

## Developing Highland's Housing Strategy 2010 - 2015 Feedback on Stage 1 Consultation

**Summary of responses to consultation** – This section summarises the broad comments received on the different housing issues and proposed options.

### **Where should new houses be built:**

- There was wide support for the proposal that investment priorities should be based on where there is the greatest need for housing.

### **Who should houses be built for:**

- There was wide support for an increase in the proportion of houses built for affordable rent rather than low cost home ownership.

### **How can we best meet community care needs:**

- There was general support for the principle that mainstream housing solutions and enabling people to remain at home should be central to the strategy. There was less clarity on how to assess the need for and address specialist housing needs for particular community care groups.

### **How can we make sure the Council's houses meet the Scottish Government's quality standard:**

- There was general support for the importance of supporting and taking measures to increase energy efficiency and address fuel poverty.

### **How can we help private owners repair and improve housing:**

- There were mixed views on this subject. On one hand many respondents supported grants, loans and advice and information to help owners. However there was also a strong view that private owners should not receive subsidy for the upkeep of their property.

### **Is there anything we or other housing organisations should be doing differently:**

- There were no specific suggestions.

### **How can we support the private rented sector:**

- Many landlords responded that we should avoid unnecessary regulation and administrative burden on landlords. Many also wanted assistance to provide energy efficiency measures.
- Respondents also highlighted the importance of providing housing support where needed by vulnerable tenants.
- Finally some landlords would like to see changes to tax system to encourage growth of the sector.

This section includes feedback on the some of the detailed questions, comments and suggestions that were made through the consultation. The **Bold** text indicates a point made by respondents, and the plain text is the response.

### **Building additional Council Housing**

The Council has already made a successful bid for funding to support new Council House building under the current Scottish Government Scheme. The Consultative Draft Housing Strategy highlights the need for additional affordable housing supply and that the Council considers that it should have a role as a supplier as well as an enabler of new housing provision. The Council is continuing to explore ways that it can maximise its own contribution to housing supply.

### **Prioritise building in areas with local employment and population loss**

The Consultative Draft Strategy recognises the role that housing can play in supporting wider economic development activities.

### **End or further restrict the Right to Buy**

The Council supports the proposals set out in the Housing (Scotland) Bill 2009 to further restrict Right to Buy and has argued that these restrictions should go further. The Council has successfully applied for Pressured Area Status to restrict Right to Buy in most parts of the Highlands. The Consultative Draft Housing Strategy sets out the case for reviewing and extending existing Pressured Area Status designations.

### **Provide more amenity / sheltered housing / housing suitable for older people**

The Council is working to a target for ensuring that houses suitable for older and disabled people are provided as part of Highland's affordable housing development programme. The Consultative Draft Housing Strategy makes a commitment to ensure that new build affordable housing continues to be designed for to meet people's varying needs. It also commits the Council to reviewing Highland's sheltered housing to make sure that it is meeting the needs of people with the greatest need for the services it provides.

### **Tenant Inspections**

Many existing Council tenants expressed a desire to see tenant inspections introduced as a way of obtaining feedback on landlord services. The Consultative Draft Housing Strategy strengthens the commitment to delivering the Council's Tenant Participation Strategy which itself contains a commitment to explore tenant led inspections. This is being taken forward by a Steering Group of tenants.

### **Sell surplus land to raise money to build affordable housing**

The Council has a policy of prioritising surplus land for housing and the Consultative Draft Housing Strategy proposes to continue this.

### **Give more preference to local people**

This feedback relates to the Council's policy for allocating houses. The Council and the main housing associations operating in the Highlands operate a common housing register and allocations policy called Highland Housing Register. The allocations policy meets legal and regulatory requirements in terms of access to the register and consideration for vacant property. The allocations policy gives priority to applicants who have an evidenced need to reside in the area where they are applying to live. Further changes to the policy are currently being consulted on including allowing special letting plans to be used in small pressured communities.

### **Make better use of existing housing, for example by helping older people who are underoccupying family homes to move to smaller houses**

Highland's Housing Register Allocation Policy currently provides some priority to applicants seeking to downsize to smaller accommodation. The Council is considering an incentive scheme that would provide further practical assistance to people who are underoccupying property in areas with a shortfall of family housing.

### **Build more housing suitable for smaller households – older people and younger people**

Decisions on the mix of houses to be provided in new developments is based on an analysis of local housing need and demand. The Consultative Draft Housing Strategy says that we will also encourage developers to build more houses suited to smaller households, including the elderly to respond to demographic trends.

### **Buy back former council houses**

Former Council houses form a significant part of the housing market in some areas. They can provide good entry level accommodation for new households. The Council has limited funding which it requires to use to bring its existing housing up to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. It also aims to build new housing to modern standards. The Consultative Draft Housing Strategy does not include proposals to introduce a policy on buy-back of former council homes.

### **Provide greater priority to families / young people living with parents in allocating housing**

Highland's Housing Register Allocation Policy awards priority to households who have a need for housing. If families and young people are living in overcrowded situations then priority is given to reflect that overcrowding. Priority is also awarded to reflect the need to reside in a particular community because of employment or social reasons. These help to ensure that local people in housing need receive priority for vacant social rented housing. However living with parents is not, in itself, considered to be 'housing need', and it would not be appropriate to award additional priority for this reason alone.

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