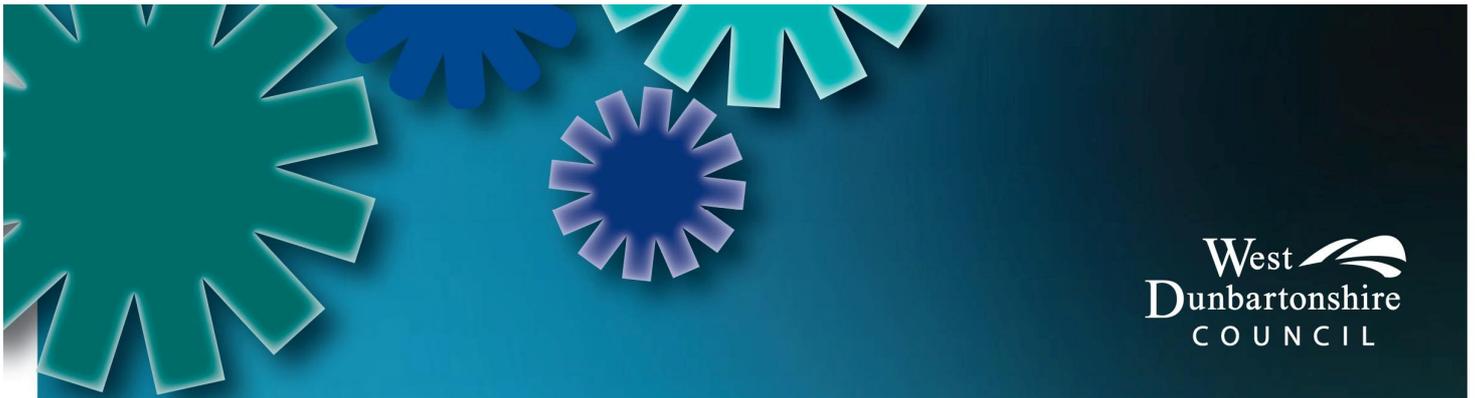




**Good Practice in Partnership Working
between Councils and RSLs**

October 2014



Introduction

Welcome to a series of regular briefings prepared by the Housing Strategy and Development team on the big issues concerning housing. These briefings will be shared with staff, tenants and elected members and keep everyone up to date with regards the ever changing policy context that we are operating within.

The Housing Strategy and Development section is responsible for:-

- Providing the statutory strategic housing authority role within the local authority area
- Supporting the development of a culture of continuous improvement in Housing services and to facilitate opportunities to excel;
- Developing and implementing effective strategies for Housing and Community Safety Services within West Dunbartonshire;
- Developing the Council's housing strategy to ensure that it supports the delivery of our strategic priorities;
- Performance management within Housing and Community Safety services; and
- Promoting effective management and the involvement of tenants across all aspects of Housing Services.

For further information on Housing Strategy and Development please telephone 01389 737889 or e-mail: housing.strategy@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Background

ALACHO (The Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers), in collaboration with the SFHA (Scottish Federation of Housing Associations) carried out a study that examined good practice in joint working between Local Authorities (LAs) and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

The study surveyed all 32 LAs and conducted 6 case studies in Aberdeenshire, Argyll & Bute, Edinburgh, Fife, Highland and Renfrewshire. The good practice emerging from the study largely comes from the case studies.

The study is related to ALACHOs involvement in the Scottish Government Housing Subsidy Working Group (HSWG) which recommended a commitment be made to progress work with the aim of identifying and sharing examples of good practice.

From December 2013 till January 2014 data was collected from LAs through Survey Monkey responses. From 32 LAs, 23 responded. The results provided the basis for identifying the 6 case study areas listed above in terms of areas where innovative or interesting partnership working was apparent through the surveys.

Visits were undertaken to these areas to meet with both LA and RSLs representatives. The three main topics discussed and reported on were:

- strategic housing planning;
- the affordable housing supply programme and
- joint working in delivering new build affordable housing.

The areas of common good practice and examples of individual good practice were identified through the surveys and case studies.

Strategic Housing Planning

Through the study it emerged that joint working between LAs and RSLs in the area of strategic housing planning is of importance in the following areas:

- the development of the Local Housing Strategy (LHS)
- Housing Need and Demand Assessments (HNDA)
- Participation by RSLs in LHS partnerships and consultation processes

The report established that the main areas of good practice in Strategic Housing Planning are as follows:

- An established partnership group(s) structure where RSLs are actively involved and contribute to the setting of strategic housing priorities
- An agreed Terms of Reference for groups and RSL sharing chairing duties
- A shared understanding of strategic housing priorities in the LA area including geographical differences in patterns of housing need
- Joint work on gathering evidence for the LHS
- Professional relationships between LA and RSL staff based on trust, good communication, openness and transparency

A good example of partnership working in strategic housing planning is from Renfrewshire where the Council has an annual practice of surveying all Housing Associations in the area. Through this the Council collects strategic information from RSLs on stock, voids, terminations, lettings, waiting lists, tenancy sustainment and welfare reform. The information is analysed and used to inform a housing trends report and contributes to the HNDA and LHS.

The Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP)

Joint working on the AHSP can be viewed in terms of planning the programme, monitoring the programme and the resources used by LAs to support RSLs in delivering affordable homes. Where joint working is clear in planning the programme, it's not as clear when it comes to monitoring it.

Planning & Monitoring

The main elements of good practice for AHSP planning and monitoring are:

- A Working Group or Development Forum with LA and RSL membership
- Clarity and transparency in the prioritisation of SHIP Projects
- Involvement of RSLs in decision making for the projects
- Consulting RSLs on the draft SHIP
- Tri-partite meetings between relevant Council, Scottish Government and RSL
- Ensuring monitoring and reporting that allows RSLs to obtain an overview of progress of the AHSP in the area
- LAs working with the Scottish Government to make joint decisions of projects that are above the benchmark.

Resources to support RSL development

The case studies demonstrated that significant financial and non-financial resources have been applied to deliver the AHSP in recent years. Good practice in this area includes the following:

- LAs to assess and consider financial resources, including 2nd homes, commuted sums, on-lending etc that could be available to support the RSL sector in delivering new homes for both the SHIP and SLP
- Where appropriate LAs to consider prioritising land disposals to support the development of affordable housing

- All LAs should consider and appraise the various SG funding and delivery mechanisms open to them to assist in delivering their AHSP
- Joint working on identifying and assembling land opportunities could be furthered by more structured involvement of RSLs

Good practice examples of the AHSP are: tri-partite meetings between the Council, Housing Associations and the Scottish Government. In Fife Council, a set of joint KPIs have been developed for both RSL and LAs new build developments.

Joint Working in Delivering New Build Affordable Homes

Local Authorities are now once again developing new build socially rented homes. The Study has looked at how RSLs and LAs can work together to deliver the AHSP.

The Study generally found that within the case study areas there was not a great deal of evidence of specific work on joint procurement between RSLs and LAs. However it may be that there are limited opportunities for this to take place.

In terms of an overall area programme, it became clear within the study that the size of the programme is a main driver, for example, some LAs may have used RSL services for the initial stages of the project but this tends to change when a LA increases the scale of the programme and develops in-house expertise.

The main elements of good practice for joint working in delivering new build affordable homes are:

- Understanding the procurement operating contexts for LAs and RSLs
- Open to considering projects that meet a range of identified housing needs from social rent to mid-market to low cost home ownership
- LAs consider the availability of skills and expertise within RSLs to assist with Council new build projects
- Ensure that the possibility of joint delivery is considered when planning the AHSP
- It is important to have more than one developing organisation delivering affordable housing in the area.

Although evident in all case study areas, Renfrewshire Council in particular provides good practice in joint delivery of affordable housing projects. They have worked with 2 housing associations recently on joint procurement and tendering activities. This has included RSLs working more closely with the strategic housing team and procurement service within the council.

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