

# AWICS Scotland News

## May 2015

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**Perth & Kinross Council offices. AWICS has provided in-house training for the Council.**

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### Introducing the AWICS Scotland News

Welcome to our new e-newsletter: The 'AWICS Scotland News'. This e-newsletter is intended to provide news about public services, especially housing and local government, in Scotland.

While our existing e-newsletters, the 'Public Services News' and 'AWICS Housing News' will continue to include articles of interest to people in Scotland, I think there is a need for a separate e-newsletter for Scotland to reflect the unique political, legislative, regulatory, social and economic situation in Scotland and the specific issues that arise.

I hope that you enjoy reading the e-newsletter. If any reader would like to give me feedback on this newsletter, or would like to submit an article or letter for publication, please contact me at [Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk](mailto:Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk).

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### Scottish Housing Regulator: Global Accounts

The Scottish Housing Regulator recently released the global accounts for the past year. The analysis of the accounts for 160 registered social landlords shows a 6.8% decrease in the surplus to £96.6million for 2013/14. The aggregated net surplus therefore fell below the levels of 2009. The decrease was attributed to an increase in maintenance and depreciation charges across the sector.

The highlights of the report are:

- Cash generated from operations, a better measure of financial performance than net surplus, rose for the third year in succession. In 2013/14, providers generated £3 for every £1 spent.
- The Scottish Housing Regulator identified a number of risks that providers currently face: pension funding, rent affordability, welfare reform, the implementation of new accounting rules, and uncertainty about the outlook for inflation.
- The analysis revealed that most providers planned for an acceleration in inflation. They also projected an increase in rent beyond the rate of inflation as well as increases in staffing levels. The Scottish Housing Regulator identified that providers should consider the scenarios of stalling inflation, too.
- Possibly, due to uncertainty in the sector, spending on new build activity fell to £610million, a five year low. The percentage of grant funded new build remained low at 38%.
- Income from the sale of properties stayed constant at around £37million. The Scottish Government is ending the 'Right to Buy' for tenants from 1st August 2016. Therefore it is possible that income from sales of homes will increase during 2015/16.

The accounts show that housing associations generated more than £3 from operations for each £1 paid in interest, a strong cash position that will be a source of assurance to lenders and other stakeholders. But the regulator has cautioned that the need to keep rents affordable for tenants, coupled with uncertainty over the outlook for inflation, mean that careful management and effective governance are more important than ever.

The regulator urges landlords to speak to lenders about the implementation of 'Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 102'. Changes to accounting practice will make it difficult to calculate some of the accounting ratios that underlie lender covenants on a consistent basis.

The regulator also highlights the growing cost of pension provision. There has been an increase of 40% in the number of employees in receipt of pension provision. The Regulator stressed that the forthcoming revaluation of the Scottish Housing Associations Pension Scheme (SHAPS) might increase costs still further. It urged housing associations within SHAPS to have plans in place to manage any increase in costs.

Ian Brennan, Director of Regulation at the Scottish Housing Regulator, said:

*"The aggregate accounts show a healthy surplus and an increase in cash generated from operations. This indicates a sector that is coping with current economic challenges. Many registered social landlords have scaled back their projected rent increases, but the uncertain outlook for inflation will create additional challenges around affordability. Registered social landlords need to understand the impact that a period of low inflation would have upon their business plans and test their compliance with lender covenants in these circumstances."*

The Scottish Housing Regulator, which has recently also published a new corporate plan, said that it would continue its efforts to 'safeguard and promote the interests of tenants, homeless people, and others who use social land lords' services'. The Scottish regulator hit a milestone last year when it published its first analysis of performance for registered social landlords in Scotland as well as its first landlord reports.

Kay Blair, the Chair of the Scottish Housing Regulator, said:

*"Our vision is of successful social landlords delivering good outcomes for tenants, homeless people and others. We will contribute by regulating effectively, focusing on our three priorities: good services, financial health and good governance."*

*"We recognise that landlords are operating in an increasingly challenging environment. We will focus on the things that matter and impact most on tenants, like value for money and rent affordability. I look forward to working constructively with landlords, tenant organisations and all of our stakeholders, recognising our shared goal to deliver for tenants, homeless people and others who use social landlords' services."*

The Scottish Housing Regulator is also focusing on Value for Money from a tenants' perspective, with Michael Cameron, their Chief Executive, writing in 'Inside Housing' that:

*"Measuring value for money is not always easy, not least because some factors in the determination can be difficult to measure. It might be relatively straightforward to measure some of the economic definitions, such as return on investment, but measuring social value or the value tenants place on different levels of service quality is more difficult. So, as with defining value for money, judgment is needed when measuring value for money."*

*"Our statutory objective is to safeguard and promote the interests of tenants and others who use the services of social landlords. This has to be the starting point for our development of a regulatory consideration of value for money."*

*"We will view value for money from a tenant perspective, with a close relationship to landlords' achievement of the charter outcomes and the level and affordability of the rent tenants pay. This link to rent affordability builds on our call this time last year for a national discussion on the sustainability of above-inflation rent increases."*

*"That's not to say that landlords should limit their consideration of value for money to this perspective; It is perfectly valid, and even necessary, for landlords to consider value for money from a range of perspectives, and landlords and policy makers may need to consider each of those perspectives in different settings."*

*"We know there's quite a bit of work going on in Scotland around initiatives to consider value for money in social housing. We will keep a close eye on these as we develop our regulatory position over the next year. We will also engage directly with tenants to ensure that their perspectives on value for money are to the fore in the regulatory position we adopt."*

*"So, we are likely to see the emergence of a distinctly Scottish regulatory approach to value for money that is firmly rooted in our statutory objective, has a clear line of sight to tenants, and builds on the work others are currently doing."*

Issues raised in the global accounts and regarding value for money will be considered at the AWICS seminar and workshop: 'All You Want to Know about Scottish Social Housing Finance' (for details please see below). The Scottish Housing Regulator's analysis of the finances of registered social landlords for 2014 can be downloaded here: [link](#)

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## **Adult Social Care and Health integration**

The Scottish Government's plans for health and social care integration are expected to take effect this year. Its implementation is based on the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act that the BBC has described as 'the most substantial reform to the National Health Service in a generation'.

The wide-ranging changes address the issues raised by the growing number of older patients with specialist, multi-service needs and the generally limited availability of health resources. The law requires local authorities and the National Health Service Board in Scotland to work together, sharing responsibility and budgets. Unique to the Scottish approach is the set-up of local 'integration authorities' that will emerge as local points of contact for the integration efforts. It is estimated that 60% of health board budgets and 72% of local authority social care budgets will be handed over and pooled in new integration authorities. Integration authorities are jointly accountable to the local council and health board and draw on a jointly agreed budget that can include integrated budgets for adult social care, primary health, community health and some aspects of acute health care.

In Scotland, the Highlands have been at the forefront of the reform to social services. Highlands Council had integrated health and social care budgets since 2012, when it decided to use the 'lead-agency model' in which the National Health Service Board took charge of adult social care, while the council took charge of children's services. It was considered that the clear delegation of responsibilities would be a better fit than to have a central agency. In turn, the local council transferred 1,400 social workers and a budget of £88million to the local National Health Service Board.

Councillor Drew Hendry, the Scottish Nationalist Leader of the Council told the 'Holyrood' magazine that:

*"We've taken the approach of forgetting about who own the budgets and thinking about it as a public pound. I think that has borne results, but it's been quite a leap of faith for us to do that, and you can only make that leap of faith where you have genuine belief across the different organisations that you can achieve something special, and I think while there is a huge amount of work still to be done, the early signs are this is absolutely the right way to go."*

Jan Baird, the Director of Adult Care at National Health Service Highland and the Director for the Transition Project, said:

*"There is a clear line of professional leadership and the social workers who were involved in the transfer said they felt quite secure. We have since surveyed staff on the transfer and some say it is too early to decide [if the move was good for them] others said it is valuable to have more opportunity to be involved with other staff. There's been a mixed response as some staff have been more engaged in integration than others."*

Chief Social Worker at the Council Bill Alexander commented to 'Community Care' that:

*"So far most of the change has been structural with little significant change to frontline delivery. We have created the means to develop integrated teams and deliver more seamless services. While there has been a significant learning curve for both organisations we are now able to grapple with issues that we couldn't before as a single service."*

*"You need to be working to common guidance and objectives to get a consistent vision and seamless pathways. Integration is more than just joint working. That is better than separate working but there is still a lot of bureaucracy and barriers. You don't get the 100% clarity on objectives that you can only get with single governance."*

Other areas may be less open to the Highland model of transfer of budgets and staff from the local council to the National Health Service. Such transfers may result in changes to the terms and conditions in the social workers' contracts, such as a longer working week of 37.5 hours instead of the council's 35 hours. There are also issues in disconnecting social care for adults from children's services as has been highlighted by Ruth Stark, manager of the Scottish Association for Social Workers.



Information Services Scotland, part of the National Health Service Scotland, is tasked with the provision of the data and information technology to support the new scheme to establish 'understanding of the whole patient / service user pathway' on an individual patient level. Currently, relevant data is held by the Scottish Government, health boards, local authorities, and representative organisations of the third and private sectors. Information Services Scotland has identified that this results in inconsistencies in the quality and structure of the data making national comparative studies difficult and limiting local health service delivery.

It has long been considered that the integration of health and adult social care services could secure improvements in service as well as greater efficiency. However, with adult social care being provided as a mainstream local authority service and health services provided separately by the National Health Service it has proved difficult to break out of a 'silo mentality'. However, integration is now being achieved through the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act and the pioneering work at Highlands Council.

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## Devolving Welfare to the Scottish Parliament

During the Scottish Independence referendum campaign of September 2014 the United Kingdom government and the Labour Party promised increased devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament in the event of Scotland voting to remain in the United Kingdom. As a result, the Smith Commission under leadership of Lord Smith of Kelvin was founded. In November 2014, it came up with a cross-party agreement as to what a new settlement of powers with Scotland should look like. This agreement is referred to as the 'Smith Commission Agreement'. It consisted of recommendations that would strengthen the institutional role and authority of the Scottish Parliament. The agreement also included agreements on the devolving of a range of non-core policy-making powers on welfare and income tax to Holyrood. The agreement follows older recommendations published by the Institute for Public Policy Research in March 2014. In their report, the Institute for Public Policy Research concludes:

*"Devolution of some aspects of welfare would not just supplement the powers of devolved governments, but would also improve social and economic outcomes in the devolved nations and enable the formulation of more joined up public policy. This would benefit the United Kingdom as a whole."*

The devolution of powers over income tax and welfare benefits to Scotland are estimated to hand over control to £14billion in public spending. Agreed devolution of powers to Scotland include:

- **Controls over income tax and access to VAT receipts:** The Scottish parliament will gain powers to set income tax rates and bands for earnings not derived from savings or dividends. Scotland will receive most of the income tax paid by Scottish tax payers as well as half of all VAT receipts.
- **Discretionary benefit payments:** The 'devolution deal' will enable Holyrood to create new discretionary benefits in areas such as benefits for carers, disabled, or ill people; discretionary housing payments; and benefits related to the Regulated Social Fund.

However, the 'devolution deal' significantly does not include the devolution of Universal Credit that will continue to be the responsibility of the United Kingdom's Department for Work & Pensions. The Scottish Parliament will be able to set the payment schedule for claimants as well as the amount paid for housing support but will not control the actual system.

This disappointed the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations. Their Chief Executive, Mary Taylor, had previously said:

*"In our submission to the Smith Commission, we argue that if it is serious about giving Scotland substantive new powers to tackle poverty and inequality, then it must devolve the welfare system, with the tax and fiscal powers to go with it. In their efforts to reach compromise between the political parties the Commissioners may be tempted to cherry-pick elements of the welfare system - and of its financing. But there are too many complex interactions between the different welfare benefits, policies and tax allowances that pay for them.*

*"We do not want to end up with a situation like Northern Ireland where the Northern Irish Assembly has responsibility without power. If the Scottish Parliament is going to be able to fully tackle issues of poverty – ranging from long-term unemployment and child poverty to disability and fuel poverty – then the Smith Commission members must be bold and recognise that this can only be done by devolving powers over the welfare system with the financial levers to run it properly."*

While David Bookbinder, Director of the West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations added:

*"With the very strong opposition to the 'bedroom tax' in Scotland, there's probably an assumption in some quarters that if there is no devolution of the wider social security system, Scotland would happily take receipt of powers over Housing Benefit alone. But the capacity to create a fairer system would be severely limited if Housing Benefit is all we had control over. Even if we did somehow manage to create a fairer Housing Benefit system, it could be seriously undermined by punitive aspects of the rest of the welfare system such as the current, cruel approach to sanctions.*

*"If Scotland is to have genuine options for reform, it needs the flexibility and scope for trade-offs which will come with power over the full system of social security benefits".*

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations also urged a halt to the roll-out of Universal Credit which has not occurred.

Announcing the Conservative's policy settlement, David Cameron said that the 'devolution deal' represents a good balance for Scotland and the United Kingdom. He sees no need for future devolution deals. Commenting on the agreement, David Cameron said:

*"This is absolutely the vow fulfilled with every dot and comma in place. [...] Scotland spoke, we listened and here we are delivering. Now it is time for all of us to move on to the next great debate – not what the powers should be, but how they should actually be used. We need a battle of ideas about the economy, about jobs, about schools and hospitals, about the future of a great country making the most of every opportunity in front of it."*

However, Nicola Sturgeon, the Scottish First Minister, suggested that the agreement did not go far enough. She said:

*"Too much of what the Prime Minister has set out imposes restrictions on the recommended devolved powers and would hand a veto to United Kingdom ministers in key areas. For example, the proposals on welfare do not allow us to vary Universal Credit without the permission of the United Kingdom Government.*

*“That means – under the current proposals – we will not have the independence to take action to abolish the bedroom tax. [...] In these crucial areas the clauses set out today appear to be a significant watering down of what was promised by the Smith Commission and need an urgent rethink by the United Kingdom Government.”*

A survey by Ipsos MORI on behalf of BBC Scotland found some backing for Nicola Sturgeon’s position. 73% of Scottish voters thought that Holyrood should be able to increase welfare and pension payments and 71% thought that the Scottish Parliament should have full control over welfare spending.

From work that I have done providing training to Scottish local authorities and housing associations on welfare reform I am aware of the considerable concern that exists in Scotland about the implications of the United Kingdom’s welfare reforms for Scotland’s benefits claimants, local authorities and housing associations. It is also the case that it is difficult for the Scottish Government to pursue its own policies on housing (which is a devolved matter) without having control over welfare policy (which funds most of the rent received by local authorities and housing associations). The ‘devolution deal’ provides the Scottish Parliament with some scope to mitigate the effects of the United Kingdom’s welfare reforms through discretionary benefit payments but does not give it the power to develop its own welfare system.

However, given the scale of the welfare budget and the fact that it is ‘demand-led’ and therefore difficult to control, its transfer to the Scottish Parliament would probably have brought with it some significant risk.

I am sure that welfare reform will continue to be a contentious issue in Scotland.

**Adrian Waite**

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## **Scottish Land Reform**

Another important issue that causes controversy and strong emotional reactions is the Scottish Land Reform.

The Scottish context is unique in Western Europe. Even today, the distribution of land ownership still reflects the outcomes of the Scottish Reformation in 1560. Compared to elsewhere in the developed world, the ownership of private land in Scotland is far more concentrated. Of the 19.5 million acres of Scotland’s land surface, 20 landowners own one fifth and only 345 families own half of Scotland.

The larger the estate owned, the more profitable it is. Outdoor hunting games, such as the Annual Game-Bird Hunting Run, bring in many wealthy sportsmen. It was estimated that country sports contribute as much as £350million to the country’s accounts. Hunting day trips and longer stays are offered at prices such as £6,500 for a week. Additionally, subsidies, that are paid out by the size of productive land and forests work in the favour of large estates. Some lands generate additional income from tenant farmers or the establishment of large wind parks.

Land reform has been on the agenda for many years and especially since 2007 when the first Scottish National Party minority government took office. In late 2014, the new First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, proclaimed that Scottish land should ‘benefit the many, not the few’. Aileen McLeod, who moved into the new role as Environment Minister, commented on the policy goals of the administration:

*“The Scottish government’s vision is for a strong relationship between the people of Scotland and the land of Scotland, where ownership and use of the land delivers greater public benefits through a democratically accountable and transparent system of land rights that promotes fairness and social justice, environmental sustainability and economic prosperity.”*

*"If Scotland was starting afresh we would not be designing the pattern of land ownership we see today. Our aspiration is for a fairer and more equitable distribution of land in Scotland where communities and individuals can own and use land to realise their potential."*

In 2012, the Scottish Land Reform Review Group was tasked to develop recommendations for future land reform. Led by Dr. Alison Elliot, a former mediator for the Church of Scotland, the group had the broad remit to understand how communities can be given a greater share in the ownership, governance, and management of land and to help 'generate, support, promote, and deliver new relationships between land, people, economy, and environment in Scotland'.

The conclusions of the Land Reform Review Group were published in May 2014. They included 62 recommendations and some of the proposals were described as 'radical'. Recommendations included:

- **Better information provision:** The government should try to do more to increase the speed with which land is registered by title in the Scottish Land Register. Currently large parts of the Scottish mainland are still patchy. At various points, the report calls for better mapping and monitoring of land ownership.
- **Limitations to ownership:** Limiting land ownership to individuals and or organisations registered within the European Union to enhance traceability of ownership. It also suggests prohibiting inheritance of all of a large property to a single heir.
- **Sell off in the community interest:** Councils should be given the ability to force the sell-off of derelict private-owned plots should this be 'in the public interest'. The report also recommends more decision rights be given to 'communities' and called on the government to establish legislation that defines a community's ability to act by law.

Alison Elliot commented on the recommendations as follows:

*"What we need to see is policy and decision-making taking greater account of the public interest, opening up land ownership to more people and giving communities more influence over land use."*

*"Our recommendations aim to move that process forward with a range of radical measures that we hope will inspire the Scottish Government, and everyone with an interest in Scottish land, to seize the opportunity and improve how we deal with this most important resource."*

In December 2014, the reform proposals were put up for consultation. In total, the consultation received 1,292 responses of which 1,086 are published online including 906 comments from individuals and 180 from organisations. The responses were largely positive.

In response to the question: "Do you agree that restricting the type of legal entities that can, in future, take ownership or a long lease over land in Scotland would help improve the transparency of land ownership in Scotland?" 578 of the individuals and 25 of the organisations answered 'yes' while 125 of the individuals and nine of the organisations answered 'no'.

In response to the question: "Do you agree that in future land should only be owned (or a long lease taken over land) by individuals or by a legal entity formed in accordance with the law of a Member State of the EU?" 530 of the individuals and 27 of the organisations answered 'yes' while 153 of the individuals and seven of the organisations answered 'no'.

Ten randomly selected responses for the disadvantages or advantages of any such restriction showed a mixed picture of the proposed regulations as shown below. Some commentators said that the regulations are far too weak and need to be further fleshed out. Another commentator was sceptical whether restriction of ownership to entities registered within the European Union would be able to enhance the land owners' accountability. Another one was concerned of limiting inward investment.



Advantages	Disadvantages
<p><b>Those who were in support...</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) EU registration might slightly improve transparency, and perhaps accountability</li> <li>2) “reduced opportunity for landowners to evade, ignore, or frustrate environmental, community, economic and legislative initiatives”</li> <li>3) “Lots of large swathes of land made available for public use”</li> <li>4) “address the pressing matter that too many estates rarely change hands, thus hindering the diversity of land ownership and consequently social mobility.”</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) [...] difficult and costly to (implement)</li> <li>2) [blank]</li> <li>3) “This could, if misinterpreted, make it difficult for immigrants to buy houses or land in Scotland, which could pose a serious issue.”</li> <li>4) [blank]</li> </ol>
<p><b>Those who were not in support...</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Can't see any.</li> <li>2) We would be able to have a clearer picture of who actually owns vast tracts of Scotland.</li> <li>3) Ensuring that land is not bought up by anonymous holding companies</li> <li>4) Agree in relation to organisations where greater clarity is required in terms of wider landowning responsibilities</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Limit inward investment into Scotland.</li> <li>2) Companies will just register in European countries and nothing will change [...].</li> <li>3) [...] I think any proposed restriction has to be much clearer [...]</li> <li>4) Individuals ownership should not be restricted if transparent.</li> </ol>

Scottish Land and Estates, a representative body for private land owners, warned in the ‘Herald’ that Scottish taxpayers could be left with a £600million compensation bill to reimburse land owners in the event that land is repurposed against their will. Their Chairman commented:

*“We believe the government's desire to make rural Scotland more prosperous would be better served by viewing private landowners and land based businesses as part of the solution. Taken in the round, all these proposals have the potential to deliver a serious blow to land-based businesses of all types and sizes and we do not think that is in the interests of rural Scotland.”*

Duke Richard Scott, the biggest landowner in the United Kingdom, expressed his dismay about the content of the recommendations in the ‘Express’. He was worried for the stewardship that he and his team provided for large estates, including forests, and farmland. He was convinced that within the changing regulatory content this would no longer be feasible. He said:

*“I can understand people who have a deep-down visceral dislike of others who own large amounts of land. All I can do is try to make a case for our stewardship of it as being good and responsive to the best interests of the community. There always been an umbilical cord almost linking these great houses with the land around them. Within a generation or two it will become increasingly difficult to look after them.”*

With no doubt, 2015 will be an important year for the land use reform as the Scottish Government will be evaluating the outcomes of the recent consultation for a future Land Reform Act. It plans the establishment of a Land Reform Commission that would oversee policy implementation and regulation on transparency and accountability. Much remains to be decided and this controversial topic will be far from easy to resolve with legal challenges being likely. While it is the Scottish Government’s intention to pass a Land Reform Act before the end of the current parliament in May 2016, such an objective may prove difficult.

## Sebastian Weise

## **Perth and Kinross Council's Initiatives**

Perth and Kinross Council has recently made a number of initiatives for housing and regeneration.

The Council has supported a £400million city deal that will see it form a partnership with Dundee, Angus, and Fife to apply for funds from the United Kingdom and Scottish governments. This follows a similar deal that is already in place for Glasgow and the Clyde Valley. Ian Miller, Council Leader (Scottish National Party), spoke positively about the city deal plan:

*"The benefits of having a city deal in place are numerous but, if we look at the models already in place for other cities, it might allow us to have a greater ability to promote new infrastructure throughout the area by looking at a regional public transport network, the ability to unlock key strategic development areas, support our key industries and growth sectors.*

*"All of that should lead to an increase in jobs, sustain employment and, above all, tackle the issues surrounding a low-wage economy. I have always been of the view that cities drive the wider economy in any area which can have a real impact."*

For the deal to come through, Executive Director Jim Valentine recognised the need for further work. He said:

*"Perth can only benefit from a city deal by collaborating with other authorities. The key issue is to get an agreement on the extent of the partnership and governance arrangements. Whilst informal discussions have taken place, formal engagement is necessary at political, as well as officer, level."*

It was reported that the preparations of a development proposal will cost up to £150,000. Mr Valentine said:

*"Once such engagement is achieved, much technical work will be necessary to arrive at a long list of projects that will then need to be tested against agreed criteria for project selection to ensure that performances measures can be achieved."*

The Council has agreed proposals to progress improvements to the Muirton area of Perth in parallel with the wider regeneration of the area where consultation has recently begun on phase 5 of the development - 25 houses being built by Fairfield Housing Cooperative. An updated version of the Muirton Master Plan that sets out progress and plans for new housing, has been prepared by the partnership board overseeing the regeneration of Muirton and approved by the Council.

Options for retaining or replacing the existing row of shops on Dunkeld Road have been explored in earlier Master Plan reviews. Feedback from the local community and elected members shows strong support to retain these facilities. Housing & Health Committee members approved a proposal that the council retains control over these assets and progresses their redevelopment. The Council is the landlord for both the shops and the flats above them and they will be included in a separate environmental improvement scheme. A key priority for the redevelopment of the commercial properties will be business continuity for existing tenants. Councillor Dave Doogan (Scottish National Party), Convener of the Housing & Health Committee told the 'Scottish Housing News' that:

*"The shops on Dunkeld Road are well used by local residents and passing trade, and it is important that these are retained and improved. This redevelopment would also deliver an increase in the availability of mainstream council housing which is to be greatly welcomed. In addition, as one of the key gateways to the renewed Muirton estate the look and feel of this area will be an important element of the overall regeneration project."*

The Council has approved the first ever joint Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness Strategy. While the two areas of housing services have always worked closely together, previous strategies have separated out their functions and objectives. However, in recognition of the significant overlaps between the two areas of service the new joint strategy has been developed to best meet the needs of individuals and communities. The joint strategy allows a more integrated approach to early intervention and prevention across all areas of the housing service, and aligns the strategic themes for the services to the 'Scottish Social Housing Charter' outcomes to enable transparent reporting on performance and progress. Councillor Dave Doogan, Convener of the Housing & Health Committee said:

*"This represents a strategic approach to neighbourhood management which considers the needs of all local residents, and focuses on supporting people to sustain their tenancies. The priority is to engage at an early stage to prevent homelessness and this requires all parts of housing services to work together."*

*"Integrating the joint vision and objectives of Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness in a single strategy sets a clear framework for how staff, other stakeholders, and importantly tenants and other customers will work together towards maintaining our neighbourhoods as safe, secure and healthy environments."*

The strategy also highlights some of the key achievements made in Neighbourhood Services and Homelessness in recent years, including a significant review and enhancement of the delivery of housing options with a strong focus on early intervention, with the result of reducing homeless presentations by 27% over the last four years. There has also been significant investment to increase the supply of affordable housing through a combination of building 118 new council houses in the last six years and buying back 28 former council houses in the past two years.

The Council has approved a new independent living strategy that aims to improve choice for people with a physical disability and/or sensory impairment and ensuring they have control over any support they require to go about their daily lives. The Joint Strategy to Support Independent Living & Quality of Life for Adults with a Physical and/or Sensory Impairment has been developed by a partnership including the Council and the local Community Health Partnership, Live Active Leisure, Vision PK, North East Sensory Services and the Centre for Inclusive Living Perth and Kinross. A range of other stakeholders and individual community members with a physical disability and/or sensory impairment have also been consulted in the development of the strategy. The key areas highlighted during consultation included communication, physical activity, 'getting out and about' and transport/parking. Councillor Kate Howie (Scottish National Party), vice-convener of the Housing & Health Committee told the 'Scottish Housing News' that:

*"This joint strategy is an important stage in making life in Perth and Kinross as accessible as possible for all residents and visitors. The ambitious implementation plan attached to the strategy sets out a range of activities to meet the objectives identified by local people with a physical disability and/or sensory impairment."*

*"The strategy also recognises some of the moves already made this year to improve and raise awareness of accessibility issues in the local area. This includes the launch of the Perth and Kinross venue guide hosted on the national accessibility website DisabledGo.com and the introduction of the Safe Place Scheme in Perth City."*

Earlier this year the Scottish Government published a national sensory strategy for Scotland 'See Hear'. Part of the activity from the Perth and Kinross Joint Strategy is to ensure that the 'See Hear' strategy is implemented at a local level.

Perth & Kinross Council is an AWICS client. We have provided in-house training in local authority housing finance and welfare reform.

Further information about Perth & Kinross Council can be found on their website at: [www.pkc.gov.uk](http://www.pkc.gov.uk)

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## **All You Want To Know about Scottish Social Housing Finance 2015**

The 2015 session of the AWICS seminar and workshop: 'All You Want to know about Scottish Social Housing Finance' will be held in Falkirk on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015.

Social housing is becoming increasingly important in Scotland at a time of rising demand for affordable housing and constrained resources. Scottish local authorities and housing associations face significant challenges. Housing association turnover increases but surpluses have started to decline. The economic background is one of recession. Terms on which loans are available are less favourable than in the past but a significant level of development is still taking place. The Scottish Government has passed the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014, reformed the Scottish Housing Regulator and is ending the 'Right to Buy'. The Scottish Housing Regulator's new approach emphasises 'Value for Money'. The United Kingdom government has 'reformed' welfare in a way that has significant implications for Scottish tenants and landlords but it is now proposed to devolve welfare to Scotland.

Whether you are in a Housing Association, Local Authority or another organisation with an interest in Scottish housing; whether you are a Housing Manager, Tenant Representative, Board Member, Councillor or even a member of the Housing Finance Team, you will need some knowledge of social housing finance. Many people have already attended and benefited from this course. You could also benefit from our seminar and workshop at which you will learn: **'All You Want To Know about Scottish Social Housing Finance 2015'**

### **The session will answer the following questions:**

- What financial environment are Scottish local authorities and housing associations working in?
- How do the finances of Scottish social Housing work?
- How is the development of new social housing funded?
- What are the financial opportunities available to local authorities and housing associations?

Delegates will gain an overview of Scottish social housing finance and will keep up to date with developments. The session includes a participatory case study and is accompanied by a very useful book that is designed for reference after the session entitled: **'All You Want to Know about Scottish Social Housing Finance 2015'**

### **Venue and Date:**

**Falkirk:** Best Western Park Hotel – 15<sup>th</sup> September 2015

For further information or to make a booking please visit our website at:  
<http://www.awics.co.uk/scotfin15.asp>



## Editorial notes



This edition of the AWICS Scotland News was edited by Sebastian Weise. Sebastian is a freelancer and PhD student at the Centre for Digital Innovation at Lancaster University. He is knowledgeable about participatory urban planning, local government, government reform, and geospatial services.

The AWICS Scotland News is published by 'AWICS' Limited. Articles are written by Adrian Waite unless otherwise stated. However, the views expressed in articles are not necessarily those of 'AWICS' or Adrian Waite unless expressly stated.

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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!

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

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