



## PRESS RELEASE

NORTH DEVON HOMES LTD

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **National taskforce visits North Devon to see how partnership action is easing rural hardship**

Three members of the Government's 'Now Let's Talk Money' taskforce visited Barnstaple yesterday to hear at first hand how north Devon's biggest social landlord North Devon Homes (NDH) is working with local advice agencies to ease rural hardship, reduce rent arrears and avert evictions.

Rural Financial Inclusion champions, Will Aston and Joy Robinson, and the taskforce's Housing Champion, Holly Reid, all sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), made the visit to find out if national lessons can be learned from the support which NDH now offers to its customers, through an active alliance with Barnstaple Poverty Action Group (BPAG), the local Citizens Advice Bureau and South West Pound, among others.

After the visit Will Aston said: "We are all deeply impressed by the way North Devon Homes is working in partnership with local organisations to help people deal with their money matters in North Devon. Whereas most landlords spend a large amount of time and money chasing arrears, NDH is putting its energy and resources into preventing arrears from becoming an issue. We are taking away the view that there are lessons to be learned here by other rural parts of England and what we plan to do next is to use the Financial Inclusion Champion network to share the North Devon example with other colleagues, agencies and communities to see if they can benefit from it."

Martyn Gimber, NDH Chief Executive: "We are very proud of what has been achieved through our partnership working and hope that others can learn from our example."

During the visit, the three champions attended a new drop-in advice clinic at the Forches Estate, Barnstaple, where people who rent from NDH, and other local people, can get free money management advice, find out about credit unions or ask for help with family, employment or social problems. They also met with front-line staff to hear how an early intervention programme is lowering NDH rent arrears, despite the credit crunch, and averting eviction.

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#### Notes to Editor

- North Devon Homes manage over 3100 properties in the North Devon area. It is a not-for-profit organisation: any money received in rents is ploughed straight back into the improvement of the homes it manages and associated services. These services include support and advice programmes run in association with a range of non-profit agencies, such as **Barnstaple Poverty Action Group**, **Citizens Advice** and **South West Pound**.
- Will Aston's post as the DWP Strategic Rural Financial Inclusion Champion and that of his colleague, Joy Robinson, are both hosted by the **Commission for Rural Communities**, which is tasked with providing well-informed, independent advice to government and ensuring that policies reflect the real needs of people living and working in rural England. It has a particular focus on tackling disadvantage and economic underperformance. For more information about its work, see [www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/](http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/).
- Photo shows Will Aston, DWP Strategic Rural Financial Inclusion Champion (left) and Martyn Gimber, NDH Chief Executive (right) with one of the money boxes NDH are giving out to local children to encourage saving from a young age. NDH Customer Forum is giving £5 to each child that signs up to the scheme to start them off.