

Unknown

From: Hitchings L (Laura) on behalf of Minister for Communities and Sport
Sent: 29 January 2008 14:35
To: Smith B (Becky)
Subject: FW: Housing Submission

Becky

To see attached.

Regards
Laura Hitchings
PS/Minister for Communities and Sport
29 January 2008
Tel: 0131 244 5539
Mob: 07768 558 305

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From: Stewart.Maxwell.msp@scottish.parliament.uk [mailto:Stewart.Maxwell.msp@scottish.parliament.uk]
Sent: 28 January 2008 18:51
To: Minister for Communities and Sport
Subject: Fw: Housing Submission

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-----Original Message-----

From: Campbell AE (Aileen), MSP
To: Maxwell S (Stewart), MSP
Sent: Mon Jan 28 18:29:29 2008
Subject: Housing Submission

<<Stewart Maxwell MSP.doc>> <<Stewart Maxwell MSP.doc>> <<Housing submission.doc>> <<Housing submission.doc>>

Stewart, please find my submission and covering letter for Firm Foundations.

Best wishes
Aileen

Aileen Campbell MSP
South of Scotland Region
The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 6706 Fax: 0131 348 6709

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***Aileen Campbell MSP
South of Scotland Region***

Stewart Maxwell MSP
Minister for Communities and Sport
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

25th January 2008

Dear Stewart

Please find attached with this email my submission for the housing consultation, Firm Foundations.

Many thanks for the opportunity to contribute to this most important debate.

Best wishes

Aileen Campbell MSP

Aileen Campbell MSP
South of Scotland Region
The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP
Tel: 0131 348 6707
Email: aileen.campbell.msp@scottish.parliament.uk
www.aileencampbell.com

This submission to the housing consultation, *Firm Foundations, The Future of Housing in Scotland: A discussion document*, will primarily be concerned with the issue of homelessness. It will not be arguing whether current policies are right or wrong, but simply hopes to add a human perspective to the issue of homelessness that is so often lost when analysing facts and figures. I hope that some of the points raised within this submission will be taken on board by Ministers and policy makers to ensure that when new housing policies are made, they are done so, not to just tick boxes, but to actually improve the quality of life and long term future of Scotland's homeless population.

The content of the submission largely stems from what I learned after I spent a day with a Big Issue vendor, Ian, in Lanark last autumn. I am not pretending that after one day with a vendor that I now know what it is like to be homeless and neither do I speak for every homeless person in Scotland.

What I will say is that the actual act of selling the Big Issue taught me very little; most people walk by, some acknowledge your presence, others don't, and quite a few put their hands into their pockets and buy a copy. It's what you would expect.

But I learned more about the complexities of homelessness from listening to Ian chatting in his own familiar environment than I could ever hope to gain from a lifetime of debate in the parliamentary chamber, and that made my visit valuable and worthwhile.

For that reason I would like to see the experiences and views of Scotland's homeless feed more into the debate on housing shortage, a topic rightly high on the political agenda.

Firm Foundations does ask for views about homelessness, this is a good and positive step. Policy needs to go beyond simply tackling homelessness by only providing a home and potentially ignoring the people behind the homelessness statistics. The dictionary defines homelessness as, 'lacking a home' and I suppose technically this is quite correct. However it would be naive to believe that this is ALL homelessness is.

The hallmark of the way this new SNP Government is working is by having a cabinet that cuts across the traditional portfolios and works together when cooperation is beneficial and necessary. Therefore, I am very excited by the fact that housing policy and homelessness falls within the Health and Wellbeing department. This offers the chance to address the larger problems often experienced by Scotland's homeless population such as mental health problems and alcohol and drug dependency.

Government will also be aware that simply providing a house for someone who has been homeless is not the end of the problem. Support post house allocation is necessary. If a person is in a house but is still living in bin liners and cardboard, then they have not been adequately supported in the transition from being homeless to possessing a home. Homelessness is a revolving door and therefore, Government has to find a way to stop this. We

need to ensure that money spent on homelessness gives us more 'bangs for our buck' and that people who are housed stay housed, are supported with their re-socialisation back into the community and are helped with any drink/drug rehabilitation or mental health problem.

I also believe that when housing homeless people into social rented housing the decision to do so needs to be explained to the wider community.

So often, people get annoyed about the perception of some vulnerable sections of society 'jumping' the social housing queue. It is a pity that decisions like these continue to divide communities. People on housing lists often do not have the option to buy or rent on the open market and often have less disposable income. Homeless people also lack the options in life we, as parliamentarians, are lucky to possess. Therefore, I believe more work has to be done to stop dividing our communities and to instead, work towards creating communities based on cooperation, solidarity and understanding.

Finally, during my day spent with Ian I learned how the current hostel system often perpetuates the homelessness problem in Scotland. I am not criticising those who run hostels, just hoping to relay what I was told by someone who had experience of staying in a hostel but then left it to live back on the streets where he felt he had a better chance of getting his life back on track. Hostels are often a place where the weak get picked on and where bullying and stealing is common. They are often places that are chaotic at night times – the worst time for someone who is homeless. Of course it is good for shelter to be provided, but if in some cases they are not allowing homeless people to get their lives back together and to move forward, then this, I believe, needs to also be looked at by those formulating housing policies.

In conclusion, the First Minister was rightly applauded when he announced his appointment of the council of expert economic advisers to help tackle Scotland's economic mediocrity. Similarly, I believe that those who are homeless now are the real experts on homelessness and it would be foolish of the government to ignore them. I understand that this is the worst economic settlement since devolution began and that our shared desire to make Scotland healthier, wealthier and fairer is severely curtailed because we do not, at present, have the full powers of a normal independent country. But I hope that within the devolved constraints, the new government can take a fresh look at housing and homelessness by engaging with those who are homeless, visiting the hostels – not during the day, but at night time when the problems occur, and to really listen and put in place a homelessness strategy that properly cares for those who are homeless and allows them to play their part in our society.