



NEWS RELEASE

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HOUSING: OUR BIG ISSUE

A new report on housing issues was launched yesterday in the House of Lords by the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities (SIGOMA). The aim of the report is to inform the government about the specific problems being faced by their member authorities in respect of not only social housing but also affordable housing and bringing back into use those homes that have fallen into disrepair.

The government's goals from 2010 of 70,000 affordable houses and 50,000 social homes a year are unlikely to be met in the current financial climate without significant reforms and help by government.

The Housing Minister, Margaret Beckett MP who attended the launch, recently wrote to all local authority leaders and chief executives about the implications of this year's Budget. SIGOMA welcomes the additional funding going into housing but thinks that this is can only be the start and more funding will be necessary to achieve the objective of decent homes for all. However, it is good to see a more strategic view being taken over housing generally.

Neil Turner MP, chair of the SIGOMA parliamentary group said he thought the report was an extremely good document and that it should be used to lobby the government. He said SIGOMA should work with other organisations including the private sector in order to effect change. He then introduced the guest speaker, Jonathan Slaughter, director of external affairs at the Home Builders' Federation.

"It is right - there is a housing supply issue," said Mr Slaughter. "House building is now at its lowest level since the first world war and redundancies in the larger companies are almost at 50%.

"However, we are grateful for the help that the government is giving and we are hopeful that by 2010/11 we should be delivering 70,000 homes. However, things will be more difficult with lenders tightening up on mortgage lending," he said.

"This report recommends that local government should be freed up to provide appropriate housing for their communities and the Home Builders' Federation does not disagree. We would be interested to work together on a new agenda and we are open to further dialogue," he added.

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NOTES TO EDITORS: SIGOMA is a campaigning network of urban local authorities, we are open to all metropolitan districts outside London and to urban unitary councils sharing similar characteristics with our existing members.

We have metropolitan and unitary councils with a total of 45 members, stretching from the north-east and north-west, through Yorkshire and the Midlands to the south-west coast. Our members have a combined population of 13 million people, making SIGOMA one of the largest special interest groups (SIGs) within the Local Government Association (LGA) and accountable for about 25% of local government spending in England.