

AWICS Scotland News

April 2017



The offices of Loreburn Housing Association in Dumfries where Adrian Waite recently presented a session of 'All You Want to Know about Scottish Social Housing Finance'

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Autumn Statement 2016 and Budget 2017

On 23rd November 2016, Phillip Hammond, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, introduced his first autumn statement. This was the first 'budget' after the referendum on the European Union that was held on 23rd June 2016.

Prior to the autumn statement, the Chancellor warned that an unprecedented level of uncertainty surrounding 'Brexit' has led to forecasts that predict slower growth for the United Kingdom and an 'eye-wateringly' large debt.

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Phillip Hammond told the BBC that:

"Many of those forecasts are pointing to a slowing of economic growth next year and a sharp challenge for the public finances. We have to maintain our credibility - we have eye-wateringly large debt, we still have a significant deficit in this country and we have to prepare the economy for the period that lies ahead. I want to make sure that the economy is watertight, that we have enough headroom to deal with any unexpected challenges over the next couple of years."

On the fiscal outlook, Phillip Hammond said that borrowing was likely to hit £68.2billion in 2016/17 (equivalent to 3.5% of Gross Domestic Product). After that he predicted that the deficit would reduce but would still be £17.2billion (0.7% of Gross Domestic Product) in 2021/22. Therefore, debt will continue to climb, rising from 84% of Gross Domestic Product in 2015/16 to 87% in 2016/17 and 90% in 2017/18. The Office for Budgetary Responsibility ascribes £59billion of extra borrowing over the next five years to changes related to the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union. It is interesting to note that a limit on debt as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product of 40% was set by Roy Jenkins when he was Chancellor in the 1960s and that this same limit was observed by Gordon Brown when he was Chancellor from 1997 to 2007.

The Autumn Statement confirmed that the government does not intend to introduce any reductions to welfare entitlements other than those that have already been announced. However, those that have already been announced are significant. The Autumn Statement included an announcement that the Universal Credit taper will be reduced from 65% to 63% from April 2017.

Until 2008, the United Kingdom government based its finances on the principle that the budget would be balanced in the long-term with deficits at times of recession balanced by surpluses during times of growth. If the United Kingdom is to avoid bankruptcy it will need to return to this policy eventually.

In August 2016, the Bank of England reduced interest rates to a record low of 0.25% and announced a programme of £70billion of quantitative easing. Now, the Autumn Statement has increased public expenditure and reduced taxation at a time when government revenues are already falling. The government was already projecting at the time of the last budget that the 2016/17 deficit would be £75billion and that total debt would increase to £1.6trillion. Total debt is now projected to increase to £2trillion.

According to the 'International Spectator', the United Kingdom's external debt as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product is now 267%. This compares with 205% in France and 194% in Greece. Looking forward, United Kingdom debt is projected to increase. Even Phillip Hammond has described this level of debt as 'eye-watering'.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will receive more money which can be spent on infrastructure projects, with each devolved administration deciding where this will be spent. This will be an increase of over £800 million for the Scottish Government, over £400 million for the Welsh Government and over £250 million for the Northern Ireland Executive.

This appears to me to be the biggest reflationary package using both fiscal and monetary measures that any United Kingdom government has ever introduced and underlines the threat to the economy caused by falling investment, exports (despite the fall in the value of sterling) and consumer demand. Whether this approach will be effective remains to be seen. However, it appears to me that it will not be sustainable in the long-term and certainly does not appear to be 'prudent'.

The government's priorities in this Autumn Statement are to reduce taxation and to increase expenditure on infrastructure – especially high profile infrastructure – but with limited emphasis on local government or social housing.

I remember attending the annual conference of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy in 2010. One of the presentations was made by Goran Persson, the former Social-Democratic Prime-Minister of Sweden from 1996 to 2006, who tackled that country's budget deficit successfully in the 1990s. He described a meeting that he held shortly after becoming Prime-Minister with American bankers with whom the Swedish government was in debt. They were insisting that Sweden reduce its expenditure on specific budgets and insisting that specific changes were made to the way education, health, welfare and other services were provided. He said that he initially felt angry that the bankers dared to make these demands but then concluded that:

"An indebted government and people have no political freedom because the markets will act independently".

In short – debtors have no sovereignty because they surrender it to their creditors. My fear is that in trying to borrow and spend their way out of this crisis, the United Kingdom government will create an even greater financial crisis in the long-term with prosperity and sovereignty being lost.

Phillip Hammond presented his first budget on 14th March 2017. Public sector debt in the United Kingdom is now close to £1.7trillion (equivalent to £62,000 for every household in the country). The government plans to borrow £52billion during 2016/17 and to continue borrowing for the foreseeable future. Borrowing now represents 87% of Gross Domestic Product and this figure is expected to increase to 89% next year. This compares with the ceiling on borrowing of 40% of Gross Domestic Product that was part of Gordon Brown's 'sustainable investment rule'. Consumer borrowing is also at record levels. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that economic growth is only being sustained because of this borrowing and that therefore it is not sustainable.

The budget confirmed that there would be a reduction of £2.9billion in the budget of the Scottish Government over ten years.

Scottish Finance Secretary, Derek Mackay MSP said that the budget would hit Scottish families and provided absolutely no detail of how the United Kingdom government plans to steady the economy in the light of Brexit. He said that:

"The Chancellor has... confirmed a real terms cut to the Scottish budget of 9.2 per cent between 2010/11 and 2019/20. While I welcome the additional Barnett consequentials... no one should think that this budget provides an end to austerity from the United Kingdom Government – in fact there is still a further £3.5billion of cuts to come.

"On top of that the Chancellor continued with the UK Government's damaging welfare cuts that will make many vulnerable and low income households worse off.

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“The real elephant in the room in this budget was Brexit. There was no mention of the UK Government’s plans to protect and grow the UK economy as the Prime Minister gets ready to trigger Article 50. This is simply not acceptable. Brexit is a real threat to people across Scotland in so many ways. The Chancellor must tell us his plans.

“We have repeatedly called on the UK Government to take action to support the Oil and Gas sector. While welcome, today’s announcement on a ‘discussion paper’ is long overdue and is not the urgent action that the industry needs.

“The Scottish Government will continue to do everything it can to boost the economy, tackle inequality and provide high quality public services but today’s UK budget does little to support those aims.”

I have written a briefing paper on the Autumn Statement and its implications for housing and local government that can be downloaded from: <http://awics.co.uk/htrack/awics.co.uk/dynam-icdata/data/docs/autumn%2520statement%25202016%2520-%2520briefing%2520paper.pdf>

Scottish Local Government Funding Settlement

The Scottish Local Government Funding Settlement was announced by Derek Mackay MSP, the Scottish Finance Secretary, in March 2017. It includes £10.426billion for local government in 2017/18.

The Scottish Government considers that the overall funding settlement and package of measures will enable local authorities to maintain, and increase, the pace of reform needed to improve the vital services on which the people of Scotland depend and value.

The 2017/18 funding package consists of:

- The local government finance settlement, including an additional £160million announced in February 2017 and £120million directly to support schools to close the attainment gap
- Other sources of support available through the actual and discretionary increases in council tax income; and
- Support through Integration Authorities for Health and Social Care.

Together this package of funding provides local government with an overall potential increase in support for local services of over £400 million or 3.9%.

Local authorities have finalised their budgets, and as 11 councils chose not to increase their council tax levels by the maximum allowable (3%) the overall additional support for services in 2017/18 will amount to £383 million or 3.7%.

Derek Mackay said that:

“My priority has been to deliver a financial settlement that councils can accept in order that we can pursue shared priorities which will improve outcomes for local people. This settlement supports the delivery of education in our schools and efforts to close the attainment gap, it supports local investment in roads and improving our infrastructure, backs community services and helps support social care services.

“Alongside additional funding for health and social care integration, including payment of the living wage, this Government has given local authorities a fair deal by providing a potential increase in services of more than £400 million.

"I welcome the acceptance of Scotland's local authorities to this financial settlement, which is firmly focused on our joint priorities to deliver sustainable economic growth, protect front-line services such as education and social care, and continued support the most vulnerable in our society."

The Councils with the largest increases in funding are: North Ayrshire (9.6%), Dundee (6.3%), East Lothian (5.3%), Perth & Kinross (5.1%) and Stirling (5.1%).

Increased Funding for Affordable Housing in Scotland

The Scottish Government announced major investment in rented homes and support for home ownership in March 2017.

Over £590million will be made available for 2017/18 to increase the supply of affordable homes in Scotland. Councils across the country will share £422million to deliver more affordable homes in their local communities. The remaining investment will fund national schemes, including support for first time buyers and increasing rural and island housing. The total budget is an increase of £18million compared with 2016/17.

The Scottish Government's extra homes pledge is expected to support, on average, 14,000 jobs a year in construction and other related industries over the next five years.

Announcing the funding on a visit to Link Housing Association's new development in Edinburgh – where 161 city centre homes are being built for social and mid-market rent and shared equity, supported by £7.3million from the Scottish Government – Communities Secretary Angela Constance said:

"A good supply of affordable homes is vital to ensuring everyone has an equal chance of getting on in life. That is why it is key to this Government's commitment to tackling poverty, reducing inequality and building strong local communities. It also boosts the economy by supporting 14,000 jobs right across the country."

"We're determined to increase and accelerate housing supply – working in partnership with councils and housing associations to deliver quality homes to fit local needs."

"We are committed to delivering at least 50,000 new affordable homes over this Parliament backed by £3 billion. This major and increased investment for 2017/18 that I'm announcing today supports our ambitious commitment."

Link Housing Association's development at City Park, Edinburgh, is being built to the greener homes standard and is a joint development between the Link Group and J Smart & Co. 161 units are being delivered over three phases – funded through £7.3 million from the Scottish Government's Affordable Housing Supply Programme. There are also an additional 40 subsidised homes for private sale on the site too.

Shelter Scotland publishes a Local Manifesto for Homes

Elections for all members of Scotland's 32 local authorities will be held on 4th May 2017. In view of this, Shelter Scotland has published a local manifesto for homes and is urging candidates to be bold on housing or risk widening inequality.

The Local Manifesto for Homes includes demands aimed at boosting the supply of affordable homes, strengthening the housing safety net, improving renting and ensuring housing is recognised as key to achieving a fairer Scotland. The manifesto is asking politicians to commit to four key aspirations:

- Deliver a home for everyone in Scotland
- Meet the needs of every homeless person in Scotland
- Make renting right
- Put housing at the heart of social justice and tackling child poverty

In support of its local elections manifesto, the housing and homelessness charity is holding housing hustings across Scotland between 6th and 20th April.

Graeme Brown, Director of Shelter Scotland, told the 'Scottish Housing News' that:

"Our Local Manifesto for Homes complements our current national campaign Homelessness: Far from Fixed which highlights the unacceptable situation of homelessness in Scotland today. At the heart of our manifesto and our campaign is the need for a home for everyone in Scotland. We are challenging all local election candidates, from all parties, to sign-up to both our manifesto for homes and our campaign call for a new national homelessness strategy to better tackle and prevent homelessness in Scotland.

"We know that housing is a priority for many people in Scotland and that's why we're organising local election hustings in our four largest cities to give people a chance to ask representatives from each of the main parties what they will do if elected to finally fix homelessness and bad housing in their local area."

Meanwhile, the Scottish Government has announced that it will make £590million available to increase the supply of affordable homes in Scotland. This is an £18million increase on last year's budget. The 32 Scottish councils that administer the scheme will share £422million of grant between them and the remaining £168million will fund national schemes, including support for first-time buyers and increasing rural and island housing. The Scottish Government has committed to delivering 50,000 affordable homes – 35,000 for social rent – by the end of the parliament in 2021.

Update on Welfare Reform

The Department for Work & Pensions published its guidance for the removal of entitlement to housing benefit for people aged under-21 last Friday and this guidance is now in force. It means that under-21s on Universal Credit will no longer be eligible for housing support.

The policy has been criticised for assuming that people aged under-21 always have the option of living with their parents. In fact, there are many reasons why this may not always be the case. It has been calculated by 'Inside Housing' that 11,400 claimants could be affected.

The guidelines therefore detail a series of exemptions, including young people for whom it is inappropriate to live with their parents or have responsibility for children. However, young people will be required to prove these circumstances to qualify for the exemption.

The guidelines only apply to new claimants. Current claimants will not be affected. The changes apply across the United Kingdom.

Many in the sector have warned that the benefit cut will increase homelessness and make it difficult for young people to find landlords. It will have implications for young people and for local authority and housing association landlords that provide accommodation for young people.

Angela Constance MSP, Scotland's Secretary for Social Security told 'The Herald' that:

"It is very disappointing... that the UK Government has insisted on pushing through these... changes to housing benefit. This is hugely dismissive of the difficulties young people in Scotland face in obtaining and keeping a tenancy. We have been steadfast in our commitment to retain housing benefit for 18-to-21-year-olds and despite our repeated attempts to agree a solution with the Department for Work and Pensions and our calls for a delay, the UK Government's change in policy will clearly lead to a rise in the level of homelessness among that age group.

"We are absolutely committed to ensuring that every young person can access the support they need. We are working with Cosla to extend the Scottish Welfare Fund to provide a safety net to young people because we don't want to see anyone without a roof over their head. However, this is not a long-term solution."

The future funding of supported housing is currently being considered at a joint meeting of the Parliamentary Communities & Local Government and Work & Pensions Committees. The government is proposing to end the current system where housing support costs are generally met through housing benefit to one where housing benefit will be capped at local housing allowance rates and any additional funding that is required for supported housing will be funded by local authorities. Evidence was given this week by David Orr, Chief Executive of the National Housing Federation who warned that this may result in lower funding in low-value areas:

"If you are already in an area of high value local housing allowance you're almost certainly also in an area of high business rate and high council tax take. If you're in an area like Hull where the local housing allowance is already low, most of the council tax is going to be in band A for property and business rate take will not be sufficient, so by what means will the money be siphoned from the high-value local authorities to the low value?"

It is also becoming clear that the government's decision to freeze certain benefits will have a more significant impact than was first expected. With inflation increasing mainly due to the falling value of sterling the real reduction in the value of benefits becomes greater with serious implications for claimants.

In March 2017, the 'Guardian' reported that the poorest families in the United Kingdom are already struggling to put food on the table; while the Chartered Institute of Housing published research that showed that housing is 'almost totally out of reach' for young single people. Poverty is becoming more widespread.

Homelessness in Scotland

Shelter Scotland has published research in a report entitled 'Funding Homeless Services in Scotland' that shows that the standard of accommodation and the quality of services provided for homeless people are under threat from funding cuts to Scotland's councils. Shelter Scotland is therefore calling on the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to find new ways of funding and protecting homelessness services after the study showed some local authorities were concerned that the standard of accommodation used for housing homeless people could deteriorate due to lack of repairs and maintenance caused by budget constraints. It was also found that there was little evidence of recent investment in the quality of accommodation for homeless people.

United Kingdom government changes to the way temporary accommodation is funded – by being linked to the Local Housing Allowance from 2017 – will also mean a significant reduction in the money local authorities receive from central government to pay for temporary accommodation (see above).

The research showed how local authorities are concerned that further funding cuts will impact their ability to maintain personalised homelessness services developed under the Housing Options approach.

The independent research by Anna Evans Housing Consultancy, and commissioned by Shelter Scotland, also found that some local authorities think the reduction in homelessness applications seen over the last decade has now plateaued and they fear the number of people making homelessness applications will begin to rise again.

Shelter Scotland said the report shows that while many local authorities have done what they can to protect the funding of homelessness services, the fact they are now paid from councils' General Fund means they aren't protected from future swingeing cuts.

Graeme Brown, director of Shelter Scotland, said that:

"The provision of accommodation and homelessness services together provide a vital safety net that helps people in crisis. But if services are cut, more homeless people will fall through that safety net. If nothing changes then something has to give. Our fear is that, due to underfunding, the quality of accommodation for homeless people and the services they receive will deteriorate, in effect, failing some of the most vulnerable people in our society at the very time they most need help.

"Homelessness can happen to anyone. It's unthinkable that we now face a situation where much of the progress made in Scotland over the last decade to combat the human tragedy of homelessness could be undone. We can't let that happen. A way must be found to stop the cuts and maintain and build our homelessness services. The Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities need to find a new funding model that recognises and supports the full cost of providing good quality temporary accommodation and delivering world-class homelessness services. Councils must be supported so they can continue with their frontline person-centred services – not just their statutory duties. It's vital that we find some practical and creative ways of tackling this very worrying situation. Politicians also need to develop a new National Homelessness Strategy for Scotland to bring a joined up approach to tackle this issue head-on and focus on the root causes of homelessness."

Scottish Housing Regulator's Approach to Regulation

In May 2016 the Scottish Housing Regulator published a summary of its work plan for 2016/17 that will see the organisation focus on its three priorities of good services, financial health and good governance. According to the summary, specific areas of work will include planned regulatory engagement; Charter data collection, analysis and reporting; and involving tenants.

The Regulator's engagement with landlords will see it:

- Oversee statutory interventions and publish a report on each when they conclude
- Put in place a new reviews and appeals procedures from April
- Publish reports on the thematic inquiries started in 2015
- Engage with representative groups and publish information on 'how we intervene'
- Put in place and publish its selection panel for special managers by October
- Carry out thematic work on governance and on landlords' delivery of new homes
- Start its annual risk assessment and publish information on the risks it will focus on in November.

The Regulator will involve tenants in its work through its National Panel of Tenants and Service Users, its tenant liaison group and by working with its new tenant advisors. This work will aim to empower tenants by providing helpful and easy-to-use information on their landlord's performance that helps them to compare this with other landlords. It will also maintain the confidence of public and private funders which the organisation says is crucial for access to competitive investment in social housing.

On the Scottish Social Housing Charter, the Regulator will:

- Collect performance data from all social landlords on its digital portal by May
- Publish landlord reports and update the online comparison tool in August
- Carry out 10 data accuracy visits by October
- Publish its national Charter report by February
- Contribute to the Scottish Government's review of the Charter.

It also plans to publish:

- a refreshed consultation and involvement strategy in May
- updated tenant satisfaction methodology in June
- a new factsheet for tenants on significant performance failures in July
- outcomes from its national panel of tenants and service users
- data tables on the finance of RSLs by November
- its analysis of loan portfolios and the financial health of RSLs by March.

Working with reduced resources, the Regulator has also laid out plans to cooperate with the Scottish Government in its response to the Office for National Statistics review of the classification of registered social landlords and to move office by December.

Michael Cameron, Chief Executive, said:

"Successful social landlords deliver good outcomes for tenants, homeless people and others who use their services. Our work helps to achieve this by focusing on our three priorities: good services for tenants and other service users and landlords' financial health and good governance. This year we will empower tenants by providing easy to use information on their landlord's performance. We will also work to maintain the confidence of public and private funders that is crucial for landlords' access to competitive investment."

“We are a smaller Regulator, having had a significant reduction in our funding from 2016/17. We will continue to prioritise our use of resources to protect the interests of tenants and service users, while doing less of some things and stopping others.”

In April 2016, the Scottish Housing Regulator published a summary of its annual risk assessment of local authorities and registered social landlords. The Regulator’s report sets out the main themes of its engagement across both registered social landlords and local authorities in a single report. It details the landlords the Regulator will engage with and the reasons for this engagement. The Regulator will engage with 51 registered social landlords and nineteen local authorities in 2016. Michael Cameron, Chief Executive said:

“Our annual regulatory assessment drives our risk-based regulatory approach and our regulatory engagement. This year, we’re engaging with fewer landlords than last year having gained assurance that a number are managing the risks they face. We know landlords are continuing to face risks and challenges, particularly around rents, development, budgetary pressures and homelessness. We will monitor and assess emerging risks as we engage with landlords to gain the assurance we need that the interests of tenants and other service users are protected.”

The Regulator’s risk assessment includes a review of financial health and governance for registered social landlords, service and stock quality for both registered social landlords and local authorities’ homelessness services. This takes account of landlords’ performance against the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

The Scottish Housing Regulator has published its new plans for continuing to involve tenants and service users in its work. According to the plans, the Regulator will use a variety of initiatives, many of which build on existing activities, to help it understand tenants’ and service users’ views. It will continue to work with its National Panel of Tenants and Service Users. Established in 2013, the Panel now has almost 500 members and lets the Regulator hear directly about the views and priorities of a diverse range of tenants and others.

Continuing to engage with tenant representatives will also be a key part of the Regulator’s work. It will do this through its Registered Tenant Organisations’ liaison group and the nine Regional Networks. It will also speak with bodies who work on service users’ behalf.

The Regulator will also involve tenants and others in its regulation activities, bringing a direct service user perspective. Building on the work of its tenant assessors, it will shortly begin working with its new pool of independent, volunteer tenant advisors. Tenant advisors will speak directly to tenants and test landlords’ services.

Iain Muirhead, the Regulator’s director of strategy and communications, said:

“Our plans for the next two years build on our work since 2012. We’re very grateful to all the tenants and service users who have taken the time to contribute to our work. That includes tenant organisations, members of our National Panel and tenant assessors. It’s important that we understand their perspectives and priorities. And involving tenants and service users directly in our regulation helps make sure we stay focused on the issues that matter most to them.”

Housing News around Scotland

Glasgow City Council's Executive Committee has agreed a new Housing Strategy for the City for 2017 to 2022 that is founded on the two main themes of increasing the supply and improving the quality of housing available to Glasgow's people and improving access to appropriate housing for the city's people. The strategy envisages that 15,000 new homes are to be built in Glasgow over the next five years.

The strategy includes targets for new build housing, the promotion of area regeneration and actions for maintaining and improving Glasgow's existing housing stock. It will be used to inform future housing investment and related services in the city. Within the two main themes of the strategy are six strategic priorities and fifty key actions to be achieved by 2022. The strategic priorities of the strategy are as follows:

- Promote area regeneration and enable investment in new build housing;
- Manage, maintain and improve our existing housing stock;
- Raise management standards in the private rented sector;
- Tackle fuel poverty, energy inefficiency and climate change;
- Improve access to housing across all tenures; and
- Promote health and wellbeing.

Glasgow has a population (2015) of over 606,000 living in over 297,000 homes, 44 per cent of which are owner-occupied, 36 per cent are socially-rented and 20 per cent privately-rented. The council consulted extensively with a range of organisations, with sixteen consultation events held and five pieces of research commissioned, all of which helped to help shape the final strategy document. The strategy will now be submitted to the Scottish Government.

A positive report on housing conditions has been approved by the Housing & Health Committee at Perth & Kinross Council. The committee also agreed proposals for a nil increase to housing rents in 2017/18 to allow a new rent model to fully bed in.

Significant investments in council houses in Perth and Kinross over recent years has seen the percentage of council houses achieving the Scottish Housing Quality Standard reach an all-time high. Perth & Kinross Council is committed to achieving the Scottish Housing Quality Standard requirements for tenants, and is delivering the standard through a sustained programme of housing investment and improvement, including improvements to the external fabric of buildings, upgrades to central heating, kitchens, bathrooms, double-glazing and energy efficiency works.

This investment programme has led to almost 95% of council housing stock meeting or exceeding the standard as at 31st March 2016. Of those that were not compliant, fewer than 0.5% of the overall stock, a total of 36 houses, were recorded as failing the standard.

The remaining non-compliant properties are a combination of where elements of the standard are 'exempt' because the work cannot be carried out for technical reasons (0.2%), and where work has been prevented in common areas where private owners refused to participate (5%).

Following extensive consultation with tenants, members of the Housing & Health committee last year approved a new rent structure model for council house rents. The new model moves to full implementation from April 2017, and will result in higher or lower rents for many Council tenants with some of these adjustments being significant.

Collaboration between Lochaber Housing Association and Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust has delivered twenty new affordable homes across four Lochaber communities.

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After listening to the needs of local communities the new homes are located in Kilchoan, Lochyside (Fort William), Mallaig and Strontian. This ambitious development programme forms part of an agreement between Lochaber Housing Association and Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust to build forty new homes per year. Development is currently on-going in several areas in Lochaber to invigorate the area by offering a diverse range of housing tenures to strengthen the communities.

Lochaber Housing Association provides social rented homes and low-cost home ownership properties to complement Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust's Rent to Buy Scheme and self-build options. Occupants are soon due to move into the properties built next to the High School in Strontian. This is the first stage of an inspiring wider development that is strongly supported by the Sunart community following a master planning exercise for the larger site. The development also includes Scotland's first community owned primary school being driven forward by the Strontian Community School Building Group Ltd and currently project managed by Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust.

Scottish Minister for Housing Kevin Stewart said:

"I am delighted that the strong working relationship between Lochaber Housing Association and Highland Small Communities Housing Trust, along with their construction partners, has resulted in such positive outcomes. The Scottish Government encourages the use of different housing models and these practical examples of rural housing, backed by our affordable housing supply programme, low-cost home ownership scheme, as well as our Highland Rent to Buy Scheme and self-build pilots, has given people who might not otherwise have been able to afford their own homes the opportunity to get on the housing ladder. Last year we also launched a £25million Rural Housing Fund which will also provide an estimated 500 new affordable homes for Scotland in rural areas over the next three years by helping with the building of new homes and the refurbishment of existing buildings."

Dundee City Council has approved plans to build 163 homes on the site of two former multis in the city's Hilltown area. The development by Robertson Partnership Homes, on behalf of the council and Hillcrest Housing Association, will see 123 flats and forty houses built on land where the Bucklemaker and Butterburn Court blocks stood on Derby Street before being demolished in 2013. Five of the houses will be fully detached with the remaining 35 homes terraced. Twelve of the flats will be two storeys high with another eighteen listed as supported accommodation.

David Zwirlein, Hillcrest director of development and new business, said:

"It's exciting to be part of the transformation for Dundee's Hilltown so we are delighted that this project has been given the green light. Not only will the homes be good quality and affordable, they will be energy efficient and meet a range of housing need. A mixture of flats and houses as well as social and mid-market rent means that we will deliver a development which addresses the shortage of affordable rented housing in the city."

Editorial Note

The AWICS Scottish News is published by AWICS Limited. This edition was edited by Adrian Waite. Articles are written by Adrian Waite unless otherwise stated. However, the views expressed are not necessarily those of Adrian Waite or AWICS unless expressly stated.

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AWICS Survey

We would be grateful if you could take part in our survey of our clients, website users, newsletter readers or others with an interest in local government or housing. If you would like to please visit <http://form.jotform.me/form/50612526489459>

AWICS Seminars:

Our next seminars are as follows:

- All You Want to Know about Service Charges in Social Housing
 - Leeds – 17th May 2017
- All You Want to Know about Housing Association Finance.
 - London – 24th May 2017
 - Leeds – 24th October 2017
- All You Want to Know about Welsh Social Housing Finance.
 - Cardiff - 6th June 2017
- Developments in Local Authority Housing Finance in England.
 - London – 14th June 2017
 - Leeds – 5th July 2017
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Finance
 - London – 27th June 2017
 - Leeds – 21st November 2017
- All You Want to Know about Service Charges in Social Housing in Wales.
 - Cardiff – 12th September 2017
- All You Want to Know about Local Authority Housing Finance.
 - London – 27th September 2017

Information about all our seminars can be found at: <http://awics.co.uk/seminars2017>

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About 'AWICS'

'AWICS' is a management consultancy and training company. We specialise in providing support in finance and management to clients in local government and housing in England, Scotland and Wales. We are well known for our ability to analyse and explain complex financial and management issues clearly.

Our mission statement is 'Independence, Integrity, Value'. We therefore provide support to clients from an independent standpoint that is designed to help the client to achieve their objectives. We are passionate about working with the utmost integrity. We believe that we offer the best value for money that is available today!

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For more information about our services and us please visit our website at www.awics.co.uk or contact Adrian Waite at Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk. Services that we offer include:

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