

Report

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Report to:	Housing and Technical Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	29 September 2010
Report by:	Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

Subject:	Scottish Government Discussion Paper – Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ provide an update on the Council's response to the Scottish Government's discussion paper on the future of housing policy, entitled "Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas"

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the content of the report and the Council's response at Appendix 1 be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. On 24 May 2010, a discussion paper entitled Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas, was launched by the Scottish Government. The key purpose of the document was to initiate discussion on the unprecedented challenges facing the Scottish housing system.
- 3.2. On 21 June 2010 a report was presented to Housing and Technical Resources Committee to advise on the publication of this important discussion paper. The report summarised the content of the five themes considered within the paper and highlighted the key challenges associated with each.
- 3.3. The report also confirmed that consultation events would be arranged for Elected Members and staff, and that the views expressed would be taken into account in the development of the Council's response to the discussion paper.

4. Consultation Events

- 4.1. To provide Elected Members with the opportunity to consider and debate the issues set out within the paper, a seminar was held on 17 August 2010. A detailed presentation covering each of the themes within the document was followed by a question and answer session which provoked a wide ranging discussion. A number of key points and views were highlighted including:-

- Concerns over the impact of homelessness legislation and specifically;
 - the Council's ability to continue to resource the service
 - the impact that it is having on the Council's ability to meet the demand for housing from other households

There was a clear view from members that the homelessness legislation requires to be significantly revised.

- There was a general view that successful communities comprise a mix of tenure types and residents with differing needs and income levels. The promotion and achievement of balanced and sustainable communities should be a key focus for housing policy at both a local and national level to avoid stigmatisation in the sector.
- Some concerns were raised over the proposal to charge higher rents to fund future new build council properties
- Support was expressed for the introduction of more flexible types of tenancies, in particular probationary tenancies for new tenants.
- The need for additional sheltered housing to be built to free up mainstream stock to meet housing need

4.2 A presentation on the discussion paper was also given to Area Services staff at a Service Development Session held on 25 August 2010. A series of questions relating to the issues which are most pertinent to the work of Area Services staff were used to facilitate discussion at the session and the views/comments of staff recorded

4.3 A session specifically for tenants was arranged by the South Lanarkshire Tenant Development Support Project (SLTDSP) on 12 August 2010. 21 tenants and tenant representatives from across South Lanarkshire attended the event. The following key points were noted from the discussion:-

- concerns were raised over the impact that the homelessness legislation is having on other applicants
- support was expressed for the Council to build new social rented housing

Based on the discussion at the tenant event, the SLTDSP developed an independent response to the paper on behalf of South Lanarkshire tenants which will be returned separately to the Scottish Government.

5. The Council's response

5.1 While the Scottish Government did not set a closing date for responses, the discussion paper indicated that a further policy paper setting out proposals in relation to housing policy would be issued by the end of 2010. With this timescale in mind, the Council's response was submitted to the Scottish Government on 10 September 2010.

5.2 The Council's full response to the discussion paper is attached at Appendix 1 and incorporates the views of a range of stakeholders including elected members and staff. Set out below is a summary of the key points made within the response in relation to each of the themes:-

5.2.1 Theme 1: Scottish Housing Need

Government funding priorities

- Social rented housing provides decent and affordable accommodation for those in lowest income groups and must, therefore, remain a spending priority for the Government.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Increasing the Supply of Affordable Housing

Which funding and delivery models have most potential to meet housing need cost-effectively?

- We welcome the exploration and use of a wider range of funding models for affordable housing delivery and argue that greater flexibility is required in terms of funding systems which should focus upon outcome rather than be specific to particular initiatives.
- We agree that less subsidy dependant models of provision are vital to support a sustainable increase in supply in the future. However, the suitability of different models must take account of local housing need and affordability issues and fundamental to the development of any new funding mechanism will be consensus on the valuation of land for affordable housing.
- We highlight concerns about the cumulative effect that increases in rent would have in terms of long term affordability and note the need for a level playing field for new affordable rented housing in terms of subsidy levels for RSL's and Councils.

5.2.3 Theme 3: Choice, Fairness and Making Better Use of Stock

Homelessness Legislation and access to social rented housing for non homeless households

- We are strongly of the opinion, that a substantial review of the legislative framework relating to homelessness is required. This specifically would require;
 - a shift from an undue focus on the provision of permanent tenancies to homeless households; and
 - a new approach based upon the provision of good housing options advice

The key objective in revising the legislation would be to provide waiting list applicants in housing need a realistic prospect of being housed.

Unending duty to homeless applicants

- When fully commenced, the 2003 Act will give local authorities an unending duty towards intentionally homeless households. Over a number of years the Council has expressed a view that when a household becomes homeless, due to anti-social behaviour and fails or refuses to address their conduct, the duties under the legislation should end. Our response notes our strong view that this legislative provision should not be commenced.

Addressing under occupation

- While there is scope locally and nationally to further develop initiatives to tackle under occupation, our response notes that this will not have a significant impact on meeting housing needs within South Lanarkshire or across Scotland

Tenancy flexibility

- Our response notes support for greater flexibility being given to social landlords in terms of tenancy types and the introduction of probationary tenancies for all new tenants.

Fairness of rent structures

- The potential identified in the paper for increased rental income to be used to fund new housing would result in current tenants paying to meet future need. While there may be some merit in this being considered there is a need for a broader discussion on issues such as rent affordability, subsidy (including Housing Benefit) and housing supply across tenures.

Promotion of mixed communities

- In relation to taking income/capital into account in the allocation of housing our response notes the need for further consideration to be given to this proposal. Our overriding view is that we need to promote mixed and sustainable communities and avoid further exacerbate the “residualisation” of the social rented sector.

Providing good housing options

- Support the emphasis on an expanded role for housing options with a clear focus on assisting individuals to address both their short and long term housing needs.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Sustainable Quality Houses and Places

Energy efficiency

- The response notes the need for
 - a review of the different outcomes which have been set in relation to meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and the Climate Change Act
 - enhanced collaboration with the private sector on new construction methods, materials and techniques to identify improvements in construction efficiency and quality.

5.2.5 Theme 5: Excellence Across the System

Working together

- The Scottish Government has a role in setting the framework for effective cross sector working, for example a national “best practice” unit on private sector funding might help build confidence and facilitate new funding models.

Empowering people to influence performance and housing outcomes

- The debate on the future of housing policy requires to be integrated with a much broader consideration of the future of key linked areas of socio-economic policy, including; poverty, welfare reform, employment, training health and community safety.

6. Next Steps

6.1 The Scottish Government has indicated that they will issue a formal consultation paper on specific housing policy proposals before the end of the year.

6.2 Following the publication of these proposals, a further report will be presented to a future meeting of this Committee detailing the proposals and setting out the arrangements for consultation and response.

7. Employee Implications

7.1. None.

8. Financial Implications

8.1. None.

9. Other Implications

9.1. There are no implications for sustainability or risk in terms of the information contained in this report.

10. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

10.1. There is no requirement to carry out an impact assessment on the content of this report.

Lindsay Freeland
Executive Director
(Housing and Technical Resources)

5 September 2010

Link(s) to Council Objectives

- ◆ Improve the quality, access and availability of housing
- ◆ Improve lives of vulnerable children, young people and adults

Previous References

- ◆ Scottish Government discussion paper Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas – May 2010
- ◆ Report – Scottish Government Discussion paper - Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas – 21 June 2010

List of Background Papers

- ◆ None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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**South Lanarkshire Council Response to Housing:
Fresh Thinking, New Ideas
September 2010**

Theme 1 – Scottish Housing Need

Question: Should Scottish Government funding be:-

- Focused on lowest income groups and those in highest need; or
- Should they continue to help meet ownership aspirations of lower and middle income groups?

Response

- Social rented housing provides decent and affordable accommodation for lowest income groups and must therefore remain a spending priority.
- National housing policy needs to look at the whole housing system across tenure, bearing in mind that changes in supply and demand in one sector will impact across the whole system.
- The promotion of a range of tenures is necessary for:-
 - housing markets to function effectively; and
 - to promote mixed, sustainable communities
- However the bulk of Government support has to be directed towards those in greatest need.
- It is important that subsidy to support owner occupation or shared equity/ownership should be directly guided by local assessment of needs as detailed in Local Housing Strategies.

Theme 2 – Increasing the supply of affordable housing

Question: Which funding and delivery models have most potential to meet housing need cost-effectively?

Response

- We welcome the opportunity to explore new funding sources and delivery models as highlighted in the discussion paper “Investing in Affordable Housing - A Radical Rethink?”, and support the need to reduce costs and increase efficiency in the system to support a more sustainable increase in affordable housing supply to meet need.
- Funding options which provide a return for investment over the life of the asset offer a viable alternative to traditional debt funding. Despite the economic downturn, investment in well managed rented housing is likely to be attractive to institutional investors. Improving the balance of development risk between stakeholders could play a significant part in reducing costs and stabilising the housing system.
- Whilst recognising that the traditional approach to delivering new homes through the AHIP is the most expensive route, there should be a level playing field for new affordable rented housing in terms of subsidy levels for RSLs and councils.
- Greater flexibility on use of funding with a focus on outcomes would be welcome. There are examples of delivery models historically – for example the New Housing Partnership model in South Lanarkshire - NHP subsidy of £8.5m combined with SLC land (cross subsidy), RSL private finance and private sector investment delivered over 1100 new homes half of which were for rent.

- Increasing rent levels to pay for new housing raises a number of issues, most specifically that it would seem questionable whether it is equitable that the burden of raising funding to pay for future housing needs should be borne by current tenants.

Questions:

- **How can we best use tightly constrained public funding to bring in additional resources for housing?**
- **Should more be spent on infrastructure rather than building social homes?**
- **How can barriers to delivery be removed?**

Response

- Both developer and RSL based shared equity schemes could provide a scope for meeting some level of housing need although clear evidence of impact on reduced waiting lists is required. Most developer schemes are higher than lower quartile prices to begin with and have a limitation in that the equity stake has to be purchased after 10 years.
- One option to facilitate more people in housing need accessing this model might be for councils to hold an equity share in perpetuity in lieu of an affordable housing gain.
- Leverage models such as the National Housing Trust on the surface look attractive because of the low subsidy input, but there are limitations on the supply side as well as concerns about the unknown duration of tenancy for tenants in the scheme since the subsequent sale of the property rests with the developer. These issues would need to be resolved to make the model more attractive.
- The Scottish Government needs to deal with the long standing issue of the valuation of land for affordable housing. Negotiations for development on new land releases where there is an affordable housing obligation continually come up against the issue of how the land is valued. Guidance is required urgently which will allow the Section 75 process to be streamlined.
- Development constraints including major infrastructure costs could be helped by levying a 'roof tax' on completed new build homes to create an 'Infrastructure Deficit Fund' which could form the basis of a local or national low cost loan/grant fund to pay for up front costs.
- Funding for research in the sector to look at new or innovative models of housing / housing construction. For example there has been great progress made with prefabrication – shorter construction times and use of different materials could contribute significantly to lower build costs (and therefore subsidy); sustainability and delivery of outputs.
- Alongside this there are issues about the capacity in the sector including the supply of skilled labour – corresponding investment in skilling the workforce in traditional and new techniques is required.

Theme 3 - Choice, Fairness and Making better use of Housing

Question: How do we make better use of existing housing stock (e.g. by addressing under occupation)?

Response

- While there is scope locally and nationally to further develop initiatives to tackle under occupation this will not make a significant in-road into meeting housing needs either within South Lanarkshire or more widely across Scotland.
- Indeed it is important to avoid developing policy proposals based on an over simplistic statistical analysis of occupancy levels. There are a number of factors which would call into question such an approach, including:-

- The areas where there is demand for larger houses will not necessarily coincide with the areas where people are under occupying larger properties
 - Beyond clear cut examples involving single people or couples under-occupying 3 and 4 bedroom properties the property size may meet the needs of the household in terms of part time access to children or care responsibilities for other relatives
 - The availability of an additional room or rooms provides for the possibility of future household growth; and
 - It is also the case locally and nationally that the bulk of demand for social rented housing is for 2 bedroom properties. Any blanket promotion or (compulsion upon tenants) to move to smaller properties could have the effect of further increasing the demands being made upon this size of property
- While we would not be supportive of compelling sitting tenants that are under-occupying properties to down size we do however feel that there is scope to change the rules governing succession to tenancy.
 - We would propose that where:-
 - a tenancy is inherited by a qualifying person other than a surviving joint tenant or a spouse/partner; and
 - the property is significantly larger than they require; then
 - the individual should not be entitled to succeed to the tenancy (where it is required to meet the wider need of waiting list applicants) but should be entitled to a tenancy of another suitably sized property

Additionally in relation to succession to tenancy we would propose that where the person who wishes to succeed to the tenancy is a family member or carer then the law should be changed to add a requirement that they have been resident at the property for a defined period.

Question: Should we make social tenancies more flexible?

Response

- We are supportive of the move to give greater flexibility to social landlords in terms of tenancy types.
- Currently Council's have only very limited tenancy options and are required and directed (by regulation) to:-
 - provide a Scottish Secure Tenancy in response to immediate crisis or short term need
 - in limited circumstances make use of Short Assured Tenancies to meet the needs of homeless households

Question: How might we make progress in improving the fairness of rent structures and is there potential for rent increases to fund new housing?

Response

- Variations in council house rents across Scotland are often related to historic housing debt rather than the cost of delivering services and local incomes.
- The potential identified in the paper for increased rental income to be used to fund new housing would mean current tenants paying to meet future need.
- While there may be some merit in this being considered by individual landlords (in consultation with their tenants) there is a need for a broader discussion regarding: rent affordability, subsidy (including housing benefit) and housing supply across tenures to inform national housing policy in the long term.
- In the short term individual councils need to consider the best balance between affordability, rents and new supply.

Question: Should the income of the applicant be considered in the allocation of housing?

Response

- While we are supportive of this issue being considered further there is a need to avoid access to the service being means tested as this would undoubtedly further exacerbate the residualisation of the social rented sector.
- At the same time in relation to homelessness we feel it would be wholly reasonable that the legislation be amended, such that the ability of applicants to use income or capital to resolve both their short and longer term accommodation needs would be a legitimate consideration for local authorities.
- A key objective of national and local housing policy should be the promotion of communities which are safe attractive and sustainable. The achievement of this objective undoubtedly entails achieving the appropriate balance within neighbourhoods of household types and incomes. It is essential that the legislative and regulatory frameworks in relation to housing allocation is revised to support this focus

Question: Should we continue to improve access to housing through Common Housing Registers?

Response

- In South Lanarkshire along with our RSL partners we established our CHR in July 2009. There are currently 6 landlords participating and we are confident over time that the CHR will result in real improvements in terms of service awareness and access.
- We would strongly support a continuing emphasis on the further development of CHRs and feel that there is a strong case for all social landlords being compelled to join local CHRs.
- Our experience locally has been that while the majority of RSLs have embraced the agenda others have stood back. Establishing a clear statutory requirement on social landlords to actively participate in local CHRs would undoubtedly help further improve access to social rented housing across Scotland.

Question: Would a national housing register help promote mobility and meet needs?

Response

- We do not think that this should be a priority area for development. The focus of attention in terms of improving access to housing should, as noted above, be upon the further development of CHRs across Scotland.

Question: Should we put greater focus on providing good housing options advice to households, across tenures (housing health checks)?

Response

- Strongly support the emphasis on a much expanded role for housing options with a clear focus upon assisting individuals to address both their short and long term housing needs.
- The move toward such an approach marks a significant undertaking and should be founded upon councils and their partners establishing approaches to housing options advice at a local level which reflect the specific circumstances of the area.
- Given the scale of the challenge we feel that it is crucial that the development the new approach should not be unduly focused upon the short term requirements of meeting the 2012 homelessness target. More rightly this should be clearly viewed as signalling a strategic shift at a national level away from a focus upon the target of providing permanent accommodation to all homeless households by 2012.

- In order to ensure a clarity of focus It is essential that homelessness legislation and the regulatory focus is appropriately revised.

- Questions:**
- **To what extent should RSLs be expected to meet the cost of adaptations to their stock from their overall rental income, in line with what we expect of local authorities?**
 - **To what extent should older people or the State pay for support services and adaptations?**

Response

- We would support RSLs being responsible for meeting 100% of the cost for adaptations in their own stock. Local authority landlords currently fund equipment and adaptations through their Housing Revenue Account and there is no legitimate justification as to why this should not be the same for RSLs .
- Responsibility for funding adaptations would encourage a proactive approach to matching applicants to suitable housing and promote the concept of “health checks” for existing tenants.
- It is apparent that a key consideration for all social landlords over the next few years will be how they can best meet the changing needs of their tenants over time.
- It is essential at a national level that consideration is given to the increased demands (and the budgetary implications) which will undoubtedly arise due to the demographic trends highlighted in the discussion paper.
- The substantial increase in the over 75 population over the next ten years will pose a significant challenge to achieving the overarching community care objective that people should be able to remain in their own home for as long as possible.

- Question:** **Do current buildings standards in Scotland meet the needs of an ageing population, and would common standards across tenures make a difference?**

Response

- Current building standards do, to some extent, take account of particular design criteria whether it be new built or changes/alterations to an existing property. The lifetime homes design criteria sets out 16 design features which can be applied to “general” new homes at a minimal cost. These features add to the comfort and convenience of the homes and support the changing needs of individuals and families at different stages. They also avoid the need for costly adaptations or people having to move home in future.
- These criteria could form the basis for developing a framework to support national standards for an ageing population regardless of tenure. It would be vital to ensure that private developers also recognise the ageing population agenda and provide housing to meet any agreed national standards.

Issues Not Specifically Raised under Theme 3

1. Homelessness Legislation and Access to Social Rented Housing for Non Homeless households

- It is becoming increasingly apparent that full implementation of the Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Act 2003 is neither feasible nor desirable.

- For many authorities the Act is placing an unsustainable call upon resources and is having the effect of establishing homelessness as the only viable route to social housing. In this respect the acknowledgement of the severity of the situation facing homelessness services made by the Minister, at the Fresh Thinking New Ideas summer consultation event in East Kilbride, was most welcome.
- The current homelessness legislation encourages people to present as homeless as it increasingly represents the only realistic access route to Council and RSL housing. The move towards a housing options approach, highlighted in the discussion paper in relation to North Ayrshire Council does as noted above, provide both a positive and challenging agenda which requires to be backed up by a revised legislative framework and regulatory focus
- We are strongly of the opinion, that a substantial review of the legislative framework relating to homelessness is required which would shift the focus of attention away from an undue focus on the provision of permanent tenancies to homeless households (or in limited circumstances use of Short Assured Tenancies under the terms of Section 32 A of the Housing Scotland Act 1987) and signal a move towards a new approach based upon the provision of good housing options advice. To achieve these objectives the key requirements in terms of legislative change are to :-
 - I. Revise the homelessness legislation to remove the “blanket” right of priority homeless applicants to permanent accommodation
 - II. Re-focus the statutory duty upon local authorities to achieving suitable accommodation for homeless households with a priority need (accommodation could be in the social or private rented sectors)
 - III. Revoke the provisions of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as revised, relating to homelessness priority need; and
 - IV. Bring forward new legislation which defines priority need in a manner consistent with that which was in place prior to the commencement of the Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Act 2003
 - V. Revise homelessness legislation to remove right of non priority households to temporary accommodation as was case prior to commencement of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001
- It is essential that the required change in legislation is backed up with clear guidance and a new regulatory focus.

2. Intentionally homeless households – the unending duty

- The 2003 Act will, when fully commenced, give local authorities an unending duty towards intentionally homeless households.
- Over a number of years the Council has expressed a view that when a household becomes homeless, due to anti-social behaviour, and fails or refuses to address their conduct, the duties under the legislation should end.
- Do not commence provisions of the 2003 Act in relation to intentionality and consider alternative legislative route.

3. Probationary tenancies for all new tenants

- There has been a long standing debate on the establishment of a system of probationary tenancies. We are strongly of the view that establishing a system whereby probationary tenancies were more widely available to social landlords would:-
 - help establish positive patterns of behaviour and promote personal responsibility by new tenants;
 - at the same time the use of such tenancies would also give neighbours and the wider community reassurance that effective action could be taken against new tenants who fail to act responsibly at the outset of their tenancy; and

- emphasise that along with the rights associated with a council or RSL tenancy come quite clear obligations on tenants
- We would propose that all tenancies which are commenced for people who are not currently a tenant of the same landlord should be established as probationary tenancies.
- Indeed, as noted in relation to homelessness, where an individual has lost their tenancy due to their inability or unwillingness to address their behaviour councils should not be required to provide them with accommodation under the terms of the homelessness legislation.

4. Housing Tribunals

- The debate on the need for the establishment of “Housing Tribunals” stretches back a considerable number of years. One of the key arguments which has consistently been made in favour of tribunals, is that they would allow sufficient time and expertise to be devoted to housing issues particularly eviction actions.
- The merits which this authority and many others have pointed to over the years, in response to various consultations, regarding the establishment of Housing Tribunals remains evident. It would be helpful to put in place firm proposals to establish a system of housing tribunals.

5. Termination and commencement of tenancy for adults who lack capacity

- Currently we face a number of challenging cases of individuals in permanent care who are not considered to have the capacity to terminate their tenancy. In such situations it is necessary for a family member or Social Work to pursue an order under the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 to terminate or commence a tenancy. Under the terms of this Act the family or council require the most onerous order (a financial guardianship or intervention order) to be granted in order to terminate or commence a tenancy.
- The pursual of these orders can be complicated and protracted and result in properties being unoccupied for considerable periods before a tenancy can be terminated.
- Similarly the process of tenancy commencement for adults lacking capacity can be protracted and lead to people remaining in hospital or care situations unnecessarily.
- Given the demographic projections regarding the continuing increase in the number of older people we can anticipate a related increase in the proportion of tenants with incapacity issues. In this regard it would be helpful if consideration was given to amending the legislation to make the process of gaining the appropriate order less onerous.

Chapter 4 – Sustainable quality houses and places

- Questions:**
- **How can we improve design and sustainability?**
 - **How can we ensure homeowners take responsibility for energy efficiency of their homes?**
 - **How can housing promote new green industries?**

Response

- We recognise the key challenges in meeting the Climate Change Act (CCA) targets to ensure future sustainability. However whilst recognise the imperative of the SHQS in driving up standards, one of the current anomalies is the target to meet the SHQS by 2015 – which sets the energy efficiency ‘bar’ at a much lower level than the CCA targets. The concern is that investment is wasted over the next five years to meet SHQS but is subsequently unavailable to meet the latter CCA targets as the investment in heating systems is designed to last 15 -20 years. A review of the target dates for the outcomes required of both the SHQS and climate change in relation to energy efficiency is needed make best use of planned medium term investment in the housing stock.
- As noted earlier national research in collaboration with the private sector on new construction methods, materials and techniques to identify improvements in construction efficiency and quality including zero carbon homes should be encouraged.
- In a similar way to low CO2 road tax bands, developers and owners could be incentivised through the taxation system (discount on corporation tax, purchase taxes and subsequent savings in fuel costs) to make their homes as energy efficient as possible.
- In this context, gains from new greener and renewable sources of energy and enhanced methods of constructing and insulating homes would provide an ecological as well as financial incentive for closer collaboration between the construction and energy sectors.
- This also recognises that the energy companies have a key role to play in terms of new renewable technologies, but also through early investment in existing infrastructure – for example smart meters provide an instant appraisal for householders of energy running costs, providing incentives to save.

Chapter 5 - Excellence across the housing system

- Question:** **How can the various parts of the system - in particular lenders, social landlords and house builders - best work together to support each other’s interests and the interests of the system as a whole?**

Response

- We believe that the Scottish Government has a role in setting the framework for effective cross sector working. For example a national “best practice” unit on private sector funding might help build confidence and facilitate new funding models or improvements in construction techniques.

- Question:** **How can people be empowered to influence performance and housing outcomes?**

Response

- The current discussion on Fresh Thinking, New Ideas is extremely useful in raising the profile of housing policy and creating an environment in which all stakeholders can consider the contribution they can make.
- However it is apparent that the debate on the future of housing policy requires to be integrated with a much broader consideration of future of key linked areas of socio- economic policy, including :poverty; welfare reform; employment, training, health and community safety.

Question: What technologies are available that could be exploited further to raise the performance and efficiency of housing and housing services?

Response

- We believe that there should be greater ability to report and compare council and RSL performance on key housing management performance and cost indicators.
- In terms of housing options approaches there is potential for developing regional databases on housing supply that may help manage demand.
- Text and internet technology could make a significant difference to some service users who have difficulty with traditional routes for access to service.
- One area that could be explored further is reviewing the capacity to share services with all RSL providers within a geographical area. There are some arrangements in place already, but there may be capacity to free up resources by sharing for example IT and office costs.