



The Future of Right to Buy in Scotland: A Consultation

August 2012

Introduction

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy.

This is achieved in a number of different ways - through roadshow, round table, conference and celebratory events. Following each event a report is compiled and issued to women who attend and relevant policy and decision makers.

The SWC uses the views of women to respond to Scottish and UK Government consultation papers.

SWC Evidence Source

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events throughout Scotland, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. During these events concerns have been raised regarding a number of issues relevant to housing. This submission paper provides the views of women throughout Scotland and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to this consultation document.

Purpose of the Consultation

The Scottish Government launched its consultation on The Future of 'Right to Buy' in Scotland in 2012. The purpose of the paper is to consult on the reform of right to buy laws in Scotland.

Right to Buy was introduced in 1980 but in its current form the basis is the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, which was later amended by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010.

There can be exceptions in particular cases, but, in general terms, the changes made by the 2001 Act were introduced in a way that 'preserved' the entitlements of existing tenants and introduced 'modernised' entitlements for new tenancies that started on or after 30 September 2002. The 2010 Act kept existing entitlements, but ended the right to buy for new tenants, those returning to the sector for a break, and for new supply homes.

The Scottish Government wants more changes for a number of reasons – it is unfair that some tenants benefit from much larger discounts than others; the law in this area is too complicated and difficult to understand and the right to buy is outdated and may have no place in today's Scotland with a focus on increasing the availability of affordable housing for those who need it most.

The SWC have only responded to questions where women have provided information.

Proposal 1: Create more flexibility for social landlords to decide who should get priority for their housing

Do you agree that further restrictions to the right to buy are needed?

Yes X No

It is unfair that tenants afforded the right to buy under preserved entitlements are required to undergo a two year qualifying period, whereas tenants who are covered by the modernised right to buy entitlements must wait five years before they can purchase their homes. The system is confusing for both tenants and practitioners. All tenants should be afforded the same opportunities to purchase their homes if that policy is agreed.

Fundamentally the right to buy scheme diminishes housing stock. In a time of recession, with changes to welfare benefits including housing benefits, it is vital that there is social housing available for those who need it most.

Q2. Do you agree with the proposal to end the right to buy altogether?

Yes X No

Overall, there is not enough social housing to meet the needs of tenants in Scotland. The right to buy scheme has been a strong contributing factor in the reduction in availability of good quality housing.

The removal of right to buy from new tenants and those returning from a break was seen as a "*positive step*". Women throughout the country believe the right to buy scheme will have a "*lasting and damaging legacy*". It has greatly reduced the availability of quality social housing, particularly in rural areas.

Quality housing stock in what are considered desirable areas has been bought under the scheme. The majority of social housing left available are flats in what are seen by many as 'undesirable' locations. Larger homes have also been purchased, which has made it increasingly difficult to house bigger families in suitable accommodation.

Continuing with right to buy under any term of entitlement would further restrict availability of suitable accommodation for women and their families.

Changes brought about by the UK Government Welfare Reform Act 2012 will also have an impact on housing availability. A 'bedroom tax' is to be imposed, whereby the amount of housing benefit a person receives may be cut if they are deemed to have a 'spare' bedroom. This will result in the need for certain types of housing being greater and if right to buy were to continue availability would further diminish.