

Dumfries
& Galloway
COUNCIL

Mr Tony Cain
Secretary
Housing Improvement Task Force
Housing Division 2 , Victoria Quay
EDINBURGH
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Your Ref:

5 June 2002

Dear Tony

ISSUES IN IMPROVING QUALITY IN PRIVATE HOUSING

Further to the issue of your consultative document on private housing please find our comments below.

CONCLUSION

REFERENCE: COMMENT:

5, 6 Involving all owners in the repair or improvement of flatted properties is an emerging problem which will continue to grow. It is essential that owners are given substantial encouragement to carry out such works and that there are suitable remedies when some owners fail to willingly participate. (see item 65, 66, 67, 80). Problems with flatted properties does not just apply to multi-storey blocks but also 'blocks of four'.

12, 13 Rural housing has a greater potential for being in poor condition and for the occupiers being in fuel poverty. This situation has been recognised by the HITF but the solutions must lead to a greater emphasis on specific resources being made available to improve the condition of properties and relieve fuel poverty.

65, 66, 67, 80 Investment by Local Authorities to maintain or repair flatted properties can lead to conflict with some owners. A measured, but robust 'scheme' must be developed which seeks to resolve differing attitudes.

Finding solutions which owners can readily accept has to be the primary objective. Incentives should be available in the form of grants to provide a financial subsidy. Further assistance should be available to help 'vulnerable' owners through the process, which can be extremely daunting for some people.

However, following full and proper negotiations there must be a fall-back position where the required work can be achieved. This power should be vested in Local Authorities. For major repairs to the structure of buildings the existing 'repair grant' legislation can be used. For works not classed as major repairs, i.e. redecoration of communal stairwells, fencing, another scheme will have to be developed.

It is essential that the suggested scheme provides substantial opportunities for a negotiated resolution. However, if this fails there has to be a means of ensuring works are undertaken and all owners meet their responsibilities.

86, 89 Promoting the maintenance of properties has to be a key objective for this initiative on private sector housing. It can be partially and importantly achieved at the time of purchase, through comprehensive surveys with information on projected repair cycles and costs.

The overall objective of improving the condition of private sector housing will require a range of initiatives. To assist Local Authorities to identify solutions and maximise opportunities there should be a mechanism to share best practice and promote consistency in the interpretation of powers. It is suggested that Communities Scotland should take on this role.

Yours sincerely

Steve Southam
Head of Housing Development