

TENANT PARTICIPATION SUB-GROUP MEETING REPORT: DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS

Introduction

1. The meeting of the Housing Act Implementation Working Group, held on 19 September 2001, considered a paper (WFHAI-10) which asked the Working Group to decide whether all the available resources should simply be allocated to landlords on the basis of an agreed formula or, alternatively, if some of the resources should be top sliced for centrally funded initiatives.

2. It was agreed that the main focus should be on resourcing landlords directly, but that funding a team of development officers was a good idea in principle. It was acknowledged, however, that there were a range of practical issues that needed to be resolved before this could be taken forward. This was remitted to the Tenant Participation sub-group for further discussion.

Development Officers

3. The thinking behind the development officers posts (sometimes known as capacity building officers), is that they would have responsibility for facilitating and promoting good practice in tenant participation for Local Authorities and RSLs landlords. By resourcing these posts, the implementation of the tenant participation sections of the Act could be driven more pro-actively. Landlords would also have a resource to call all in helping them with this. There are, however, a significant number of structural and practical issues with the posts that need to be resolved.

TP Sub Group meeting

4. Two meetings were held on 9 October and 6 November 2001 to discuss the practical issues surrounding the employment of development officers.

5. At the first meeting David Bookbinder, SFHA advised that SFHA had discussed the issue of development officers and overall were opposed to the principle. It was felt that the resources should be distributed directly to landlords who would decide themselves what to spend it on, subject to the requirements of the funders. SFHA doubted that the appointment of development officers would increase the amount of tenant participation expertise available. SFHA also raised concerns over practical issues, for example how would development officers prioritise access. After discussion the remainder of the group felt that there was merit in discussing the potential for development officers further. It was further agreed that an additional meeting was required to give adequate time for discussion.

6. At the meeting held on 6 November the following points were agreed:

- The key criteria for the organisation(s) hosting the development officers were identified as location, appropriate skills and knowledge and a structure which gave accountability.

- The Group identified a number of important factors in the implementation of the posts: clarity, a strategic approach and support for individual development officers. Clarity from the Executive was seen in terms of setting a clear and consistent national framework; in the guidance produced and in the outputs expected. The Development Department of the Executive should not manage the development officers. It would be the responsibility of the host organisation to set up the strategy to deliver the Scottish Executive's objectives and work within the framework provided by the Executive. The host organisation would also provide support on the ground.
- A single organisation hosting the development officers was preferred over the idea of a number of organisations. The thinking behind this was that a single organisation would allow more consistency, make it easier for the landlords to identify and access the service providers, give economies of scale, have one identifiable leader for development officers and provide mutual support for them.
- The division of work should be sensitive to geographical issues as development officers would develop an understanding of local issues in an area, without necessarily being based in an area. It was seen as important for landlords to get a good service irrespective of where development officers were based. The work of development officers should not be spilt according to landlord type (i.e. local authorities or registered social landlords) but development officers would deal with both. It was thought that, as a running thread through the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 was the concept of a single consistent approach, this should be in the same vein. From the aspect of personal development for development officers it would also be more beneficial for them to gain a range of experience. Functional issues such as special needs, exclusion and race would also play a part in the role of development officers.

Conclusion

7. It would be helpful if members of the Group could confirm the Tenant Participation sub group views that:

- the Scottish Executive should consider the funding of development officer posts;
- the development officers are hosted by one organisation;
- the remit of the Executive would be to set a framework for the posts and appoint a host organisation but not to provide on the ground support;
- work would be divided on a geographical basis, not landlord specific, although development officers would not need to be based in an area;
- While the focus would be geographical, development officers would consider functional issues such as special needs, exclusion and race.

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