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From: Yvette Burgess [yvette.burgess@ccpscotland.org]
Sent: 23 January 2008 10:52
To: Housing Consultation 2007
Subject: Response to Firm Foundations

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Hello Becky

I would like to submit this response to the Firm Foundations consultation document.
Best wishes

Yvette Burgess
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23rd January 2008

Becky Smith
Social Housing Division 1-H(S)
Victoria Quay,
Leith,
Edinburgh ,
EH6 6QQ

Dear Ms Smith

Re : Firm Foundations: The future of housing in Scotland

I welcome this opportunity to address some of the questions outlined in the Firm Foundations discussion document.

Before I do that, however, I would like to make a general comment. I note with some surprise that the discussion document does not deal with the fact that some people require support to maintain occupation of their home. This is an issue across all housing tenures. It could be argued that support to maintain occupation of a home is all the more important given the ever increasing pressure on housing supply. It is important to reduce the number of times people with support needs lose their home or are prompted to leave when it could have been avoided because:

- it is difficult for people to find settled accommodation especially if they need support
- an uncertain accommodation situation may have a negative impact on health and wellbeing for individuals and their families
- it is important to make the best use of existing properties and lack of support may affect neighbours as well as individuals themselves
- the provision of housing support has been shown to result in savings across other areas of public spend particularly when it prevents homelessness

I would like to turn now, to some of the questions raised in the document:

Question 10: What issues do you consider should be taken into account when considering the increased use of private sector lets to house low-income and homeless households?

Some of the people turning to the private sector for renting will have housing support needs. This may mean that they need help to organise bills and payment of debts, support to locate and use local services, support to settle into a new home (albeit it temporary), assistance to get on with neighbours as well as support to maintain security and identify the need for repairs. This could be a particular issue in the private rented sector as the landlord may not see it as their role to support more vulnerable tenants.

Question 14: How could more private landlords be encouraged to let to tenants on benefits and homeless households?

This question relates closely to the previous one and I think is about gaining the confidence of landlords that people will have access to the support they need to ensure rent payments are made, the property is looked after and relations with neighbours are maintained. Landlords in the private sector typically require references before a new tenancy is agreed. For people with a poor track record with other landlords this may be difficult but is another area that housing support can help with - in terms of confirming the support network that will go with an individual into a new tenancy.

If the role of the private rented sector is to increase it will be important that people who may not have a good credit record or who may have lost tenancies in the past because of support needs are not discriminated against. The availability of local visiting support services that can respond swiftly or that can continue working with an individual as they move into private sector accommodation will be important.

Question 34: How would you like social housing regulation to be organised? (For example, should it be a separate organisation or part of a group of other regulators?)

Regulation of social housing is necessary and should be carried out with the minimum of duplication with other bodies such as the Care Commission, the SSSC and local authority commissioners of housing support. Any new social housing regulator should have formal information sharing arrangements in place so that information is not requested more than once in different formats from social housing landlords who also deliver housing support services.

I hope these comments are helpful. If you feel it would be useful to discuss any of these points in greater detail please let me know.

Yours sincerely

Yvette Burgess
Director