon Street master plan covers an important new quarter driven by rail station improvements and HS2 where 1,000 private rented homes could be offered. At Selly Oak, Persimmon are going ahead with a 600 unit housing scheme. Ambition for housing growth is shared around the Midlands with Sandwell releasing development ready land for 780 homes supported by a cross-party 10 year agreement. In Warwick, the council is investigating setting up a council

owned company to build and manage low cost rented accommodation as a local policy to balance tenure options in an area where market rent is more than catered for. Whilst there is ambition to build more public sector homes, in any future affordable housing programme, there has to be greater collaboration to ensure results; in some areas 50% of grant funding was handed back to HCA as timescales and other pressures made potential schemes unviable. Extending the right to buy for housing association tenants may have the consequence of suspending plans to build more homes as ALMOs and others have to assess the impact on the affordability of long term business plans and management agreements.



**Tim Bush** raised the issue of the under use of existing stock and ways to free up family housing - Birmingham council have a pilot scheme of 25 x 2 bed (en-suite) dormer bungalows as a flexible solution with targeted lettings, 95% are let to under occupying smaller households freeing up 3 bedroom homes; 50 more are planned to be built. Encouraging older

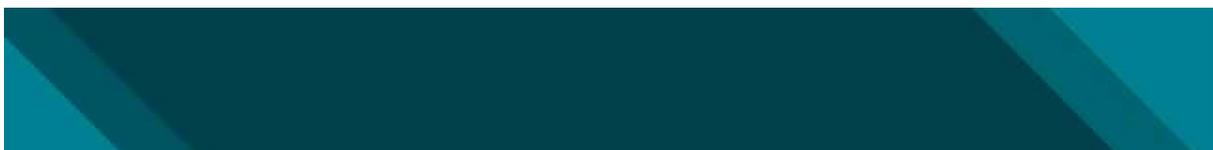
people, to consider moving to a more suitable home has to be handled sensitively and whg (Walsall Housing Group) have introduced 5 year tenancies which enable a review and conversation about whether to stay put or move on.

## **WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

**SMARTER SUPPLY: SMARTER RESOURCES** - Jim Martin focused on the supply chain which has raised training and skills as its major priority- skills in development processes, customer care and commercial management as well as construction skills. Off-site manufacture will add to the total overall with additional numbers from local authorities, self-build and PRS possibly bringing capacity to a maximum of around 180,000 units p.a. Design modelling, financial modelling and digital skills through BIM will come as advance preparation before building works start will contribute to greater efficiency and longer term benefits for asset management.

**INVESTING IN OUR HOUSING ASSETS** - Jeremy Kape focused on the priorities for this group which are that affordability is about more than rent – it is the total cost of home occupation. Between 2003 and 2013, rents rose by 33% yet over the same period, energy costs have risen by 128%. A strategy for the existing stock needs to combine energy and rent aspects. Eco, Green Deal and other policies have been withdrawn or unsuccessful and over the next decade, many homes will become unaffordable unless action is taken.

The Decent Homes standard is past its "sell-by date". The regulator focuses on the investment in individual component replacement but the Working Group's view is to allow each organisation to assess its own context and take action on fuel poverty with the flexibility to spend on its own stock. Housing organisations should take a pro-active approach, optimising the value of assets to address a range of housing and community issues.



The Housing Forum Call for action is for all party consistency on energy policy, for volume to deliver commercial viability, for simplicity and for engagement, understanding the long term value of investing in a home. But in a future with Universal Credit, the security of landlord income stream from rents may be at risk.

**Tom Langley** gave an insight into **ENERGIESPRONG** (translates as energy-leap) which began in the Netherlands as a Government led plan to improve properties to a zero energy bill level. The trigger been the rise in energy costs which are now close to rent levels. Energiesprong is a comprehensive refurbishment package of design, installation and maintenance carried out over 15 days with tenants in occupation. After a technical survey, bespoke wall panels and insulated roofs with built in solar panels are fitted on site by multi-trade "co-workers". The first scheme is of 110,000 properties owned by 6 housing associations. One difference with UK is there are less variations with more regular house types in the Netherlands.

**KEY WORDS:** housing strategy, council house building, down-sizing, energy and rent costs, decent homes, flexibilities, energiesprong.

The following delegates attended:

- 🏠 Kerry Bolister, Area Director Homes & Communities, Sandwell MBC
- 🏠 Steve Boyd, Chief Executive, Solihull Community Housing
- 🏠 Tim Bush, Partner, Baily Garner
- 🏠 Joanne Ellson, Partner calfordseaden
- 🏠 Rob Gilham, Corporate Director of Housing, Walsall Housing Group
- 🏠 Shelagh Grant, Chief Executive, The Housing Forum (Co-Host)
- 🏠 Jerry Harkness, Regional Development Manager, Circle Housing Group
- 🏠 Jeremy Kape, Director of Property Investment, Affinity Sutton
- 🏠 Simon Marks, Partner - Local Government & Regeneration, EC Harris
- 🏠 Jim Martin, Senior Partner, Martin Arnold
- 🏠 Kevin Rodgers, Chief Executive, WM Housing
- 🏠 Clive Skidmore, Head of Development, Birmingham City Council
- 🏠 Andy Thompson, Head of Housing & Property Services, Warwick DC
- 🏠 Amanda Tomlinson, Chief Executive, Black Country Housing Group
- 🏠 Jane Trethewey, Lead Officer Housing Development, Wolverhampton City Council
- 🏠 Neil Walker, Director, BM3 Architecture
- 🏠 Shelagh Grant, Chief Executive, The Housing Forum (Co-Host)
- 🏠 Claire Bailey-Jones, Business Development Manager, Wates Living Space (Co-Host)
- 🏠 Trevor Graham, Partnering Director, Maintenance Division, Wates Living Space (Co-Host)
- 🏠 Martyn Hopkins, Development Director, Wates Living Space (Co-Host)
- 🏠 Tom Langley, Operations Director, Wates Living Space (Co-Host)
- 🏠 Paul O'Driscoll, Business Development Director, Wates Living Space West (Co-Host)

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