

Scottish Monitoring Group on Housing & Homelessness

Conference, 26 February 2005

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is John Flanagan and I am the Councillor for Govan, on behalf of the people of Govan It gives me great pleasure to welcome you today to the First Annual Conference of the Scottish Housing Monitoring Group.

This venue is not only a very important building it is a valued public asset, belonging to the local community. In late 2001 an attempt was made to close the Pearce Institute. We understand that it was going to be sold off to the private sector. Well over 200 people including myself and two MSP's came to the rescue of the Pearce Institute and on being refused entry to our own building, held a demonstration on the street outside. People Power ensured that the building remained in the ownership of the people. Since 2001 there has been an ongoing programme of refurbishment. We hope to install solar panels on the roof space to not only save on

power costs but to make a contribution to a sustainable environment.

Your Conference today will hear different views from a range of speakers on the post transfer era here in Glasgow and beyond.

However I am disappointed to note from the agenda that there does not appear to be a speaker present from the GHA.

As a Glasgow City Councillor I was very much opposed to the Stock Transfer of Glasgow's Housing to the GHA and would have preferred the setting up of a Council owned, "Stand Alone Housing Company", such as the bodies established in England and Wales by the Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott. However in a devolved Scotland that option was not made available and the stock transfer became a reality.

The City Council since the stock transfer has reduced its debts by £1bn, due to the Housing debt being serviced by the Treasury.

The City Council has Councillors appointed to the GHA board to ensure democratic accountability remains.

As an elected member I have an obligation to work with the GHA to ensure the interests of my constituents who are tenants of that body. This is not always easy and I have found that local enquiries are often not responded to within a reasonable time although I have been assured that this problem will no longer occur.

There also appears to be great uncertainty for tenants in places such as the multi-storeys in Broomloan Court and so on, where the GHA will not clearly state what the future holds or when any decision will be announced regarding such properties. Last year many GHA tenants read in the Evening Times, of plans by Rangers FC to develop a large area to the South of Ibrox stadium, for a Casino, Hotel and luxury flats on land which was mainly GHA property. The press had the story before the tenants or even local councillors.

Glasgow City Council as part of its agreement to transfer the Housing Stock set out a number of criteria, one of the most important being as follows;

“The Council requires tenants to be involved after transfer in shaping locally responsive housing management, maintenance and related services”.

Tenant control at local management level with a majority of tenants on the LHO committees has been critical to the Council. It was also the wish of the City Council to see all tenants involved locally in decisions about shaping local housing services.

At the moment there are about 60 plus LHO committees in Glasgow, eager to take local control. While this is a healthy sign of local people moulding and shaping their futures, I would caution them on some of the risks of fast tracking the secondary transfer process. While the GHA is a large organisation it offers economies of scale and is able to offer cheaper refurbishment and repair work than what could be met by a large number of small independent housing associations. If there were 60 plus new housing

associations created they would have to pay 60 Directors/Chief

Executives competitive salaries in line with the going rate for such senior posts, which they do not do at present.

In order to ensure the long-term survival of the LHO committees and to make them stronger I call on all those involved to encourage

LHO committees to merge with their neighbouring counterparts

There is strength in numbers, which in itself leads to greater confidence, and more dynamic, more robust tenant led

management structures. Prior to any move to secondary transfer

the LHO committees as well as consolidating locally need to create

a federal alliance with each other to maintain the economies of

scale currently available to the GHA. As I said earlier regarding

this public asset we sit in today, PEOPLE POWER is also the way

forward for the country's future housing management.

Ladies and Gentlemen enjoy your conference.

Thank you