

## **Community Ownership in Glasgow: the devolution of ownership and control, or a centralising process?**

The largest housing stock transfer in Europe, the 2003 Glasgow transfer promises to ‘empower’ tenants by devolving ownership and control from the state to local communities. This is to be delivered through a devolved structure in which day to day housing management is delegated to a citywide network of 60 Local Housing Organisations, governed at the neighbourhood level by committees of local residents. The receiving landlord, the Glasgow Housing Association, has further made commitments to disaggregate the organisation via Second Stage Transfer in order to facilitate local community ownership, as well as management of the housing stock.

This paper argues that whilst the Glasgow transfer has enhanced local control in the decision making process within the limits permitted by the transfer framework, it has nonetheless failed to deliver the levels of involvement aspired to by those actively engaged in the process. Displaying at times more of the semblance of a movement than an organisation, the Glasgow Housing Association operates a classic centre-periphery divide. These tense central-local relations have contributed to the emergence of conflict which has further undermined negotiations surrounding the realisation of full community ownership via Second Stage Transfer.

### **1. Introduction**

Prior to the stock transfer<sup>1</sup>, Glasgow City Council was a large municipal landlord (circa 85, 000 properties) with council housing comprising a key aspect of its political power base. Yet it had to operate in a very difficult financial and political environment. Given the package of incentives including £900 million pounds of debt write-off and £4 billion pounds of investment if stock transfer was to proceed it is

perhaps unsurprising the City Council positively endorsed the proposals (Gibb 2003; Daly et al 2005). Following a tenant ballot the transfer was transacted in 2003, establishing the Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) as the UK's largest social landlord.

Explicit in the pre-transfer framework and statutory consultation documents was a commitment to local control and ownership of the housing (Glasgow City Council 2001, 2002; Glasgow Housing Partnership Steering Group 2000). This was to be achieved at the outset by the creation of a citywide network of 60 Local Housing Organisation (LHOs), each governed by a management committee made up of a majority of local tenants which would be responsible for management of the stock on a day-to-day basis. These LHOs are small-scale, locally based, tenant-controlled organisations (for further discussion, see McKee 2006).

In addition to devolved management of the local housing stock, a pre-transfer commitment was also made to local ownership via a process of Second Stage Transfer (SST). SST is a concept unique to the Glasgow transfer and involves the LHOs embarking on further smaller stock transfers in order they might break away from the GHA and independently own the local housing (Glasgow City Council 2001, Glasgow Housing Partnership Steering Group 2000). Whilst the GHA is committed to balloting tenants on SST within the first ten years from the original transfer (Glasgow Housing Partnership Steering Group 2000), and has endeavoured to accelerate the process via a programme of prototype funding pilots (GHA 2004), progress has been both slow and difficult and no Second Stage Transfers have as yet occurred (McKee 2006).

An emotive and politically controversial issue within Glasgow and beyond, community ownership remains a relatively under-researched policy area. This paper

aims to provide some insight into the present interim stage of transfer (i.e. post transfer from the City Council but prior to any SST), by exploring how housing governance has changed in the city. This involves comparing pre-transfer tenant involvement in the decision making process with the present situation, in particular the extent to which tenants have autonomy to make decisions on local housing matters and the perceived limits upon their local control. Secondly, given the express commitment to local ownership of the housing this paper also explores the perceived importance attached to SST and the conflict and tensions that surround the realisation of this coveted prize. Empirical evidence from this study is presented in sections 5 and 6. To contextualise this evidence there is firstly a discussion of the relevant governance literature, followed by an exploration of the policy context of community ownership.

## **2. Governance, Power and Active Citizenship**

Governance has become a “shorthand” label to describe a particular set of changes in the way in which society is being governed (Newman 2001: 11). Whilst it is an ambiguous concept which is defined and applied differently across a range of academic disciplines in general terms it represents both a change in the meaning of government and the emergence of new methods by which society is to be governed (Rhodes 1996; Kooiman 1999).

The emergence of this socio-political field therefore represents an attempt to capture this dynamic of change: it reflects the transcendence of hierarchy and markets by other forms of public-private mix (Rhodes 1994); the inter-dependence of state and non-state actors (Kooiman 1993); and the devolution of autonomy and responsibility from government to local communities (Rose 2001). These transformations have

been driven by broader patterns of economic and social change, which has made the task of governing society along traditional lines more difficult – the outcome of which is that the state is no longer perceived as having the expertise or the ability to solve all of society’s problems (Rose 1999; Newman 2001).

Uniting these disparate strands within the governance literature is a critique of the classical concepts of political sociology, particularly the dichotomous divisions between the state and the market, the public and private and so forth (Rose 1999). Despite these insights, the literature remains somewhat descriptive and normative: it focuses on describing the way organisations are, or should be, governed; and implicitly if not explicitly, portrays networks, partnerships and self-government as more desirable than both hierarchies and markets (Rose 1999; Newman 2001). Perhaps more fundamentally issues of power and agency have also been neglected, and are largely absent from debates (Newman 2001). The exception to this has been the field of governmentality derived from Foucault, for it places power relations firmly at the centre of analysis by drawing attention to the way in which we think about power and rule in modern society (Foucault 2003a; see also Dean 1999).

Unlike traditional conceptions of power (see for example, Dahl 1961; Bachrach and Baratz 1970; Lukes 1974), governmentality proposes an investigation of political power beyond the state; indeed, Foucault’s definition of government as the “conduct of conduct” (2003b: 138) highlights that power is endemic in all social relationships: it is both diffuse and local, and it is to be located in the multiple micro-practices of rule that authorities deploy in order to shape and direct the action of others towards desired ends. Governmentality therefore lends itself to a wide variety of research agendas, which attempt to illuminate the problematic of government and the plethora of political rationalities and practical programmes that have emerged as a

result. In addition, unlike traditional interpretations which conceive power as a negative, repressive act, a Foucauldian analysis emphasises its productive nature (Foucault 2003b). Power does not attempt to exclude or control individuals, but puts people into action by a plethora of mechanisms which work through their political subjectivities, not always against them; here authorities try to enlist, maximise, and facilitate individual voluntary engagement in the political process in order the objectives of the 'governed' and the 'governors' may be reconciled (Cruikshank 1994; 1999). This is not however necessarily a reduction in government but rather a form of regulated freedom: governance from a distance (Rose 1999).

Whilst governmentality highlights how modern liberal governance exercises a productive form of power which aims to promote active, responsible citizenship it also encourages us to be critical of democratic mechanisms such as user involvement, citizen empowerment and participatory democracy and so forth. No matter how well intentioned these programmes may be they nonetheless represent a means of shaping the behaviour of citizens whose problems are deemed as needing to be addressed, and thus have the potential to be regulating as well as liberating (Cruikshank 1994; 1999). This mode of analysis therefore mounts a challenge to the traditional understanding of 'empowerment' as a radical political project or a process to maximise citizen control. The implications of this are two-fold: firstly, that a potential disjuncture exists between how practices of empowerment are portrayed by their champions and the logic of such practices as embodied in strategies of government; and secondly, that promoting the agency of marginalised groups may not necessary lead to the realisation of a political utopia of free social relations, for relations of empowerment are not outside relations of power but located firmly within them (Dean 1999).

### **3. Community Ownership: the past and present policy context**

Since 1999 Scotland has had a devolved national government with the Scottish Parliament acquiring legislative control over most domestic policy issues, including housing; fiscal and economic matters remain the preserve of the UK government in Westminster (Kintrea 2006). Since the first elections in 1999 the Scottish Executive has been formed from a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition. This has resulted in a continuity of policy priorities of which housing has been placed high on the agenda (Kintrea 2006). Stock transfer or 'community ownership' as the Scottish Executive prefers to call it, has subsequently been presented as a vehicle to deliver a plethora of high-level government objectives including social justice, social cohesion and community empowerment (Kintrea 2006; Scottish Executive 2004).

In its present form community ownership is the label applied to the Scottish Executive's national programme of predominantly whole stock transfers of local authority housing. This is not a novel agenda but one which has a long legacy in Scotland, particularly in Glasgow where community ownership was first pioneered by the City Council in the mid 1980s as a bottom up response to regenerate small pockets of council housing (Clapham *et al* 1991, 1996). The success of this policy saw it rolled out nationally and by 1997 there were 119 small-scale, partial transfers from local authorities involving over 18,000 units of housing (Taylor 2004: 127). There were few housing associations in Scotland prior to the 1970s (Scott 1997). These partial stock transfers were therefore a key factor in the expansion of the sector and have encouraged the emergence of a housing association movement that is dominated by small-scale, locally based, tenant controlled organisations (Communities Scotland 2006).

Yet financial considerations are also an important driver for change. The three whole stock transfers that took place in Scotland in 2003 resulted in excess of £1 billion pounds of overhanging debt being written off by the UK Treasury - £2.3 billion pounds of debt however remained (Scottish Executive 2004: 6). As options for investing in council housing are more limited in Scotland than in England, whole stock transfer has emerged as the main vehicle by which local authorities can fulfil their obligations to modernise council housing (Mooney and Poole 2005).

What unites both traditions of community ownership is a desire to secure significant additional housing investment whilst also facilitating tenant empowerment. The Scottish Executive's present commitment to local control and ownership is therefore heavily indebted to past policy successes - small scale, partial stock transfers, and the model of housing management and ownership that emerged from this: that of the community based housing associations (Kintrea 2006; McKee 2006). Given the differences in scale between past and present models of community ownership (see for example, Taylor 2004), it remains to be seen whether a governance model designed for a locally based, small scale organisation can be successfully transferred on to a large-scale stock transfer association. Yet as research on the original community ownership transfers highlights, what is important to tenants is not primarily who owns the housing, but their ability to exert influence and control (Clapham *et al* 1991).

#### **4. The Research**

The research reported here reflects the initial findings from ongoing doctoral research the fieldwork of which was undertaken in Glasgow between August 2005 – April 2006. The research design involved two key stages: ethnographic case study research

involving three community housing organisations, complemented by an external phase involving key-actor interviews, documentary analysis, and non-participant observation.

The case studies include two LHOs involved in the pilot SST programme, and, as a comparator, an established housing association based in the city which operates outwith the GHA context. Attention was given to attempt to select organisations of a broadly similar size and based in different parts of the city. Efforts were also made to incorporate the different types of LHO: these are Forum LHOs, which are newly created organisations that have emerged post-transfer from the City Council's tenant participation strategy, and CBHA LHOs which are existing housing associations that have become involved in managing GHA stock.

A range of qualitative methods were employed in this study across both the case study and external phases. First, a wide range of documentary material was examined, for example local constitutional documents, tenant satisfaction surveys and key pre-transfer documents. Second, at least five management committee meetings were observed in each of the case studies; additional events were observed during both the case study and external phases where available and appropriate. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four groups of individuals: 19 members of local housing staff, 15 local resident committee members, and at the citywide/national level 10 housing practitioners and 10 housing policy-makers from the wider housing and political community, including the Scottish Executive, Glasgow Housing Association and Glasgow City Council. Finally, 5 focus groups were held with tenants not involved in local management committees, involving 36 individuals in total. As this paper only presents a small proportion of the overall findings of the



study not all of the data sources or case studies are drawn on here: in particular the comparator case study and the tenant focus groups are not featured.

Due to the tensions that exist between Glasgow's housing agencies post-transfer particular attention was accorded to issues of confidentiality and anonymity. For this reason the names of some organisations have been removed where lean staff structures make individuals particularly identifiable. Where direct quotes are used the interviewer's comments appear in italics. Given the ethnographic nature of the research and commitment to reflecting the multiple voices of local actors, efforts have also been made to preserve speakers' original dialect.

## **5. The Glasgow Housing Association: more influence and control for tenants?**

### *The Pre-Transfer Council Days*

Pre-transfer Glasgow City Council had a clear commitment to tenant involvement: it had a well-resourced tenant participation team, which was involved in promoting a range of initiatives from local-level involvement structures such as neighbourhood forums and estate action groups, to more strategic attempts to promote the housing co-operative movement via both partial stock transfers and devolved management of the housing. Housing issues further comprised a significant part of elected members' workloads, especially for those councillors representing areas with a lot of social housing.

Despite recognition of the numerous initiatives the City Council were engaged in, key actors nonetheless described their experience of pre-transfer tenant participation in largely negative terms. Firstly, tenant involvement was very frustrating for residents as it took the form of a "wish list" mentality where tenants were paid "lip service" to as there were no resources, and perhaps commitment, to

implement their locally identified priorities. This resulted in activists becoming very disillusioned with the process as they were constantly raising the same issues over and over yet they were never attended too.

“... [a housing officer] came to our (estate action group) meetings all the time and she took notes and I used to say to her ‘don’t bother taking any more of these notes if you’re no going to do anything about it’. Because the next month it was the same I says ‘it’s just a repeat, you should copy the last meeting’ (laughs). Shame, but it was really getting us down; it was ridiculous” (*LHO Committee Member*).

This view was echoed by local housing staff who were only too aware of the limitations of the Council’s approach to tenant participation. They described local structures as simply “talking shops” where residents could come and have a “moan” and raise their complaints but where nothing would really happen because resource constraints prevented them from implementing tenants’ priorities. This ultimately limited the potential of participation structures and undermined the whole process.

Secondly, decision making was perceived to be centralised and taken by individuals out with the local area, with the sheer size of the Council as an organisation acting as a “shield” for bureaucratic and remote decisions by both officers and councillors, which local staff then had to implement. There was no room for meaningful tenant involvement in this top-down model of decision making, and both committee members and local housing staff reflected on the “take it or leave it” attitude that was prevalent in the City Council at this time.

“*How were decisions taken then about local issues?* They were taken from the centre by people who didn’t live in the area... As I say we always had a wish list and it was taken into the centre and somebody says ‘no they’re no getting it’ or maybe, and this is maybe me being a bit cynical, if it was an election year and somebody, the Labour candidate or whoever it was in a shaky seat it was ‘Oh we’ll pour some money in there then; that’ll make it look good so we can save his seat’” (*LHO Committee Member, Office Bearer*).

Thirdly, the small number of issues that tenants did have influence over were perceived as minor, such as ‘no ball playing’ signs, dog fouling, or graffiti. Council staff defended this position by reference to the difficult financial environment. Yet a small number of tenants who were active at this time commented that even the minor issues they were raising about the general environment of the local area, which required minimal resourcing, were still ignored. As one committee member observed, you cannot resource tenant involvement out of “a big box of nothing”: tenant priorities need to be funded and delivered upon in order to sustain their interest and motivation. Given the Council’s failure to meet these expectations, it is perhaps unsurprising that activists became jaded with the whole process and the majority of staff regarded it as an unwelcome burden in an already difficult job.

*Fragmentation, localism and devolved control*

Compared to the pre-transfer situation the structures of tenant involvement in Glasgow have been transformed. As has already been discussed, 60 LHOs have been established across the city: these are existing or new, independent registered social landlords. These community organisations are small-scale, locally based and governed by a management committee comprised of a majority of local tenants. Stock transfer has therefore resulted not only in the significant growth of the city’s community housing movement but also the number of active committee members (circa 600-700 LHO committee members).

In order to deliver a devolved management structure, these local committees have entered into a contractual management agreement<sup>2</sup> to provide services for the GHA. As table 1 indicates overleaf, the management agreement outlines the functional division of responsibilities between the *centre* (the GHA central team) and

the *periphery* (the LHO network). It is in effect a two-way service contract with the performance of both parties measured against their ability to meet key performance indicators. The ability of the LHOs to deliver these standards is however dependent on centrally provided services. For example, local arrears management may be effected by centrally provided computer systems failings, or delays in the centrally based legal team processing requests for court action. The management agreement therefore binds both the GHA and their LHO partners into a mutually dependent relationship: they cannot achieve their respective goals in isolation without joint working. Annual management allowances are paid to the LHOs based on the number of housing units managed, staffing and costs incurred in providing the service. Most LHO staff are employed directly by the GHA, albeit managed locally, and whilst budgets such as maintenance and repairs are devolved the GHA's central team physically makes all payments and therefore has ultimate control of financial resources.

[insert table]

**Table 1: Functional division of responsibilities between the GHA/LHO network**

FUNCTIONAL AREA	GHA FUNCTIONS	LHO FUNCTIONS
<i>Allocations</i>	Guidance on GHA's allocation policy, which must meet regulator's monitoring & inspection requirements; allow LHOs access to citywide Information and Communications Technology (ICT) system; strategic issues such as facilitating nominations between LHOs & specialist agencies.	Scope for policy to be varied locally; operational control of allocations (e.g. maintain housing list, allocate properties & general tenancy management); agree nominations with specialist agencies.
<i>Day to day repairs</i>	Procure & fund contracts centrally; develop targets and other monitoring requirements for third party contracts; establish LHO expenditure categories/ budgets; pay for all approved expenditure.	Agree budgets & monitoring criteria for third party contracts; monitor third party contracts; identify local repair priorities; instruct client-side post inspections; authorise payments to contractors.
<i>Major repairs</i>	Supply LHOs with stock information; establish LHO budgets; award external contracts & process all payments; create strategic monitoring group.	Consult tenants on major works; develop local management & investment plan; liaise on stock condition information; contract, quality & financial monitoring.
<i>Corporate &amp; citywide services</i>	Provide full ICT system to the LHOs; provide Human Resources (HR) policies & procedures; control all payroll issues; oversee delivery of legal advice & attend court if necessary.	Ensure all staff properly trained in ICT & advise GHA on users; must apply GHA HR policies but responsible for their local implementation; can instruct legal action.
<i>Arrears Management</i>	Guidance on GHA's arrears policy which must meet regulator's monitoring & inspection requirements; provide LHOs with access to rent arrears system; take legal action against tenants.	Scope for policy to be varied locally; management of local rent & service charge arrears (e.g. arrears administration, home visits, assisting with Housing Benefit applications); instruct legal action/attend evictions; pursuit of former tenant arrears.

*Source: adapted from GHA/LHO (2003) 'Interim Management Agreement'*

Yet this contract provides the LHOs with enforceable legal rights, which in practice offers increased opportunities for local control as compared to the pre-transfer situation. Firstly, the post-transfer framework affords tenants an input into setting local policy variations. Although they have to retain core elements and work within the established Scottish housing legislative and regulatory framework there is some leeway for debate and an ability to tailor policies to suit local circumstances. Whilst many LHOs have adopted to retain the standard version because of the workload involved and issues of comprehension amongst tenant members, on some issues, such as tenant participation and equal opportunities, a diversity of approaches have emerged.

Secondly, via the production of Local Management and Investment Plans stock transfer has allowed tenants to become involved in the setting of local investment priorities. This involves identifying what work needs done most urgently and where projects should start, and also enables local people to be involved in choosing colours and designs for external or communal fabric works. This has been a particularly welcome addition for committee members given the lack of investment and centralised decision making that occurred under the City Council, and many have taken considerable pride and enjoyment in planning future investment for their local area.

*“What aspects of being on the committee do you enjoy? The fact we can say no we’re not having that, we’ve now got some say in what we can do. In the past, in the past when we went to the [Council] it was a case of this is the budget; this is what we’ve planned. And it didn’t matter if you say ‘oh no I think that should have been done’ that was it. So just now we can sit and talk and say, the likes of this week, tomorrow we’re coming in and we will pick the colours of the houses. Things you never got involved in before” (LHO Committee Member).*

Thirdly, the provision of performance monitoring information is a new experience for many tenant activists. The LHO lead officer is ultimately line managed by their relevant local management committee and these statistics are therefore vital in ensuring desired targets are being met and staff accountability achieved. This shift in relationship between staff and tenants has however been a difficult transition post-transfer, although partnerships are beginning to be forged and clarity about roles and responsibilities is slowly emerging.

“...it’s a new set up that people are and people have been used to quite a different relationship with the staff beforehand. So whereas you know people were tenants of the council and got told stuff by the staff the roles are in some ways kind of reversed, in that certainly in that some of the tenants locally who could occasionally be a thorn in the staff’s side are suddenly on the committee. So it’s a slightly different dynamic for people to get used to” (*Policy Officer, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations*).

#### *Centralisation, internal conflict and organisational tensions*

Despite these advancements in tenant control, for some key actors stock transfer has clearly fallen short of their expectations and aspirations. The lack of ownership of assets is a key source of frustration for the LHOs who feel constrained within the devolved, and in their view, subservient relationship they have with the GHA. The management agreement is a key source of tension here, because for the LHOs the functional responsibilities retained at the centre are perceived as the lifeblood of community ownership - centralised control by the GHA is therefore a recurring theme in discussions with LHO actors.

Firstly, centrally set and controlled budgets act as a cap on both local investment aspirations and the local management service, as both staff and committee members have to operate and make decisions within the budget they are allocated. Furthermore even when decisions are made within the allocated budget headings

these local plans still have to be ratified by the centre in a rather bureaucratic fashion, leading to accusations by LHO actors that the GHA is “just the council with another name”. This centralised payment and procurement approach has further resulted in a “one size fits all” approach being implemented in the huge investment programme currently being rolled out across the city. Whilst individual tenant choice is permitted in terms of colours and designs (e.g. kitchens and bathroom suites), in terms of the bigger picture local preferences with regards to the style and cost of the modernisation works are being sacrificed for bulk procurement and standardisation.

“... [the GHA] have still got a wee bit of the old Glasgow city council in them: one size fits all. So they’re putting what it costs for one kitchen in the city that’s the price for every kitchen in the city and it doesn’t work. So I mean if you’re kitchen costs two thousand pounds and I’ve got a kitchen double the size of yours, it’s still only two thousand pounds that’s getting spent on it. Which is daft” (*LHO Committee Member*).

Yet it is not only with regards to investment and maintenance that this centralised approach is evident, but also local policy variations. For example, the LHOs were critical of GHA centrally directed major policy reviews and regarded them as being in direct opposition with aspirations to disaggregate the organisation. An example of this includes the 2005 Sheltered Housing Review, which proposed to remove resident wardens, alter the warden’s responsibilities and introduce specialist management teams. Whilst the GHA has to ensure policies are compliant with the wider legislative/regulatory framework and these policies may have been received favourably by some organisations, if they come into effect they may equally be imposed on some LHOs who criticised and resisted them.

“... [GHA] still tell us what to do, I mean they are holding a review: a sheltered housing review. Why? I don’t understand why they are getting involved with a review of my sheltered housing complexes (and) how they are run when we are supposed to be going stand-alone...I thought GHA was there



to guide us on our path now they're trying to kind of interfere if you like"  
(LHO Housing Officer, GHA).

It is perhaps no surprise then that the management agreement has resulted in tense local and central relations, and indeed growing mistrust and hostility. However some stakeholders have been more willing than others to regard this as an inevitable and unavoidable part of the present organisational model as opposed to the fault of any one party. This tension between key partners is an important issue that urgently needs addressing, as it is not only undermines the devolved management structure but is also a major impediment in negotiations surrounding SST.

## **6. The Pathway to Second Stage Transfer**

### *The importance of ownership*

As no secondary stage transfers have as yet been achieved it is too early to establish the extent to which the objective of community ownership has been realised on the ground. The aspirations of LHO actors are however clear: SST is regarded as the only means by which they can realise their ambitions for local autonomy, and thus resolve present organisational tensions between the centre (GHA) and the periphery (the LHOs), in which the latter feel they are dependent upon and answerable to their 'master' at the centre.

*"How will things change post-SST? I think obviously you'll be a stand-alone organisation; you are not dependent on GHA releasing this money, releasing that money. And really it's your local. More kind of local control I guess? Aye. At the end of the day that's what the transfer was all about wasn't it, it was about getting more local control for people in the area"* (LHO Housing Officer, GHA).

For the Scottish Executive and the LHOs and their representative organisations, SST was perceived as the key means to deliver upon the promises of

tenant empowerment that were fundamental to the transfer framework. Post-SST the LHOs will own as well as manage the stock, and will therefore adopt a more traditional landlord role. Like other registered social landlords, they will have autonomy over important matters such as rent setting, asset management, budgets, staffing and external contracts. Furthermore, unlike the present landlord, the GHA, an LHO is a small organisation based within, and controlled by, the local community – this allows autonomy to be devolved to people that actually live in the locality and greater weighting accorded to local needs and priorities. By elevating the involvement of tenants in the management and ownership of their housing SST therefore offers the ability to deliver something different, and most importantly superior, to the standardised and centrally directed service presently being delivered by the GHA.

“...what really get’s me annoyed (is) the GHA people saying (SST) ‘oh it’s just the same’. Well it’s not just the same we think we can be doing something here, or we wouldn’t be doing it. We think we can make a difference...I think it will offer a better, a more responsive local service”  
*(Member of LHO Management Team).*

As a mechanism to realise community ownership SST emphasises the social dimension of stock transfer for it highlights both the importance and advantages of local control, bottom up decision making, and active tenant participation. Yet it is not only autonomy but responsibility that is being devolved here: in the post-SST environment, LHOs and their management committees will be judged on their performance and will have to stand and fall by their own decisions. They alone will become accountable for the success and failings of the organisation and there will be no third party to blame. This will be a new experience for committee members, who have already undergone a transition in their role from activist to becoming part of the

landlord organisation itself. Post SST their responsibilities will increase further for the LHO will become the tenants' landlord, employer of all local housing staff, and will have sole control over how any rent monies are to be spent in the area.

“It offers choice. It offers control, which is really important.... (and) with all this control and choice comes responsibility. It was dead easy years ago for committee members or community activists to say ‘ooh it was the council but no we’re great’ but then suddenly it will be us and I think we’ll need to learn to say ‘wait a minute the buck stops here’. With all this choice comes an awful lot of responsibility” (*LHO Committee Member*).

Whilst external actors from the wider housing and political community sympathised with the LHOs' frustrations, they were nonetheless more critical about a necessary link between empowerment and ownership of the housing. Here a debate emerged between stakeholders who, like the LHOs, believe that ownership is at the very heart of empowerment and is central to the success of the community based housing association model, and on the otherhand those who argue that tenant control is more fundamental than who owns the housing. These divisions are not easy to map; however in broad terms what has emerged is a division between on the one hand the LHOs, housing association representative organisations and Communities Scotland, and on the other the GHA, the City Council and tenant representative organisations.

Of those who were sceptical of the necessity of ownership their argument adopted two main forms: firstly, that the initial transfer from the City Council has been successful in delivering enhanced tenant empowerment via the devolved management structure, and secondly that tenants may not necessarily aspire to become involved in the control of their housing and indeed may have more instrumental goals for the transfer process such as investment in the housing and stable rent levels. This grouping also stressed the need for a rational debate about the

future provision of Glasgow's social housing, and argued what was important was not organisational structure but the nature of tenant involvement and local control on offer. The insinuation here is that because of ideological and financial drivers the Scottish Executive have become obsessed with recreating the success of the community based housing association model without fully considering alternative means of 'empowering' tenants.

"I don't think that Community Ownership matters a jot, I think community empowerment, community control is what matters ownership means nothing. And in my experience of tenants, tenants don't care who actually owns their house they care that they are properly involved in the decisions that go on around that house" (*Senior Representative, Development and Regeneration Services, Glasgow City Council*).

Therefore whilst all parties expressed a commitment to the empowerment of Glasgow's tenants they nonetheless had different visions of what this empowerment involved and its fundamental properties.

### *Blame culture*

SST has become a life project and top priority for those actively involved in the negotiation process. It is very much a live issue, and at emotive one at that, for a lot of time and effort has been invested by all parties in trying to deliver on this most fundamental of goals. As a result a blame culture has emerged in which key actors have become involved in venting their frustrations by blaming each other for the lack of progress.

The GHA is the organisation that has received the most criticism for the inability to realise aspirations for community ownership. Indeed the organisation's commitment to the process has been called into question as both the LHOs and their representative organisations have accused the GHA of blocking the process and

manipulating the situation in order to maintain the status quo. The insinuation here is that the GHA is not committed to the principles of community ownership, and instead wishes to retain long term control and ownership of the housing stock for itself.

“...the GHA I think are now manipulating the situation because they have never been committed to a structure that was set up before they were in being. Because you’ve got to remember the framework document was set up by the (Scottish) Executive and the City Council. Now the GHA had to adopt part of that framework to take it to tenants, and they were committed to it because it was statutory notices and it was contained in a transfer proposal that GHA built up. (But) I don’t think they own, or they didn’t work through, or they didn’t fully understand the public policy framework they’re being asked to operate within” (*Former Civil Servant, Scottish Homes*).

Whilst the GHA acknowledged these criticisms, senior representatives interviewed dismissed suggestions that they were deliberately undermining the process, and that it was in fact the sheer practicalities of facilitating SST that was slowing things down.

Whilst there is not scope within this paper to explore these practical barriers it is important to note that the major hurdle in realising ambitions for community ownership has been the financial cost of SST; negotiations have therefore centred on arriving at a price that is mutually agreeable to both potential purchasers (the LHOs) and the seller (the GHA) (for further discussion, see McKee 2006).

Yet the GHA is not the only party that has come under criticism. Firstly, the LHOs (the CBHA LHOs in particular) have been criticised for what has been perceived as the selfish pursuit of SST at any cost, including to the detriment of GHA tenants in other LHOs who do not proceed to SST immediately. Here critics, particularly from within the GHA and the City Council, have accused them of seeking a “sweetheart deal” by having the conditions for a successful SST altered to suit them and also for their reluctance to bring their own financial reserves to the table in order to plug the “expectation gap” over the price and fundability of SST. The CBHA

LHOs have however dismissed such accusations and counter argued, not only would it be inappropriate to jeopardise the level of service they can provide to their existing tenants by using their own resources to acquire GHA stock, but that they do not have the necessary financial reserves in order to render SST fundable.

Secondly, the Scottish Executive and its housing agency Communities Scotland have not escaped criticism either. Community ownership is ultimately a policy that comes with a price tag attached, and the continued slow progress of SST has heaped further political pressure on the Executive to intervene and provide additional financial resources; this is a particularly compelling argument given the close involvement of Communities Scotland in the initial transfer from the City Council, and therefore future plans for SST.

“...the Executive are saying on the one hand ‘we wants this’ but on the other hand when you say that’s the price of it they say ‘no I want it but I don’t want to pay that for it so get me it’. Well you can’t get a Rolls Royce unless you’ve got the cash, you might have to settle for a mini” (*Senior Representative, Development and Regeneration Services, Glasgow City Council*).

The Executive have however defended their position by citing the investment Glasgow has already received to modernise its housing, and that it is ultimately the GHA’s responsibility as landlord to deliver its promises within the budget agreed at the outset.

“We made the commitment: you know there was a business plan there. Now (as) I understand it the GHA have changed the business plan, that’s quite within their remit to do that, again I would not be entrenched about that... (but) the fact that you’ve changed a, b, c, and d means you might not have the same amount of money available for Second Stage Transfer is your responsibility; go and sort it.... you need to deliver what you promised” (*Glasgow, Labour Member of the Scottish Parliament*).

Given the acute tensions between all the key actors engaged in the process, perhaps all involved need to re-evaluate not only their own commitment to the process, but also the quality of their relations with supposed partners. SST is a coveted prize that will only be reached through partnership and compromise.

## **7. Conclusion**

The Glasgow housing stock transfer has resulted in positive change within the realm of housing governance: local residents through their LHO do have increased opportunities to get involved in the decision making process, and there is scope for them to shape the local housing management service to better reflect local needs. For example, they are able to adapt centrally set policies, prioritise how local budgets are to be spent, and have a say on plans for local housing investment. Whilst this represents some increase in power as compared to the pre-transfer Council days when decision making was very bureaucratic, centralised and tenant involvement was constrained by limited financial resources, it nonetheless fails to realise the ambitions of the plethora of local actors who became actively engaged in the process on the premise that it would deliver full community ownership.

The paradox that emerges here then is that whilst the political ideal of community ownership embodies a productive form of power which seeks to mobilise active, responsible citizenship the reality of the implementation process has been a stark contrast. The devolved management structure represents a classic centre-periphery divide, and tense central-local relations have been exacerbated by frustration and disappointment over the slow progress in realising aspirations for local ownership of the housing. It would seem then, that the only solution to resolve this fundamental tension is to facilitate SST; this is the only way critics will be convinced

of the GHA's commitment to the process, and for the debate about whether ownership and empowerment are necessarily synonymous to be resolved.

Yet the tensions surrounding the delivery of community ownership have wider implications than for the city of Glasgow alone. Firstly, the increasing prevalence of governmental strategies that advocate devolving autonomy and control to local communities does not imply they will necessarily be effective in realising their desired outcomes (see for example, Cruikshank 1994; 1999). Conflict and tensions are simultaneously part of the dynamic of this productive form of power, for the 'governed' are fundamentally autonomous actors capable of thinking and acting otherwise; indeed, if power was so pervasive in society that it resulted in a seamless web of control then governmental strategies would not be necessary in the first instance (Foucault 2003b). Secondly, whilst 'empowering' citizens may have the effect of maximising citizen control, its prime function is the shaping of individuals' towards desired ends. Constituting individuals as active citizens is above all a governmental technique aimed at governing from a distance in an era in which the state no longer has the monopoly on solving all of society's problems (Rose 1999). Finally, despite the political rhetoric infused in notions of community empowerment, of which the Glasgow transfer is a prime example, it remains to be seen whether transforming governance alone can offer a sustainable solution to tackling social-political problems (Rose 2001). Whilst devolved governance clearly has liberatory potential, it also represents a means by which government can absolve itself of blame by making local communities responsible for their own destiny, for it is not only autonomy which is being devolved but ultimately responsibility.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Stock transfer involves the sale of housing out of the public sector (i.e. local authority or Scottish Homes) into the private/voluntary sector (i.e. housing association or housing co-operative). For a fuller discussion of the definitions and different types of stock transfer in Scotland and their differences with the rest of the UK, see Gibb (2003) or Taylor (2004).

<sup>2</sup> The management agreement refers to the interim management agreement (IMA) signed by the LHOs/GHA immediately after the stock transfer from the City Council in 2003. Just after fieldwork ended, the IMA was slightly revised to take into account the implications of EU procurement legislation. It is *now* referred to as the Remodelled Management Agreement (RMA) within the GHA.

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