

Response to the Lyons Inquiry (Executive Summary) from Notting Hill Housing Trust

E3 We agree wholeheartedly with your view that there is now incredible variety amongst and within communities which make a “top down” or “one size fits all” approach inappropriate. Notting Hill Housing Trust works in one of the most expensive parts of the world (West London) housing people from at least 50 different national and ethnic groups. We have very little in common with an association housing elderly people in Somerset, or a stock transfer association in Stoke.

E4 We accept that the resources available are restrained. As taxpayers we do not want to pay more – we need to make better use of existing resources to get better outcomes.

E5 We agree that local solutions to local problems is the correct answer.

E6 At NHHG we do not think the state, or its agencies, can provide everything for everyone. We believe that self-help and community involvement are more important in producing sustained change. NHHG has recently launched a “Five steps to home ownership” plan, targeted at social tenants who aspire to home ownership (four out of five at NHHG). If we are successful in moving those that can afford it, into the private sector, we can make the resulting vacancies available for those in temporary accommodation, who are waiting for a vacancy.

E7/8 You make the case strongly about the “post code lottery”. In our experience this is always used as an excuse about why a wide range of centrally determined targets, expectations, KLOEs etc must be set and adhered to. Far better is your notion of varied services, informed by local conditions and wishes, expressed democratically and tailored to local needs. We also think you are right on fairness. We treat our children fairly, but not always the same.

E10/11/12 Innovation is stifled by a prescriptive, top down approach. Nearly all our ideas on how to improve our services have come from front line staff. Most of the challenges we face are generated by either direct customers (tenants) or local authority partners. Working with customers, staff, councillors and LA officers we have been able to find interesting, new responses to intractable problems – from unemployment, to ASB, to aspirations to own. Trade off are best made locally. Current Audit Commission requirements prevent us from dropping approaches that are a waste of money, in order to put resources into services appreciated by customers.

E17 We like the idea of the local authority being a “place shaper”.

E23 In terms of social well-being, in particular, we would like to promote the idea of housing associations being able to pull together a range of services for their tenants. For example we do a lot, these days, about ASB, supporting people with care and support needs (most of it **not** funded by Supporting People), community cohesion, work and training, “crime and grime”, and we work as advocates for our tenants. We would like to see greater integrated working, and would be willing to bid for such opportunities across a wide range of local authority areas (in London, where we exclusively work).

E33/34 Spot on. It seems that Ministers need to get more familiar with what they are responsible for and what they are not. What is worrying about the “double devolution” debate,(and the “sub regions” which have not worked very well in London), is that it always seems to be local government that gives away power, not national government.

E35 We have no difficulty with the idea of being obliged to work with our local government partners, and would like to see more bodies engaged. In our experience health, police, fire, probation and housing associations very much welcome the chance to work closely with their local authorities. In fact sometimes external partners find it easier to engage with the local authority than some of its own departments. We do not think this should be statutory, because local solutions to local problems may require different approaches.

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