

B049

77

Housing and Regeneration Directorate
Social Housing Division
1H(S)
Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ
www.scotland.gov.uk



T: 0131-244 7753 F: 0131-244 5596
E: housingconsultation2007@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

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: BLACKMANNSHAIRE TENANTS & RES. FED

Postal Address: UNIT 617 ALLOA BUSINESS CENTRE
WINGS RD ALLOA
FK10 3SA

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



Introduction

The Federation welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Government's Discussion Document – Firm Foundations. At this stage we request that the Scottish Government recognise that the limited timescales have not allowed the Federation to conduct a thorough consultation with all tenants in Clackmannanshire or exploration of all the issues raised in detail. However this document identifies the Federation management committee's response.

A copy of our response will be forwarded to the Council's Housing Director and the Directors of Ochil View Housing Association and Paragon Housing Association.

We also wish to highlight that the Federation intends to inform the wider tenants in Clackmannanshire of the content of this consultation document and our response. Thereafter we would hope to discuss this further with the above landlords.

The Federation Comments on the Consultation Document

For the purpose of this report we will focus our response under the following headings:

- Social Housing
- Improving Quality of Existing Homes
- Protecting and Promoting Tenants Interests
- Housing Supply
- The Private Rented Sector
- Assistance for First Time Buyers

1. Social Housing

Local Authorities who can demonstrate that they can afford to, should be able to access funding to build new homes to meet the housing needs and aspirations in their communities. Access to government funding and loans should be equal to how housing associations can access funding.

We consider that in order to make sure that there is enough good quality housing for rent now and in the future that all new build housing association and local authority housing should be exempt from the Right to Buy.

We also consider that the Government should review the Right to Buy for existing houses, especially in areas of high demand and / or communities where there is already insufficient numbers of good quality social rented houses.

There also needs to be measures put in place to ensure that owners contribute to the costs of managing and improving their properties and communal areas / items.

As social housing is now regarded as housing to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people, there needs to be funding and support available to landlords to enable them to manage this effectively. This is in terms of ensuring support is available to tenants who need it and to assist them to deal problem tenants and residents. If this is not done, we fear that more and more people will want to leave their communities – this will not make communities sustainable.

Landlords should also be able to designate certain housing as suitable for certain applicants such as older people, people with disabilities et al.

We are also concerned that some people unfairly and inaccurately use the homeless legislation to access social housing. This then means that other tenants cannot be housed or re-housed.

The limited availability of social housing means that many people are not able to get a house from the local authority or housing associations – this means that people who can afford to and often many who cannot are forced to rent in the private sector – we consider this to be unfair.

2. Improving Quality of Existing Homes

Whilst we welcomed the introduction of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard, we consider that this Standard is not as high as we would have liked to see for housing across the country. We have negotiated a local Clackmannanshire Standard for the local authority houses and look forward to this being met over the next few years.

We consider that in areas where housing has become difficult to let or manage or is increasingly unpopular that it would best if this housing was improved where possible or demolished. We would then like to see the local authorities and housing associations build new high quality housing for rent that suits the housing needs of the area. This needs to include homes for people who are being forced to rent in the private sector at present.

Alongside measures to improve housing standards there needs to be measures to improve the environment, open spaces, facilities and estate management.

As many houses have been purchased through the Right to Buy, we feel that the open space maintenance and other non housing items should be paid for via

Council Tax payments and not the Housing Revenue Account. Tenants should not be paying for items that owners also benefit from without making a financial contribution.

3. Protecting and Promoting Tenants Interests

We consider that tenant participation should be strengthened and tenants should have more of an input into how the services are delivered, managed and regulated. This will include increased resources, funding and support.

In terms of dealing with the effects of Anti-Social Behaviour protecting the rights of the tenants and residents suffering from these acts should be at the forefront of the governments and landlords policies and practice.

We also consider that regulation of landlords should be done by an independent body with knowledge of the social rented sector and an understanding of the issues facing tenants and landlords.

4. Housing Supply

The aim to increase the number of new build houses from 25,000 to 35,000 does not seem to be enough. Our main concerns here would be:

- Availability, type, size and location of housing does not meet the needs and aspirations of many current tenants and waiting list applicants at the moment
- There is no clear indication as to how many of the 35,000 houses will be for rent and how many will be for sale
- We would like to know how many of the 35,000 houses will be replacing existing stock that may be scheduled for demolition
- Many of the houses being built in the private sector at present are not affordable, to not only first time buyers but also to people wishing to move up the property ladder
- The increase in property prices means that many people who would have considered buying a house cannot. This means that more people will need to / want to rent. However as the housing association and local authority sector is increasingly difficult to access, more people are forced to rent in the private sector. We do not think this will create opportunities for “sustainable mixed communities” as it is mainly the more vulnerable and in some cases anti – social persons who are allocated social housing
- In terms of houses for mid market rent our comments are as follows:
 - Who will be responsible for and able to access funding to build these houses?
 - If these are houses at higher rents who will be eligible to rent them and how will they be allocated and by whom?
 - Will these tenants be eligible for housing benefit and if not what will happen if their circumstances change?
 - If these houses are in existing communities who will responsible for estate and tenancy management issues?

- We do not really see this as meeting the housing need – it would be better if local authorities and housing associations could build more good quality homes for rent available to a wider number of people

We would also advise that consideration needs to be given to the amount of land available, the cost of this land and the impact new build has on the community infrastructure such as services, education, employment, increases in traffic etc.

5. The Private Rented Sector

We are concerned that the Government sees the private sector as filling the gaps in housing provision. We do not think that the government should be encouraging an increase in private lets. Some communities are already suffering as a result of this such as:

- Where tenants of private landlords are anti-social and the local authority and/or housing association have no powers to deal with this
- Landlords will not pay their share of common repairs / improvements
- Tenants do not take turns to clean closes or maintain gardens etc with no penalties imposed like those for RSL and local authority tenants

In addition private sector rents are higher than social rents and in most cases the tenants have fewer rights and their tenancies may not be very secure. This will not contribute to the "sustainable mixed communities" idea if people are worse off financially and / or may be easily evicted.

We also think that the government should not be encouraging individuals to benefit financially from tenants rents and housing benefit by expanding this sector.

6. Assistance for First Time Buyers

Encouraging home ownership is okay as long as people understand the issues in relation to affordability and their responsibilities in terms of the upkeep of their home, garden, close etc.

We are also concerned that as house prices increase that some mortgages will become unaffordable and this along with less housing available for rent that people do not have the option to rent.

We do not think public money should be used to assist people buy a house. We think subsidy would be best used to assist social landlords, local authorities in particular build more homes for rent. However we do think there needs to be more low cost houses for sale and the government should encourage this as part of the overall plan to regenerate an area and meet housing needs and aspirations.