

# The Scottish Tenant

agahst2003@hotmail.com | 07826834116 | 01698-281488

- - -

Summer 2009



Join the STO Campaign for Housing Debt Write Off

## -> **DROP THE DEBT!**

It was true then. It's still true now.

In June 2000, tenant delegates from across Scotland attended a conference in Perth, organised jointly by the Scottish Tenants Organisation and the Tenants Information Service, where they voted unanimously for having legal rights to participation and also to demand that the UK government should write off Scotland's historical housing debt.

Legal rights are now in place for participation but the UK government still refuses to write off the debt unless councils hand over their

housing to the private sector. The STO say this is unfair and continues the campaign that tenants called for. Approaches have been made to the Chancellor and the Treasury but they appear to need convincing over the issue. So we are once more seeking the help of other tenants to exert pressure on the politicians and the mandarins in the Treasury to have this unfair burden removed from Scotland's councils.

Historic debt, which is an unjust imposition on remaining council tenants, must be removed. Removing

this burden would solve virtually all our investment problems in one act. Audit Scotland say writing off this debt would be at no cost to government, being a transfer within government. Huge amounts of money would be released to allow councils to invest in their housing stock with the knock on effect to our economy. There are no good financial reasons for denying debt write off.

STO is urging tenants across Scotland to support the campaign by lobbying their politicians, writing to the Chancellor and the UK Treasury demanding the removal of the debt which stands at £2.2bn.

Tenants can also sign our online petition at:-

[www.scottishtenants.org.uk](http://www.scottishtenants.org.uk)

## Its Time to Build Council Housing

The Times newspaper announced on Thursday 30 January 2009 that Gordon Brown had ordered thousands of new council houses.



and insecurity of the market. Council housing is the most cost effective and democratic system in place with which to meet the present housing crisis.

## Community Planning without the Community

Did you ever wonder what Community Planning is? How it is planned, who planned it and who is it for? Then wonder no more. Just contact your local government offices and they will be only too eager to tell you what they have been doing on your behalf and all about how they have planned your community.

They have lots of glossy productions that will inform you about how they have been in concert with the Scottish Government, the Fire Service, Health Authorities, the Police Service and every other authority you can think of. Single Outcome Agreements have been published and Community Planning documents have been produced telling you all you need to know about Community Planning.

At this point you may be wondering how your community may benefit from

### ***...Time to build more council housing***

Gordon Brown said “ today let me be clear: if local authorities can convince us that they can deliver quickly-and-cost-effectively – more of the housing that Britain needs, and if local authorities can build social housing in sustainable communities that meets the aspirations of the British people in the 21st century, then we will be prepared to give them our full backing and put aside anything that stands in their way”. (Gordon Brown, New Local Government Network, 29 January )

At about the same time Nicola Sturgeon was also announcing “ a massive kick start to council house building” here in Scotland.

Welcome news indeed as Gordon Brown`s statement denotes a significant change in UK government policy. However, the detail of how

this will be put into practice has still to be announced.

Nicola Sturgeon`s announcement has also still to be followed by details of what happens next. In other words, how will it be funded? Now that the political commitments have been made, actions have to follow to make the words reality.

Scotland urgently needs a big housebuilding programme to provide homes, jobs and give a boost to the economy. Investing in a new generation of first class council homes makes urgent sense.

We want to make council housing once again the tenure of choice to stand alongside a first class National Health Service, good local schools and other public services we can be proud of. We need council housing to provide an alternative to the instability

all this Community Planning and you may also be wondering how your local community could get involved, especially since the words say; Community Planning.

Further questioning may get you to the point where you are invited to take part in the Community Plan that has been drawn up for your area.

It is also at this point that realisation may dawn that you must have missed much of the planning for your Community Plan and that you may not entirely agree with what has been planned for you and your community.

This, it will become clear, is a futile reaction, as Community Planning has already been agreed while you have been slumbering or, more likely, were too heavily involved in your community to notice.

Failure to see through closed doors and into Council offices will not serve as an excuse.

The process can not be rearranged to suit you.

Just as in the regeneration game, you will be contacted when they want you to move your goods and chattels out to help them with their Community Planning.

## Time to Get Back to Basics for Tenants!

*Civil servants should not be leading policy debates!*

Recent events at Westminster have called into question much of the political systems presently in place in Britain and have led to calls for constitutional and political change at the heart of government.

Critics say we need a root and branch reform of the way government works in order to save our democracy from a descent into chaos.

Criticisms have also been levelled at the rise of the managerial style over the past few decades where bureaucrats increasingly lord it over how things are run leaving a huge democratic deficit in our communities.

Calls have gone up for organisational and behavioural change so as to re-engage civil society. However the STO believes that these changes need to extend beyond the walls of Parliament and down to grass roots level and into how government actually engages with communities.

This is important as over many years the bureaucrats have tried to lead communities

in the direction they wanted communities to go and there is a debate to be had about the need to get back to basics where tenants and others should be engaged on their own terms and not those of government or its officials.

Recent Scottish Government consultations say next to nothing about tenant participation which we believe is a glaring omission given the comments about a new regulatory system working for tenants interests.

Criticism is already being directed by tenants at the intrusive involvement of civil servants in debates that tenants in the regional networks are having on housing policy matters. STO believes that civil servants should not be within miles of these debates and supports the tenants who are saying that "it is time to get back to basics" in our tenants groups, where tenants run their own debates without government officials present, leading discussions.

The Scottish Tenants Organisation say that it is totally unacceptable for civil servants to be present when tenants are discussing housing issues among themselves.

It is time to get back to basics and get civil servants out of the tenants movement.

Tenants can run their own affairs.

# Scottish Tenants Organisation

## Tenant Participation Initiative

The Scottish Government has issued a number of consultation documents on housing since they were elected in 2007. Tenant participation gets very little mention in any of them but the Government seem set on increased powers for the Scottish Housing Regulator which, in some circumstances, they claim, will mean more regulation in tenants interests. The Government also intend producing a Scottish Social Housing Charter to back up the new regime.

This all may seem on the face of things likely to prove beneficial for tenants, however it also throws up questions over the intentions and the outcomes of the new system.

Firstly, what are tenants interests and how will the Government define them? Secondly, will tenants be given the opportunity to organise together independently and agree their own definitions of tenants interests? Or, will the Government rely on their usual market research techniques which according to the Housing ( Scotland ) Act 2001 are insufficient as a means of gauging tenant opinion? ( see Guidance to the Act ).

Tenants would do well to be wary of a regime which is visited on them from above and which may not necessarily be based on a tenants agenda.

The Scottish Tenants Organisation believe that it would be in tenants interests to take the initiative on tenant participation and develop their own thoughts and opinions on what should be included in any charter or regulatory function.

We have asked the Tenants Information Service for a discussion on the issue in the hope of jointly kick-starting a participation initiative.

## The STO fights for:-

1. Public investment in public owned housing. The STO will continue to campaign against stock transfer of any variety and scale, and for debt-writeoff and direct investment in improving existing council houses and building new ones. This includes the right for tenants to transfer back to council ownership.
2. An end to the removal of homes from the social rented sector through right-to-buy.
3. Replacement of schemes that subsidise home ownership (and push up house prices) with investment in public sector housing.
4. Efficient and good quality services for tenants of all tenures.
5. Housing association rents and service charges to be reduced to and held at affordable levels.

6. Controlled private rents and security of tenure, together with policies that reduce dependence on the private rented sector in favour of public housing.
7. An end to demolitions that are not supported by tenants and are not part of a programme to provide better housing for the tenants being displaced. The STO's opposition to stock transfer includes opposition to effective transfer through the demolition of council stock and its replacement with other tenures.
8. Affordable rents that are calculated so as to leave those on low incomes with enough money to afford a decent quality of life.
9. Proactive planning policies that ensure that social housing is available in good central positions and is not driven to perimeter estates.
10. Genuine tenant involvement in running their homes through independent tenant and community organisations.

**The STO represents tenants of all tenures across Scotland.**

**It is run by and for tenants.**

It negotiates with government, local authorities, housing associations, private landlords and other organisations and individuals on behalf of tenants, while remaining independent.

Scottish Tenants Organisation, Suite 633, Claymore House, 145 Kilmarnock Road, Shawlands, Glasgow, G41 3JA. | Contact:-

agahst2003@hotmail.com  
07826834116 | 01698-281488