



ABERDEEN
CITY COUNCIL

HOUSING DEPARTMENT, St Nicholas House, Upperkirkgate, Aberdeen, AB10 1AX
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Tony Cain
Secretary
Housing Improvements Task Force
Housing Division 2
Victoria Quay
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19 June 2002

Dear Tony

**ISSUES IN IMPROVING QUALITY IN PRIVATE COUNCIL RESPONSE
HOUSING: ABERDEEN CITY**

I am writing in response to the consultation document produced by the Housing Improvement Task Force (HITE), entitled "Issues in Improving Quality in Private Housing". The document has been considered by the Council's Housing Act (Scotland) 2001 Working Party, and I have attached our formal response.

I trust you will consider these comments and I await the Task Force's final published version of the report.

Yours sincerely

Mr M Scott
Director of Housing
(Corporate Director Designate for Community Services)

RESPONSE TO HITF DOCUMENT

‘ISSUES IN IMPROVEMENT QUALITY IN PRIVATE HOUSING’

Aberdeen City Council agrees that the current standards of housing are outdated and inadequate in a modern society. It supports the stance taken by CIH and COSLA on the need for a new minimum standard to be introduced across all housing tenures. We feel that the tolerable standard is a measure that is out of date and there needs to be a more modern standard which is fit for purpose in the 21st century housing. We would want to see the adoption of a new standard with an objective that this could be met in 7-10 years. Targets need to be ambitious, but we must also be pragmatic. The basic standards of energy efficiency also need to be taken into account and for this reason we would also look for energy efficiency to be addressed in the new provisions for grants under Part 6 of the new Housing (Scotland) Act 2002. The minimum standards should also be tied to a set of regulations or standards for all landlords within the private sector, in a similar way to the regulation of Local Authorities and other Registered Social Landlords.

The HITF's conclusions about Right To Buy properties and the disrepair that is common with these in flatted properties must also be addressed. Aberdeen City feels that the Executive must move towards ensuring potential buyers aware of the obligations of property maintenance and repairs. There needs to be some guidance given about the potential costs of this in the future. It must be made mandatory for the seller include a 'service book' of maintenance in the case of flatted properties with common elements, there is a need for this to be written into the title deeds. The onus must not be put on the solicitors, as they are certainly not an unbiased party in the procedure. The concern over flatted properties is one that Aberdeen City Council is extremely aware of.

It feels that there may be the need for a new type of Housing Action Area to be introduced that could be aimed at the modernisation of shared or common areas within these type of properties. In particular the replacement of lead pipes is one that we would like to see tackled. Aberdeen City has a limited experience of factoring within shared buildings and this has led to a poor uptake of repairs to communal areas.

Further more the conclusion surrounding aspects of poor investment in housing are also agreed. There needs to be a strategic movement to try and promote and encourage owners to do more repairs to their properties and to invest in their homes linked to the consequences of not doing so. I.E affecting the value of their home. Part of this could come from VAT and tax concessions for certain types of improvements/repairs to properties. This would also need to be backed up by a private sector initiative that could tackle the long-term problem. One possible idea is the introduction of a policy or 'warranty' similar to that that comes with car-purchases, or some sort of private Improvements Insurance. Something along these lines would have to be drawn up with the support and guidance of the Council of Mortgage Lenders, and could be tied to title deeds or mortgages. This type of initiative could then be linked to a list of approved contractors that would undertake the works.

Aberdeen City would also be in favour of a system of regulated rents that is tied to the standard of properties. This would act as a stick to force landlords to improve their property in-order to be able to achieve a better rental level. Council tax concessions for landlords with

empty properties need to be at least reduced if not stopped, which is the Council's preferred option.

Aberdeen City realises that there are issues concerning equalities and feels the best way to tackle this is to promote a new minimum standard. The raising of the base line would then lead to a move to prioritise funding and improvements towards those areas, which are poorest in order to reach this standard. This would tackle the issue of equalities indirectly but effectively. Furthermore there is a need to provide a better information service concerning housing service, tenants right and the law etc, within the private rented sector. This is a task that should be made mandatory for all local authorities.

Aberdeen City also feels that all houses must have some sort of 'MOT' certificate Which will certify the repair standard of a house and will therefore provide a summary for new owners of the costs that may be required for future repairs. It may also be prudent to make it mandatory for all owners to get a structural survey of their property at regular intervals to produce as information to be held and made available at time of sale. This 'MOT' should list the main elements and the life cycle of each of these elements. This would mean that a snap-shot of the properties repair state is always available. This of course, could then be tied to the minimum standards and could act as a method enforcement and inspection.

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