



The Northern Light

Issue 1: October 2008

HISTORIC MEETING IN GLASGOW

On the 28th July in the Radisson Hotel in Glasgow members of the nine regional committees met with Stewart Maxwell, Minister for Communities and Sport. This was the first formal meeting of tenants' representatives and a cabinet minister.

Also in attendance were senior civil servants from the various departments within the minister's portfolio, who, although they were only there as observers got involved in informal discussions with committee members. It was apparent that the delegates relished the opportunity to approach the Minister and the proceedings were carried out in an extremely cordial manner.

During his address the Minister was quite explicit in his interpretation of the role of tenants in developing future housing policies and strategies. Mr Maxwell stressed that the Scottish Government want to use tenants expertise and knowledge in shaping national policy, and looked forward to working in partnership.

The Minister assured delegates that the Government was committed to supporting the Networks and that national policy development will only be successful if the Networks have access to

key policy makers and Ministers. The expectations of the Networks will be realised when they have a strong relationship with the Scottish Government working closely to influence future housing policy. The Minister acknowledged that the Networks would need to identify the training and requirement needs and the support for future development. In order to play a positive role in this process the Scottish Government is committed to help meet those needs and support the Networks grow and develop.



*Stewart Maxwell, Minister for Communities and Sport
with the Regional Network Chairpersons.*

Although the Minister reiterated that 25 million pounds of government funding is being provided over the next three years it was clear that this funding was only to kick start the process of new council house building, not funding for a complete programme of council new build. There was a proviso that the government will focus on councils that are well placed to progress new build programmes which acknowledges that some councils have a limited ability to borrow so the scheme might not benefit them. The government will target the resources where they will have the greatest impact.

Many delegates were delighted to hear that the government was now committed to ending the right to buy on new-build and that they will legislate to implement that commitment at the earliest opportunity. Existing right to buy entitlement will remain but a short term review will be conducted.

The Minister concluded by highlighting the voluntary commitment of the delegates and reaffirmed the governments commitment to tenant participation, to supporting Regional Networks, and promoting strong relationships between the Networks and the Scottish Government.



Stewart Maxwell, Minister for Communities and Sport



Stanley Green and Eric Allan posing questions to the Minister.



The Minister gave candid responses to all questions!

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



The Network is now up and running and the committee is coming to terms with the task of building a process which will serve the Network efficiently and achieve the aspirations of all the members of the Network. By the time this hits print we will have been going for eight months and will have held our first progress meeting on the 16th October, in the Town House, Aberdeen.

The committee now has a clearer vision of what is required to serve the members of the Network and is aware that communications to the members has been limited, but we are in the process of preparing stationery and

will soon start the development of a Regional Network web-site.

We are planning to hold 2 progress meetings throughout our first year of operation as well as our AGM and we hope that these events will give members the opportunity to find out what we have been working on and to ask questions and get involved in National policy issues. We look forward to welcoming and meeting you all.



WHERE WE ARE NOW?

The Northern Lights Regional Network Committee came into being at their inaugural Annual General Meeting on 2 February 2008, and this was after four years of hard work by many people, not least the tenants of the region. During his address to the AGM, Eric emphasised that the real work, making the views and ideas of RTOs in the region known to government, was just beginning. The Annual General Meeting accepted, with amendments, the constitution drawn up by the steering group which was formally ratified and signed at the first committee meeting.

Because the Regional Network exists to make the views of the tenants known to the government the committee decided at their first meeting that their priority was to get a communication strategy in place (this is currently being consulted on). This will keep not only the tenants informed of what is happening but also local authorities and housing associations. The views of the tenants in the region are of paramount importance, therefore to keep them informed of what is happening both regionally and nationally a formal strategy is required. This strategy will provide the opportunity for two way communications allowing all members of RTOs to not only contribute to consultations but also comment on issues raised by the committee and provide the committee with issues which the member RTOs believe should be tackled.

The committee has held three meetings to date on the 16th April, 19th June, and 14th August. The committee also concentrated on the recent report on landlords performance on tenant participation and the review of free personal and nursing care in Scotland. The committee along with the other eight regions met with Stewart Maxwell, Minister for Communities and Sport, on 28th July in Glasgow. The meeting was very productive and was welcomed by all delegates.

Although it has taken four years to get the Regional Network in place, the work of the committee has just begun. We have had our first of an ongoing programme of regular meetings with the minister and made him aware of our current concerns. These were taken on board and Mr Maxwell

promised that he would make sure his senior civil servants would be brought up to speed on the issues. The Northern Lights Network exists to make the minister and his staff aware of the concerns, ideas, and views of the tenants of the Northern Lights Network and with your help we will succeed.

The committee is still short of some members from Angus, Aberdeen, Orkney, and Shetland, and elections will hopefully be held prior to the next AGM in order to fill these places.

YOUR COMMITTEE

Eric Allan

Eric is the chair of the Northern lights Regional Network and, chair of Hazlehead Residents' Association. He is a volunteer providing assistance in marketing of the Community Food Initiative North East (CFINE), to the general public and local businesses. He is a board member of Aberdeen Heat and Power Ltd, a not for profit company dedicated to reducing, and eventually, eradicating the impact of fuel poverty in Aberdeen.

Heather Anderson

Heather has been involved in tenant participation since 2000, and eight years in she is secretary of the Forres Area Tenants Forum and the Moray Tenants conference committee. Within the Moray Council Heather attends best value meetings, the Tenant Participation Working Group, and is a member of the council's Housing Sub

Group. Heather is also the treasurer of the Northern Lights Committee and remains a member of TRAG.

Diana Foxcroft

Diana has been the secretary for FRANRA for the past four years. She became interested in Tenant Participation after a day event in Aberdeen and is now a committed activist.

Charles French

Charles has been involved in tenant participation since 1999 and, has been the chair of Lossiemouth Tenants' forum throughout this period. He is also Vice-chair of both the Northern Lights Regional Network and the Moray Tenant Core group. He has spent a number of years working with the Scottish Government, is a Tenant Assessor with the Scottish Housing Regulator and, a member of TRAG.

Lynda Spink

Lynda is new to the Tenant Participation scene, but has thrown herself wholeheartedly into the process. She is the secretary of A.R.C.H and her RTO which is registered with Angus Council and Angus Housing Association. Lynda is also involved with various tenants groups throughout Angus and is also a member of the community voices Network and TIS.



The newly elected Northern Lights Regional Network (back row, left to right): Eric Allan, Linda Spink, Stanley Green, Heather Anderson, William McArthur, Charles French; (front row, left to right): Audrey Murray (recently resigned), Helen McPherson and Diana Foxcroft.

Willie McArthur

Willie is a committed tenant activist who represents Aberdeenshire. He is currently chair of TRANG and is part of a wider tenant participation role. He is active on Aberdeenshire's Property Management, Planning for the Future Groups, and the Management Committee.

Helen McPherson

Helen has been a tenant activist for 15 years and, is totally committed to achieving the goal of tenants having a say on what goes on in their community. Her involvement with diverse groups provides her with the opportunity to Network with tenants from all over Scotland, gathering information on their experiences. She is presently a member of the Community Voices Network, St Machar Parents Group, and the Northern Lights Network.

Stanley Green M.B.E.

Stanley has been an activist for many years. He is currently treasurer of Thistle and Windmill Residents' Association (TAWRA). In the past he has been chairman of TAWRA and was a board member of Aberdeenshire Housing Partnership. He was elected to the regional committee to represent Aberdeenshire.

A WORTHWHILE DAY IN GLASGOW. A Delegates Perspective...

The Network event in Glasgow on the 28th July, was the first time that all of the members of the regional committees met to discuss current issues affecting housing in Scotland. Although the event was only one day, it was the start of all committees working together.

After registration there was the opportunity during the Networking sessions to get to know other Regional Network Committee Members from all over Scotland. It was apparent that there is a vast difference in the approach to tenant participation across different landlords and the level of involvement by tenants. I was able to inform those taking part in the Networking sessions that in Aberdeenshire tenants are able to attend and participate in tenant working groups and the Management Committee. Funding is readily available to promote tenant participation which

provides the opportunity to effectively communicate and get things done. It would have been good to have more time for Networking and perhaps next year we will plan for this.

After lunch the Minister addressed the delegates, assuring those present that the Scottish Government is fully committed to working in partnership with the regional committees to develop new strategies and policies for housing in Scotland. I was heartened by this and look forward to meeting the Minister at our next meeting as well as all the other Regional Network committee members.

USEFUL INFORMATION

If you would like to speak to us please contact us on:

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Email tilly-comm-flat@mplc.co.uk

A Regional Network Web-Site is in progress where we will publish all of our minutes, reports and provide further information on our work with the Scottish Government. Until then if you would like hard copies of our minutes please drop us a line and

we will make sure that you get them!

There are vacant places on the Regional Network Committee, if you are interested in joining us please let us know. Please note that elections will need to be held to fill places as per our constitution.

JUST FOR FUN

SEASONAL WORD SEARCH

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| AUTUMN | WINTER | OCTOBER |
| FIREWORKS | HOGMANAY | CHRISTMAS |
| ADVENT | ICE | SNOW |

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