

South Ayrshire

Social Work, Housing and Health

Director: Elaine Noad BA, MSc, OPA, DASS, CQSW

Housing Headquarters

Holmston House, 3 Holmston Road, Ayr, KA7 3BA

Telephone: 01292 262111 Fax: 01292 288244

Date: 10 June 2002

Tony Cain
Secretary
Housing Improvement Task Force
Housing Division 2
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH 6QQ

Dear Sir

The First Report of the Housing Improvement Task Force

South Ayrshire Council thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the Task Forces initial report.

We would point out that large areas of this report presents information on the current position in relation to private housing stock in Scotland. Thus, we found that many of the reported issues were typical of the housing stock in South Ayrshire when the last local house condition survey was carried Out in 1994. Several of the key conclusions make commonly known points for example the first key conclusion (p 16) which tells us ‘Many houses occupied by those with some level of physical disability do not meet the needs of their occupants’.

We would point out the need for additional resources to address private sector housing. South Ayrshire is a pressurised market area both in terms of supply of and demand for affordable rented housing and we have the highest net loss of housing through Right to Buy of all the rural authorities. The high number of Right to Buy owners who are unwilling or unable to pay a share of the costs of common repairs/improvements has had serious repercussions on our ability to invest in our own housing stock through the HRA Capital Programme. We feel that this is an area that needs to be addressed with some urgency.

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The current proposals to reform the repairs/improvement grants by the end of this year are relevant to this. However, in order to ensure a uniform approach, we think it is necessary to consider whether the proposals to change the grants system should be delayed for a period of time until the work of the Task Force has been completed.

Please find specific comments in relation to each section of the Task Forces Report. The

Extent of Disrepair and Obsolescence in the Private Sector

- Disrepair in flatted property in particular tenement property is higher.
- Disrepair and poor condition is more likely in rural housing. We are currently conducting a Local House Condition Survey, which will enable us to compare urban and rural house conditions. This will also allow a comparison to be made in relation to energy efficiency. Results are expected in early 2003.
- Upgrading B. T. S. housing should remain a priority and for South Ayrshire there are significantly large numbers of sub-standard private water supplies in rural areas.
- Housing standards must be reviewed and supported at a national and local level.
- Research should be carried out on the condition of private sector housing throughout Scotland. The data collected should be used to establish a baseline that can inform Local Housing Strategies.

Investment Patterns in Private Sector Housing

- Surveys for property sales should include comment on previous repairs expenditure and on future estimated expenditure
- Equity release may be a potentially powerful funding option. Local Authorities should be given guidance on how to offer low interest loan arrangements in terms of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.
- Measures must be put in place to improve conditions in the Private Rented Sector. We have recently appointed a Liaison Officer, Private Rented Sector to help identify blockages in the system. Consideration should be given to the level of Housing Benefit paid for private rented accommodation and how this can be aligned to the quality of service provided.

Arrangements for the Management of Communal Repairs and Maintenance

- Strategic planning for addressing house conditions in the private sector must be reviewed.

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Tony Cain
Secretary
Housing Improvement Task Force

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- The use of legal notices in South Ayrshire has been minimal to the point of non-existent because of resource implications. Mandatory grants linked to Statutory Notices must be reviewed
- Expenditure on improvement and repair grants has fallen significantly since the withdrawal of ring fencing in 1996.
- Area based repair powers are required
- Grant conditions addressing maintenance must be reviewed
- Grant aid should be directed where it will have the greatest effect

House Buying and Selling

- Property enquiries in relation to house sales result in difficulties with building certificates. The review of the building standards system might be expected to address this problem.
- Prospective purchasers should be made aware of the common obligations associated with the property and the expected repairs and maintenance costs

South Ayrshire Council hopes that these comments will be useful when compiling the Stage 2 report.

Yours faithfully

Peter Whyte
Head of Housing