

Key Messages on Information Needs from the First Round of Local Housing Strategies

BACKGROUND

Section 89 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires local authorities to submit a Local Housing Strategy to Scottish Ministers, which maps out the course between the current operation of the housing system and how the local authority, with partners, wants the housing system to operate in 5 years time, taking into account national housing priorities. The Local Housing Strategy should demonstrate the fit between national housing priorities and local requirements and identify the broad picture of investment needs for existing and new housing. All 32 local authorities have submitted Local Housing Strategies for assessment. The assessment process has been completed and all local authorities have received feedback from Communities Scotland.

CONTEXT

The Local Housing Strategies provided information on numerous topics and issues. However there have been requests for information on topics/issues such as abolition of priority need and housing needs figures, which have either not been available from the first round of local housing strategies due to gaps in information or have not been able to be neatly aggregated.

An example of this problem has arisen is the housing needs figures. To help inform the Local Housing Strategy process, most local authorities commissioned consultants to produce local housing needs assessments. Guidance prepared by Communities Scotland recommended that if there is evidence available suggesting a chronic shortage of affordable housing, local authorities should establish and report on its extent using the approach laid out in *Local Housing Needs Assessment: A Guide to Good Practice (DTLR (now ODPM), July 2000)*. There is however no single ideal blueprint for local housing needs assessments, although the DTLR guidance recommends a common framework for the basic needs calculation. Nonetheless, the Local Housing Strategy guidance stresses that judgement is always necessary in assessing housing need.

It is however inappropriate to aggregate the information from the various local housing needs assessments to give a national picture as there were differences in the geographic framework, time series and methodology used.

Communities Scotland commissioned Professor Glen Bramley to update and refine a model designed to estimate housing need and affordability at the local authority level for Scotland. The research, *"Local Housing Need and Affordability Model for Scotland – Update"* (Communities Scotland, June 2004) provides a "snapshot" estimate of net annual need (number of household/dwelling units per year) for each local authority in Scotland in 2003.

The housing needs figures from the Local Housing Strategies are not directly comparable with Bramley's "snapshot" estimates of need, as Bramley's model uses consistent calculations and datasets and uses the same geographic framework. However, when the affordable housing needs figures are compared with Bramley's "snapshot" estimates of needs, they show a broadly similar distribution of need.

Economies of scale could be gained by combining needs assessments and already the Lothian Housing Forum has jointly commissioned an up to date housing needs assessment across the Lothian area.

INFO NEEDS

Information needs which come through in the majority of the first round of local housing strategies are:

- Role of private rented sector (Communities Scotland commissioned research to gather further information on this sector. The final report is nearing completion)
- Private sector stock condition
- Housing needs (and support needs) of young people, older people, people with disabilities

Other areas which a selection of local housing strategies indicate additional information is required:

- BME needs (North Lanarkshire, Midlothian, Renfrewshire, Clackmannanshire)
- Affordable housing needs and delivery (Inverclyde, East Dunbartonshire, Aberdeen, Fife)
- Fuel poverty (Highland, East Lothian, Argyll and Bute, Angus)
- Right to Buy (East Dunbartonshire, Moray, Highland)
- Homelessness (Angus, Fife, Moray, South Lanarkshire)
- Second/holiday homes (Moray, Scottish Borders)
- Tied housing (Scottish Borders)
- Gypsy/travellers (Scottish Borders, Perth and Kinross, Renfrewshire)
- Housing aspirations (Inverclyde, Angus)
- Impact of transport infrastructure on housing (Clackmannanshire)
- Immigrant workers (Perth and Kinross)
- Low demand for owner-occupation (North Lanarkshire)
- Construction industry capacity (North Lanarkshire)

ACTIONS PLANNED

Each local authority was offered funding to support the local housing strategy process from 2001/02 to 2003/04. This funding has now come to an end. Many local authorities used this funding to commission research into areas where they had information gaps. Communities Scotland will be providing some training in areas which have been considered weak and advise other bodies of areas where training would be appropriate and useful. Communities Scotland will continue to support local authorities in the ethos of continuous improvement.

The LHS web based guidance is currently being updated. The updated guidance will include a section on good practice which highlights strengths and weaknesses from the first round of strategies.

Communities Scotland intends commissioning an independent evaluation of the local housing strategies. It is intended that this evaluation will include looking at the information gathered and where gaps still exist. A brief for this project is currently being prepared