

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE - 31 JANUARY 2001

ESTABLISHMENT OF A HOUSING FORUM

Report by the Director of Homes and Technical Services

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1** To obtain approval from the Committee to establish a Council led Strategic Housing Forum in partnership with other housing stakeholders in East Ayrshire.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The forthcoming Housing Bill 'Better Homes for Scotland's Communities' will provide local authorities with an enhanced strategic role. This specifically means that a new single housing planning and funding framework will be introduced and "local authorities will be at the heart of this new framework".
- 2.2** Under the new arrangements Council's will be responsible for developing new initiatives such as a homelessness strategy, repair and improvement grants scheme, and will have to adopt new strategies to deal with the implementation of the Supporting People regime.
- 2.3** The Housing Bill will also include provision for the preparation of a single housing plan for each local authority area. These plans will replace the current separate local authority housing plans and Scottish Homes regional plans. The single housing plan will provide a strategic framework for housing investment and for the allocation of funding by the Scottish Executive which will be led by each local authority in its role as strategic housing authority.

3. ESTABLISHING A HOUSING FORUM

- 3.1** To ensure that the local authority is at the heart of these developments it needs to work in partnership with all those in East Ayrshire who have an interest or role to play in the planning and provision of housing. Several local authorities such as Aberdeen and East Lothian have already set up Housing Forums.
- 3.2** The department has carried out research and is of the view that the forum would be an appropriate mechanism to meet our strategic requirements. This view is supported by the Local Housing Strategies Single Housing Plan Sub Group set up by the Scottish Executive which recommended that Local authorities should produce Local Housing Strategies through a partnership process using appropriate, formally constituted fora.
- 3.3** To ensure that all the partner agencies and organisations support this type of forum they would be consulted and agreement sought prior to it being set up.

4. REMIT AND STRUCTURE

- 4.1** The remit of the Housing Forum will be to support Homes and Technical Services in the ongoing development of a comprehensive housing strategy for East Ayrshire. This will include the production of the single local housing plan, enabling partnership working and eventually the distribution of development funding.
- 4.2** The Forum will require to be formally established and a constitution thereafter developed which would govern the running of the Forum and specify its purposes and functions. The membership of the Forum will mainly be made up from other housing providers and other service providers. A draft list of potential members is attached in **Appendix A**. The Forum will be led and administered by the local authority through the Director of Homes and Technical Services.
- 4.3** To ensure that the Forum has a real purpose and is an effective body, clear links to existing strategic groups within East Ayrshire will need to be established. This will help the work of the Forum, and reduce duplication of work.
- 4.4** The Forum will provide a platform for the local authority as lead agency and other agencies to discuss and agree upon strategic housing issues. The Forum will act in an advisory or consultative basis and will ensure that the Council is fully informed on all housing related strategic issues prior to any decisions being made by the Council.
- 4.5** Tenants and residents will have an important role to play in the development of the Council's strategic housing role. Through the organised tenants/residents movement close consultation will be established. This will provide one of the mechanisms to ensure customer focus in the process.

5. ACTIVITIES

- 5.1** While the main function of the Housing Forum is to deal with the strategic issues arising from the Housing Bill it will also need to have a more practical focus if it is to remain interesting and informative to other departments, organisations and agencies. It is accordingly anticipated that the Forum will deal with issues such as:
- Licensing Houses in Multiple Occupation
 - Nomination agreements between housing providers
 - Tenant/Service User Involvement
 - Local Housing System Analysis
 - Homelessness
 - Statistical data collection and analysis

Broadening out the activities of the forum should ensure that all housing related issues are fully discussed and agreed upon with all relevant parties and should

provide a platform for true consultation and involvement with other housing agencies operating in East Ayrshire.

6. LAUNCH AND PUBLICITY

6.1 Given the importance of the Housing Forum and the pivotal role that it has in the development of housing policy and provision in East Ayrshire, it is crucial that it is given the appropriate high level of publicity. It is proposed that the Council facilitate a special 'launch' of the initiative. All members would be invited to attend a special lunch to launch the Forum and Councillors would be present to host the event and endorse the work to be done by the Forum.

6.2 Press releases for the local press would be prepared and an article produced to sell the Forum as good practice in the national professional publications.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 It is proposed that a new post be created to act as the administrator for the business of the forum and to support the necessary detailed work which will be required. Proposals for the grading and terms and conditions of the post will be put to the Personnel and Property Sub-Committee in the normal way.

7.2 The anticipated costs are as follows:-

| | 2001/2002 | 2002/2003 | 2003/2004 |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Admin support costs | £12,000 | £12,360 | £12,730 |

7.3 It is proposed that these costs will be met from the Housing Revenue Account and a bid for these resources has been included in the budget setting process for 2001/2002. The success of the project will be evaluated at the end of the first year and funding for the following years is required for the continuing support of the Forum.

8. LEGAL / POLICY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from a decision to establish a Housing Forum. The role and remit of the Forum will however require to be formally established and a constitution developed as indicated in paragraph 4.2 above. The Forum will be an advisory body with strategic decisions being taken by the Council in fulfilment of its statutory responsibility.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1** It is recommended that the Committee give their approval to the establishment of the East Ayrshire Council Housing Forum and the costs attached which will be facilitated within the Department of Homes and Technical Services.
- 9.2** It is further recommended that the Committee refer the staffing implications to the Personnel & Property Sub Committee of the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration, subject to appropriate resources being provided in the Council budget for 2000/2001.

James Lavery
Director of Homes and Technical Services

3 January 2001

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Letter from Scottish Executive *Local Housing Strategies* dated 19 December 2000

(Members wishing further information on any of the above should contact Joseph Cassidy, Policy Manager, on 01563 576617)

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Appendix A

DRAFT FORUM MEMBERSHIP LIST

| | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Kirk Care Housing Association | Hanover Scotland Housing Association |
| Key Housing Association | West of Scotland Housing Association |
| Link Housing Association (incorporating Gap HA) | Blue Triangle Housing Association |
| Margaret Blackwood Housing Association | Shire Housing Association |
| Horizon Housing Association | Cunninghame Housing Association |
| Bield Housing Association | East Ayrshire Housing Partnership |
| Disability Forum | Elderly Forum |
| Community Safety Forum | Police |
| Ayrshire Economic Enterprise | Shelter |
| Scottish Federation of Housing Associations | Letting Agents/Estate Agents |
| Private Landlord representative | Health Board |
| Voluntary Agencies (CAB etc) | Private Developers representatives |
| Scottish Homes | Scottish Council for Single Homeless |
| Council Departments: Social Work, Education, Environment, Planning, Social Inclusion Unit, Economic Development, Legal Section | |

AGENDA