

Report

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Report to:	Housing and Technical Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	30 June 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:-

- ◆ advise of the publication of a discussion paper by the Scottish Government on future housing policy, entitled “Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas”
- ◆ outline proposals for consultation to inform the Council’s response.

2 Recommendation(s)

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

- (1) that the proposals for local consultation on the issues set out in the discussion paper be noted
- (2) that a seminar be arranged for elected members to enable their views to be incorporated into the Council’s response.

3 Background

3.1 The discussion paper Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas, was launched by the Scottish Government on 24 May 2010. The document notes that its key purpose is to provoke discussion and innovation in light of unprecedented challenges facing the Scottish Housing system.

3.2 The key challenges highlighted in the paper include:-

- impact on the housing market of the recession;
- severe limitations which exist on the availability of mortgage funding
- the high cost of private finance; and
- continuing high levels of housing need (including meeting responsibilities towards homeless households).

3.3 The Scottish Government has indicated that the discussion paper aims to initiate discussion and that they will be engaging in a range of activities throughout the summer to seek views and ideas. While there is no specific end date set for the process the paper notes that the Scottish Government intends to prepare a policy paper towards the end of the year, setting out their housing policy proposals. This document will take account of views expressed in relation to the discussion document.

4. Outline of the Discussion Paper

4.1 The discussion paper is structured around five themes. These are:-

- (1) Scottish Housing Need
- (2) Increasing the Supply of Affordable Housing
- (3) Choice, fairness and Making Better Use of Housing
- (4) Sustainable Quality Houses and Places
- (5) Excellence across the Housing System

Section 4.1 to 4.6 provide a brief summary of the content of each theme.

4.2 Scottish Housing Need

This section of the document notes the need to establish a clear understanding of the level of housing need and how it varies across Scotland. The paper places particular emphasis to the changing profile of needs which are being brought about due to people living longer and the proportion of one person households increase. In terms of discussion points the following issues are raised:-

- the tough decisions which require to be taken by Central Government in relation to the distribution of funding to meet the varying ranges and types of housing need which exist across Scotland
- 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.

4.3 Increasing the Supply of Affordable Housing

This section examines some new ways of generating investment in new affordable housing and seeks views on the respective merits of different options.

4.4 Choice, Fairness and Making Better Use of Housing

Among the broad ranging issues dealt with within this section are the need to:-

- make better use of existing housing stock (e.g. through helping people who under occupy properties to move to smaller homes)
- make social tenancies more flexible to help meet peoples changing needs over time (e.g. the possibility of fixed term tenancies for council house tenants)
- continue to improve access to housing through the further development of Common Housing Registers
- explore the scope for improving consistency of rent levels within the social rented sector
- consider whether the income of the applicant should be considered in the allocation of housing
- focus on providing good housing options advice to households, across tenures

4.5 Sustainable Quality Houses and Places

This section focuses on the need for good design and neighbourhood planning to create attractive places for people to live. The key issues addressed within the section are:-

- how to improve design and sustainability of housing and communities
- the need for effective partnership working to help identify land and provide infrastructure

- involving and encouraging communities to become involved in regeneration work
- meeting the challenges of climate change

4.6 Excellence Across the Housing System

This section considers the roles of different agencies, organisations and stakeholders in meeting the challenges facing the housing system. The key focus of the paper is upon exploring the scope for partners to work better together and pool knowledge, experience and resources to address the key challenges.

5. **Forming the Councils Response**

- 5.1 Although there is no formal closing date for comments, the Scottish Government has indicated that they will consider views expressed on an ongoing basis to inform a more formal policy paper in the autumn
- 5.2 To ensure that there is the broadest possible input to the Council's response, it is proposed to undertake wide ranging consultation with relevant Council Resources, partner agencies, tenants and service users over the next three months.
- 5.3 To provide an opportunity for elected members to comment on the discussion paper, it is proposed that a seminar is arranged to set out further details of the proposals and to gather views of members.
- 5.4 To ensure that the Councils views are considered before the Government's Policy paper is published, it is proposed that a short seminar is arranged for members during August and that views expressed are reflected in the Councils response, which will be submitted in early September. The discussion paper can be accessed via the Scottish Government website at housingdiscussion.scotland.gov.uk
- 5.5 The final response and any update on the policy paper will be reported to this Committee on 29 September 2010.

6 **Employee Implications**

- 6.1 There are no employee implications arising from the report.

7 **Financial Implications**

- 7.1 Future financial implications for stock investment will be detailed in future programming reports to Committee.

8 **Other Implications**

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

9 **Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements**

- 9.1 This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and, therefore, no impact assessment is required.
- 9.2 There is no requirement to undertake any consultation in terms of the proposals contained within this report.

Lindsay Freeland
Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

21 May 2010

Link(s) to Council Objectives/Values

- ◆ Improve the quality, access and availability of housing
- ◆ Accountable, effective and efficient

Previous References

- ◆ None

List of Background Papers

- ◆ Scottish Government discussion paper - "Housing: Fresh Thinking, New Ideas"

Contact for Further Information

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

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