

## Who's putting your house in order?

The National House-Building Council paid out £35m in claims for defects to new homes in 2004 to 2005. Are our builders letting us down? We ask NHBC Chief Executive Imtiaz Farookhi



Imtiaz Farookhi: 'The industry needs to get its act together'

**Q** Are new home buyers' expectations too high when it comes to the quality of the building work?

**A** For the money they're spending I think new homeowners have every right to expect their homes to be exactly what they wanted. There

might be the odd sticking door, the odd thing they want done but if the builder does it quickly they're very satisfied. The problem arises when either there are too many things that are wrong with a house or they don't get fixed. The industry needs to get its act together to improve on its after-sales service.

**Q** Are more defects found in new homes in December and June as builders rush to complete houses ahead of their financial year-end deadlines?

**A** I don't like the year-end culture. Many builders have become a lot better with it. Having said that, I still think the industry needs to do a lot more work, so I think the answer is they've got a lot better but they need to do more.

**Q** You paid out £35 million in claims for house defects in the last financial year. Doesn't that indicate that too many new homes with serious defects are being signed off by NHBC inspectors?

**A** No – the majority of that £35 million would have been for non-visual issues. With the best inspection system in the world – and we've invested a lot of money in our system – you will never be able to find all the different things that go wrong with a house.

The majority of that £35 million will be for significant, expensive claims which are to do with foundations, with water penetration and so on. It sounds an awful lot of money but it isn't. When you consider that we have 1.6 million homes under cover, that amount is not surprising.

**Q** Are the professional troubleshooting firms which act for new homeowners when they find defects in their properties doing a good job?

**A** The problem I have with these firms is their business model is based on finding as many defects as possible. Their offer, as I understand it, is for the house purchaser to pay them a certain amount – £300 is mentioned – and the troubleshooting company then guarantees to find that much work for the builder.

**Q** Your warranties run for ten years but the builder has to pay for repairs only in the first two years – after that the responsibility is less clear. Do builders too often leave the NHBC to sort things out?

**A** For the first two years the builders are obliged to sort things out. We ensure they do – but if they didn't, we would sort it out. After that, many builders do deal with their own claims, others don't. Sometimes things can take a bit too long but the main thing for the purchaser is that they are protected, whether it is the NHBC or the builder who does the repairs.

**Q** If you were 'king for a day' what would you do to make life easier for people buying a new home?

**A** I would want to ensure that when people moved into their new homes they were as defect-free as possible, and that if there were minor problems they would be dealt with instantly by the builder.

### MORE ONLINE

What does the NHBC think of the government's new home information packs for house sellers? For this, and more, visit: [www.which.co.uk/questiontime](http://www.which.co.uk/questiontime)