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## RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

### FIRM FOUNDATIONS: THE FUTURE OF HOUSING IN SCOTLAND

Please complete the details below and return it with your response to the above address. This will help ensure we handle your response appropriately. Thank you for your help.

Name: MRS JENNY BURTON

Postal Address: Abronhill Housing Association Ltd  
Unit 10 Abronhill Shopping Centre  
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1. Are you responding: (please tick one box)

(a) as an individual  go to Q2a/b and then Q4

(b) on behalf of a group/organisation  go to Q3 and then Q4

### INDIVIDUALS

2a. Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government website)?

Yes  (go to 2b below)

No, not at all  We will treat your response as confidential

2b. Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your response available to the public on the following basis (please tick one of the following boxes)

Yes, make my response, name and address all available

Yes, make my response available, but not my name or address

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

### ON BEHALF OF GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS:

3. The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Government website). Are you also content for your **response** to be made available?

Yes  No  We will treat your response as confidential

### SHARING RESPONSES/FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

4. We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for the Scottish Government to contact you again in the future in relation to this consultation response?

Yes  No



## **ABRONHILL HOUSING ASSOCIATION LTD**

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7 January 2008

Ms Nicola Sturgeon  
Deputy First Minister and  
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing  
Scottish Government  
Social Housing Division  
1-H(S) Victoria Quay  
Leith  
Edinburgh  
EH6 6QQ

Dear Ms Sturgeon

### **Firm Foundations**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Government's proposals for housing and please find enclosed our responses.

Yours sincerely

M D Scoular  
Chairperson



## ABRONHILL HOUSING ASSOCIATION

### Response to Firm Foundations

The Scottish Government's Green paper has been welcomed and discussed by the committee of Abronhill Housing Association. Responses to the questions posed are detailed.

Copies are being sent to SFHA and LVHF (Lanarkshire Voluntary Housing Forum) Cathie Craigie, MSP, as well as the seven list MSPs representing this region: Linda Fabiani, Jamie Hepburn, Christina McKelvie, Margaret Mitchell, Alex Neil, Hugh O'Donnell and John Wilson.

Responses are not suggested for every question

<b>Green Paper questions</b>	<b>Abronhill Housing Association's response</b>
Q4 What could accelerate development on land with planning permission?	A national strategy for decontaminating brown field sites
Q5 How to encourage the development of new sustainable communities sympathetic to landscape and environment	Make provision in tenders to encourage local residents to get employment opportunities. Make provision for adequate space standards and require mixed sizes of properties. These can be a condition of any subsidy.
Q8 Direct cash to first time buyers	No ~ not a cost effective way of using Government money. It can contribute to rising prices and Government gets nothing in return.
Q10 Issues to be taken into account when increasing use of private sector lets to house low-income and homeless households	There should be compulsory registration with Landlord Registration Service; part of registration should insist on having a procedure to deal with anti social behaviour by their tenants. At minimum this could be a Minute of Agreement with the local Anti Social Task Force. This can be enforced through the provision of housing benefit.
Q13 Increase supply of private rented housing	Reduce council tax relief on empty properties to a maximum of, say, 90 days.
Q14 Encourage more private landlords to let to low-income and homeless households	Fast turn around of Housing Benefit applications ( <i>although this is not a devolved issue staffing for local authorities can be influenced</i> ) Help, in the form of guaranteed alternative accommodation for tenants, if the landlord wants to sell a property. Evidence needed that landlord was selling and sanctions if they abuse this to "get rid" of tenants.

Q15 Schemes and incentives to recycle empty properties	Same answer as Q13: Reduce the council tax relief on empty properties to a maximum of, say, 90 days. Reintroduce the Empty Homes Initiative under which social landlords could buy and refurbish empty properties. Could be run similarly to the Mortgage to Rent scheme
Q16 Exempt new build social housing from Right to Buy?	Yes. There seems little point in encouraging provision of increased social housing and then making landlords sell off their assets.
Q17 Subsidise local authorities to build?	No. More cost effective to use the existing expertise within housing associations and offer local authorities nomination rights to the properties to reduce their waiting lists rather than encouraging them to build up the expertise that exists in partner organisations
Q18/19 Introduce large scale competitions for subsidy? How to ensure public subsidy is used to build as many good quality houses as possible	Scottish Government should be encouraging the long term view in house provision and not sacrifice quality, sustainability and future maintenance considerations for short term gain in the spending of public monies. It needs to be acknowledged that building properties to last is not a cheap decision. It would be disappointing if this Government took the short term option, with an eye to the next election and requiring remedies within the next few decades rather than seeking a legacy that can be remembered for years.
Q20 Subsidise the development of houses for mid-market rent	No. Should be wary of the "law of unintended consequences" ~ will an increase in the supply lead to a price fall? Is this a good way to use public money? The provision of longer mortgages (as in Japan) could be encouraged to increase short term affordability.
Q21 Should subsidy be awarded as part of competitive regime?	No. The increase in properties available should ease the pressure on all housing tenures.
Q22 Increasing variety in social housing	Is there evidence that variety increases standards ~ a rigorous monitoring regime might be a more effective use of resources combined with input from the end users, the social housing tenants.
Q23 Would encouraging landlords to adjust the mix of stock achieve more sustainable mixed communities?	Not in Cumbernauld, where tenure is already diverse
Q24 Provide development subsidies to other bodies	No. Housing associations already have a comprehensive monitoring regime. Similar arrangements would need to be set up for other

	organisations. Housing associations have built up a considerable level of expertise that can continue to be harvested.
Q26 To vary discounts by locality and/or type of property	Right to buy discount could be a fixed percentage of the price of the property, regardless of length of tenancy. This percentage could be reduced in areas of low demand or high density social housing.
Q28/29 Additional help from Government to meet SHQS linked to improvements in landlord's performance	No. this just punishes the tenants of poor landlords ~ they already suffer a lesser service and get less help with their worse maintained properties.
Q31 Approaches for focusing on the quality of greenspace in deprived areas.	Abronnhill, Cumbernauld, among other places like Kirkshaw, Coatbridge, offers an example of an excellent resource, provided by Lottery Fair Share funding, accessed by local volunteers and now maintained by the Council. This example is being copied elsewhere but publicity about it is often by word of mouth and it is dependent upon local residents and workers giving freely of much time.
Q33 Agree with the features and principles for modernised regulatory framework	Agree with the proposal to reduce the regulatory burden on housing organisations.
Q34 How to organise social housing regulation	All landlords should be subject to regulations that ensure their tenants live in secure, well managed and maintained property. The onus of inspection should be on ensuring tenants have this, that service provision is open and consistent. Existing regulatory bodies have developed experience and this should be retained, built upon and shared.

The Association would like to ask some questions of their own:

1. Why would the social landlord regulatory system monitor "neighbourhoods being unattractive places to live"? Police, youth organisations, several local authority departments including environmental health or cleansing, common ground maintenance and schools all have a part to play in making an area attractive.
2. Housing associations have played a significant role in area renewal as part of their "wider action" agenda. This area of their work is not aided by government grants. Are housing associations to continue this work from rental income and staff time?
3. Despite recent legislation, the registration of landlords remains patchy and appears limited to the most conscientious who are willing to be involved in common repairs and maintenance, addressing anti social behaviour. There should be a better procedure to accept reports of private landlords and more

vigorous chasing up to get them registered. If not, common repairs will not be done and properties will deteriorate.

4. Why are tenants given a discount to buy in recognition of the equity they have built up in the property when that equity is the rent which has been paid by housing benefit?

5. If local authorities offer grants in mixed tenure blocks of flats to regenerate the properties, why do social landlords with properties within the block not also get access to the grants?

6. Can the Government influence a change in housing benefit legislation so that the unemployed parents, in receipt of housing benefit, with working children are not "penalised" for keeping them at home? In the present system working children in these circumstances pay their parent's rent. This encourages them to seek independent accommodation earlier than they would otherwise and increases the pressure on the housing provision.