

The Scottish Parliament

Tony Cain
Secretary
Housing Improvement Task Force
Housing Division 2
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Dear Mr Cain

HOUSING IMPROVEMENT TASK FORCE FIRST REPORT

At its meeting on 12 June the Social Justice Committee considered its response to the Scottish Executive consultation on the first report of the Housing Improvement Task Force (HITF). The Committee had previously agreed to invite limited written evidence and responses were received from Scottish Consumer Council and Shelter Scotland.

There are three issues in particular which the Committee wishes to highlight as areas which the Task Force may wish to include in its work:

Fuel Poverty

Firstly, in relation to the draft Fuel Poverty Statement, the Committee recommended that the Housing Improvement Task Force recognises the following housing improvement issues in its ongoing work:

- Friends of the Earth believed that it is essential to strengthen the link between the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group and HITF in order to tackle fuel poverty in the private housing sector;
- COSLA suggested that, as the housing improvement task force's papers do not mention the leasing of heating systems and other measures for private landlords and the private sector, these should also be investigated;
- While concentrating on training qualifications for fitters was important COSLA emphasised, there was a need to ensure that maintenance side of the rapid installation work that is being done by the private sector is covered and it is suggested that this may be an issue for the housing improvement task force. This point was also reflected in the evidence by Transco who suggested that the Scottish Executive needed to address as a matter of urgency the skills shortage problem among gas installers;
- Energy Action Scotland expressed concern over the level of information that local authorities have on the private sector's energy efficiency performance;

- COSLA suggested that there is a need to review how grants for cavity fill insulation in tenement properties are assessed, especially where there are shared costs with owner occupiers.

Licensing of Houses In Multiple Occupation

Secondly, in its Interim Report on the Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation, the Committee indicated that it was aware that the HITF was considering a range of measures on conditions in the private sector and a sub group of the Task Force was examining the private rented sector, which might lead to recommendations for legislation. If wider regulations were recommended, the licensing scheme could be integrated into them.

Common repairs

Thirdly, the Committee considered that the Task Force may wish to look at a number of issues in relation to common repairs:

- the possibility of developing a mechanism and appropriate form for the resolution of disputes between local authorities and home owners of former local authority homes;
- the subject of local authorities as factors and whether they had a monopoly on the tendering process for common repairs works;
- how the reform of tenemental law would impact on common repairs schemes;
- proper protection to tenants who exercised their right to buy and thereafter had local authorities impose repairs without owner/occupiers' consent.
- to consider whether local authorities had an obligation at law or by policy to consult owner/occupiers.

The Committee also invites the Executive to consider developing a longer term management strategy in relation to common repairs and to investigate the potential of long-term maintenance funds for tenemental properties.

Finally, the Committee supported the point made by Shelter Scotland that little was said in the report about the role of the construction industry and the need for the industry to engage-in discussion about strategic housing in Scotland. The Committee supported the view that a new partnership between government and the building and developer sector is urgently needed

The Committee looks forward to learning the outcome of the consultation in due course.

Yours sincerely

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Convener of the Social Justice Committee

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