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Sent: 25 January 2008 15:53
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Subject: Aberdeen C.C. HOPB Response

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Beccy

Please find attached a copy of Aberdeen City Council's Housing Options Board (Tenants Representatives) Firm Foundations Response.

Please note that a hard copy was sent via post earlier this week, but I just wanted to ensure it's receipt.

many thanks

David Stewart

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The Housing and Regeneration Directorate
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21/01/08


Firm Foundations – The Future of Housing in Scotland

Dear Sir

On behalf of the tenant representatives on Aberdeen City Council's Housing Options Project Board please find enclosed our response to the Scottish Government's "Discussion Document Firm Foundations The future of Housing in Scotland".

I would be grateful if you could acknowledge receipt of this letter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Stewart', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Stewart
Tenant Representative

**Response from Aberdeen City Council Housing Options Project Board
Tenants' representatives to the Scottish Government' Discussion
Document – Firm Foundations- The future of Housing in Scotland.**

Final Version Jan 08.

Introduction

This response to the Scottish Government's Discussion Document "Firm Foundations – The Future of Housing in Scotland" comes from the tenants' representatives on Aberdeen City Council Housing Options Project Board. The response has been compiled following a special meeting called to discuss the Discussion Document held in December 2007.

Background

In November 2005 Aberdeen City Council decided that retention of part of its' council housing stock with partial stock transfer to community ownership was the best way for the Council to meet the objectives of delivering the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and Community Regeneration of its six priority areas. These priority regeneration areas are Tillydrone, Woodside, Middlefield Torry, Cummings Park and Seaton.

Aberdeen City Council Housing Options Project Board was established in early 2006 to take forward the Council housing regeneration proposals. Its' remit is to consider the options and prepare a business case for entry into the Community Ownership Programme. Further to ensure information is clearly fed back to residents, community groups and equally to ensure that comments and concerns are fed back to the Project Board.

The Board is made up of:

6 Councillors

6 Community representatives

Council staff representatives

Community representatives from each of the six priority regeneration areas

The Council has carried out extensive consultation with tenants in six priority regeneration areas, Tillydrone, Cummings Park, Seaton, Woodside, Torry and Middlefield and "Master plans" for each area have now been prepared. The "Master plans" aim to tackle the full range of issues including housing, education, employment, and environment. They show that radical change to the council housing is needed to make sure that the areas have a sustainable future.

In June 2007 the Council appointed an Independent Tenant Adviser to inform tenants of its progress towards entry into the Community Ownership Programme and to gauge tenant opinion.

In September 2007, the Project Board was advised by the Minister for Housing and Sport not to pursue joining the “Community Ownership Programme” and to await the outcome of the Spending Review and the Scottish Government’s housing discussion document.

It is with disappointment therefore that we find that the “Discussion Document Firm Foundations - The Future of Housing in Scotland” does not specifically address housing regeneration and the much needed Government financial support for this. If the “Community Ownership Programme” and the financial assistance that came with it is no longer an option for local authorities we need new policy and financial options urgently from Government to tackle our regeneration needs.

We request that the Scottish Government identify what specific measures it will take to support the housing regeneration in not only our area but the other areas in Scotland that urgently require Government support to ensure sustainable communities in the future. We would welcome a discussion with the Minister on this.

Finally, we would like it recorded that the timescale set aside for comment on this important “Discussion Document” is, in our opinion, insufficient to give a full and considered response to all of the issues identified in it. Given the holiday period a more realistic timescale would have been the end of February 2008. Therefore, we have considered the questions within the Discussion Document which we feel are most relevant to us. Our response is set out below.

QUESTION	ANSWER
27. Can ALMO’s provide a satisfactory alternative to stock transfers?	<p>This has not been an option that we have considered and we have little knowledge of this type of organisation.</p> <p>A radical change to the housing stock in the regeneration areas is needed and this can only be achieved with additional financial support from the Government.</p> <p>In our view, ALMOs would only provide a satisfactory alternative to stock transfer if there was significant resource incentives attached to them similar to that offered in the previous administration’s “Community Ownership Programme” to ensure that the housing regeneration was</p>

	<p>achieved.</p> <p>It is also noted that stock transfer still remains an option within Firm Foundations. However with no extra financial subsidy from the Scottish Government beyond “debt write off” for it.</p> <p>As the scale of the regeneration in Aberdeen requires additional financial help beyond debt write off it is not clear to us how regeneration can be achieved.</p> <p>If the “Community Ownership Programme” is no longer an option for the Council we urgently need new policy and financial options from the Scottish Government to tackle our regeneration needs.</p>
<p>16. Should we exempt new build social housing from the right to buy?</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p>26. Do you think that the Scottish Government should vary Right to Buy discount by (a) locality and/or (b) type of property?</p>	<p>We have not had enough time to fully consider this point.</p> <p>As money from the Right to Buy sales goes towards the Council meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), any changes to the Right to Buy may have an impact on the Council’s Prudential Borrowing and meeting the SHQS. More details on this are required.</p> <p>Our Council already has “Pressured Area Status” for a number of areas within Aberdeen.</p> <p>Any such work should be carried out with participation with tenants and reflect local circumstances.</p>
<p>23. Should we encourage landlords to look at means of adjusting the mix of their stock in the interests of achieving more sustainable mixed communities?</p>	<p>Yes. Regeneration and the development of sustainable mixed communities have to meet the needs of the existing community while</p>

	<p>developing sustainable communities for the future. This work has to be carried out by landlords in full consultation with tenants through their regeneration strategies.</p> <p>Our regeneration “Master plans” require Scottish Government support to achieve these and we urge the Government to identify new policies and financial options to tackle the regeneration needs.</p>
<p>17. Should we subsidise councils in areas of need to use their prudential borrowing capacity to build new houses?</p>	<p>Yes, In addition, we feel that new build council housing should be targeted within our regeneration areas as a means of introducing new family housing without tenants having to change landlord.</p> <p>Due to the scale of regeneration identified within the six priority areas we require more time to investigate the possibilities of the Council carrying out regeneration without housing stock transfer. This is an option that we feel tenants would want to consider further should subsidies to the Council be available.</p>
<p>18. Should we introduce large-scale competitions for subsidy?</p>	<p>This is a complicated question for us to answer. In our view cheaper may not always be better.</p> <p>While competition is about value for money other factors must be taken into account. Competition should not be based solely on price. Other factors such as tenant involvement in design and layout of neighbourhoods, quality of materials, standards of building, the capacity of the construction industry, and local factors such as rents must be taken into consideration.</p>
<p>19. If not, how would you ensure that public subsidy is used to build as many good quality RSL houses as possible?</p>	<p>Our interest is in having Scottish Government subsidy to meet the regeneration of our areas. As noted at question 18, all subsidies should have</p>

	<p>checks which include value of money but also takes account of other measures suggestions include quality, standards, the constraints of the construction industry, quality, rents and tenant involvement.</p>
<p>20. Should we subsidise the development of houses for mid-market rent?</p>	<p>No, we are of the view that providing a subsidy to mid-market renting while not addressing the regeneration needs of communities in Scotland is not appropriate. We are of the view that the Government should have a strategy for subsidising the much needed social housing regeneration and not at introducing mid-market renting.</p> <p>Further, it is our opinion that the introduction of mid-market renting would marginalise social rented housing even further by creating a new tier of tenants with social rented tenants at the bottom!</p> <p>We understand that some housing associations are already providing mid-market rents without subsidy which is up to them.</p>
<p>24. Should subsidies for development be provided to bodies other than RSLs?</p>	<p>Government subsidy is a scarce resource with many competing demands.</p> <p>In our opinion there should be the same level of subsidy available to the Council as to RSLs.</p> <p>At the end of the day what is important to us is the impact any change in subsidy would have on ensuring affordable rents.</p>
<p>25. What sort of protections should be offered to tenants in these circumstances?</p>	<p>As tenants of Aberdeen City Council's Regeneration areas our housing regeneration needs are huge. In our view any subsidy should be provided in a planned, monitored and evaluated way. This would involve tenants, the</p>

	<p>Council, RSLs, developers and other partners working in partnership taking a long term view of the regeneration. Similar to the work that we have been doing to ensure a future for our neighbourhoods.</p>
<p>30. Do we need to find new ways of focusing on the quality of place/open space and greenspace within deprived neighbourhoods?</p>	<p>Yes. There are large unattended open spaces within our regeneration areas. Altering the house type, layout and size is one key element of regeneration however environmental issues also play a key part in regeneration. Having a clean, healthy environment for our families with good quality play areas to cater for toddlers to teens is essential.</p> <p>The Discussion Document should identify how resources can be applied to this within overall neighbourhood regeneration.</p>