

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Chief Executive

Council: 17 January 2007

Subject: Application to Join the Community Ownership Programme

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To inform Members of the decision by Communities Scotland that the Council's application to join the Community Ownership Programme (COP) is not acceptable in its current form.

2. Background

- 2.1** At a meeting of the Community Ownership Programme/Housing Stock Transfer Committee on 7 June 2006 to consider the Council's application to join the Community Ownership Programme, it was agreed:
- (a) That the decision on the Community Ownership Programme application be continued to a future meeting pending consideration of a report by the Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services which addresses some of the issues raised by Members during the discussion and in particular providing information on the possible inclusion of the Dalmuir/Lower Mountblow area in the Community Ownership Programme.
 - (b) That prior to the next meeting of the Committee, Members should be given a tour of the housing estates which would be affected by the proposed transfer.
- 2.2** At a reconvened meeting of the Community Ownership Programme/Housing Stock Transfer Committee on 19 June 2006 to consider the Council's original application to join the Community Ownership Programme and also to consider additional revised stock transfer proposals on the possible inclusion of the Dalmuir/Lower Mountblow area, it was agreed:
- (a) To refer consideration of the Community Ownership Programme to the next meeting of Council to be held on 28 June 2006.
- 2.3** At the Council meeting on 28 June 2006 it was agreed that:
- (a) This Council supports the Community Ownership Programme as agreed by the Council in December 2005.

- (b) Furthermore this Council supports the Early Action Fund bid for up to £20m of investment to enhance the environment for tenants and all the community.
- (c) Council recognises the significant investment in housing made by the Labour Administration through capital spending and prudential borrowing and welcomes the plans for further improvement.

2.4 A formal application for partial housing stock transfer was made to Communities Scotland on 12 July 2006.

3. Main Issues

3.1 Following a meeting with representatives of Communities Scotland on 28 July 2006, further explanatory information on technical points raised at the meeting, particularly in relation to stock option appraisal information and standard delivery plan questions, was sent to Communities Scotland on 18 August 2006. In addition, further information concerning costs was sent to Communities Scotland during October.

3.2 Feedback from Communities Scotland has now been received in the form of a letter dated 18 December 2006 from the Head of Quality Delivery (Appendix 1). Having now completed their assessment, Communities Scotland advise that the Council's application to join the programme is not acceptable in its current form.

3.3 It is considered by Communities Scotland that the Standard Delivery Plan (SDP) submitted for the stock intended to be retained does not demonstrate that the Council would achieve the required Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by 2015 in terms of investment considered necessary by Communities Scotland.

3.4 Further concerns were raised with respect to:

- (a) the options analysis and basis for selecting the preferred option of partial transfer;
- (b) the rationale for selecting the areas to be transferred and how these linked to other regeneration activities;
- (c) the extent to which the long term requirement for social housing had been assessed including the lack of an effective strategy for dealing with high rise and non-traditional properties and the location and types of housing required.

3.5 In preparing the application to the Community Ownership Programme based on a partial stock transfer, Officers maintained close liaison with counterparts within Communities Scotland, both with respect to the principle of the partial transfer and the content of the application. In particular, the points raised by Communities Scotland set out in paragraph 3.4 above were given full consideration. Consequently, the content of the letter from Communities Scotland, dated 18 December 2006, could be considered to be disappointing.

3.6 Notwithstanding the above, the Council remains under an obligation to meet the Scottish Housing Qualities Standard (SHQS) by 2015 and it is now essential that the Council reconsider its strategy with respect to attaining this standard. Communities Scotland indicate that it is open to the Council to consider submitting a further application to the Community Ownership Programme. In the first instance, it is proposed to arrange a meeting with Communities Scotland to discuss their findings and assessment of the Council's application with a view to assisting in considering all options for meeting the SHQS for Council stock by 2015. Obviously, this matter, including any reconsideration of an application to join the Community Ownership Programme would require to be the subject of a further report to the relevant Committee or the Council.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 Additional workload would be involved for staff in any strategy revision or re-configured application which may be necessary arising from 3.5 above.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 In line with 4.1 above, resources may be required to fund any necessary consultants fees should re-application to the Community Ownership Programme be agreed. At this stage it is not possible to provide details of the additional costs.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Given the decision by Communities Scotland not to accept the Council's COP application as submitted, options now require to be explored for meeting the SHQS for all Council stock by 2015.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 Members are invited to note that Communities Scotland have rejected the Council's application to join the Community Ownership Programme on the basis of a partial stock transfer.**
- 7.2 Members instruct the Acting Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services (Housing and Regeneration Services) to submit a report to a future Council meeting setting out options and recommendations with respect to a further application to the Community Ownership Programme.**

David McMillan
Chief Executive
Date: 11 January 2007

Wards Affected:	All
Appendices:	Letter from Stephen Devine of Communities Scotland Dated 18 December 2006.
Background Papers:	Report to Community Ownership Programme/Housing Stock Transfer Committee dated 7 June 2006 Report to Community Ownership Programme/Housing Stock Transfer Committee dated 19 June 2006 Report to Council dated 28 June 2006 Communities Scotland letter dated 18 December 2006
Person to Contact:	Irving Hodgson - Acting Director of Housing, Regeneration and Environmental Services (Housing and Regeneration Services), telephone: 01389 737169 John J McKerracher - Head of Housing and Property Services, telephone: 01389 737383 Jeff Stobo - Manager of Strategy, telephone: 01389 737580