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HOMES OF THE FUTURE

FIRST GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POST-WAR PLANNING

WESTWOOD REPORT

The first comprehensive set of recommendations of a Government Committee on Post-War Housing is published today.

The Committee is the Westwood Committee (under the Chairmanship of Mr. Joseph Westwood, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland), set up in August, 1942, by Mr. Thomas Johnston, Secretary of State for Scotland, to report on the design, planning, standard of construction and lay-out of new houses to be built after the war, and on the provision of furniture in houses built by local authorities. Both subjects are dealt with in the combined report now published, entitled - "Planning our New Homes".

The format of the report is entirely novel for committee publications of this kind. Illustrated with 120 photographs, 3 colour plates and 60 detailed drawings and plans, the publication was prepared by the Committee for the Department of Health for Scotland and much of the illustrative material was drawn from outstandingly successful housing developments in England and Wales particularly in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Coventry, Leeds and other towns which the Committee visited. Special steps were also taken to obtain up-to-date photographs from the United States, Sweden, and elsewhere.

After outlining the scope of the post-war housing problem and making close estimates of the numbers of homes needed for newly married couples, slum clearance and de-crowding, the report recommends a "Three Stage Programme" to tackle the problem as a whole.

FIRST STAGE - the provision of "transitional" houses in the form of prefabricated and preferably demountable dwellings for purely temporary occupancy. Plans of houses of this type are incorporated in the report. Other measures suggested include the maximum use of converted war buildings and the provision of permanent single family houses temporarily

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sub-divided into two family flats ("duplex" houses). Plans of "duplex" houses - and colour plates illustrating the external elevation before and after "sub-division" - are included in the Report.

SECOND STAGE - (which will proceed simultaneously with stage 1) - the building of permanent houses to short term standards - broadly equivalent in overall areas - rooms areas etc. to the pre-war sizes of houses built by Scottish authorities but incorporating improved equipment, especially in kitchens, built-in furniture etc. The Committee recommend the fullest use of alternative methods of building permanent houses - e.g. in steel, concrete, timber, etc.

THIRD STAGE - (to be put in hand when costs are stabilised and labour, materials etc. are more plentiful) - the provision of permanent houses to "long-term standards" of accommodation, equipment etc. laid down in the report.

The Committee make two supplementary points about the transitional period: first, building will be in very short supply (the labour force is only about 40% of what it was pre-war) and the special training scheme announced by the Government will need to be energetically and vigorously applied; Second, the immediate post-war programme must not be crippled by high costs or by orthodox methods of planning and pricing under which each building authority goes ahead with its own plans without regard to what is being done by other authorities. The Committee after describing in some detail and commenting favourably on the emergency measures adopted in the United States for the purposes of the U.S. Defense Housing Program suggest that the whole question of price control for new house building in relation to basic or "standard type plans" should be closely investigated.

Part I of the report sets out as a basis of long term post-war housing policy, standards of design, accommodation, planning and equipment which the Committee hope "posterity will judge worthy of the ideals and aspirations of our time and not unworthy of its own". The following is a summary of the main recommendations under each of these headings:-

TYPE OF HOUSE. The Committee recognise the overwhelming balance of preference for houses as opposed to flats. They incorporate in their report an analysis of a questionnaire circulated by the Army Educational Corps to men and women serving in the Forces. This questionnaire shows that over 80% preference for the houses over the flat. At the same time the Committee recognise that flats will have to be built, particularly in the larger cities, and they do not entirely rule out the possibility that multi-storey flats of
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between 6 - 10 storeys may be appropriate in some areas. The Committee make a special plea for the provision of small houses and flats for aged people and single women. The report includes illustrations of schemes of this kind put up in Manchester and Leeds before the war.

SPACE FOR LIVING: Increases in room-areas, particularly kitchens and living rooms are advocated. Various "functional" distributions of the additional living space are recommended, e.g. living room with dining annexe, kitchen with dining alcove, kitchen divided up to provide seaparate utility room for washing clothes and to serve as a general purposes work room etc.

The largest chapter in the report is devoted to "Services, Fittings and Standard Equipment" on which the Committee make a large number of novel recommendations and illustrate their points by photographs, detailed drawings of individual items of equipment etc. Outstanding features include:-

(1) More efficient methods of plumbing including development of pre-fabricated plumbing units.

(2) Efficient methods of heating the home including research into air convection heating as adopted in the United States for low cost housing, district heating which the Committee discover to have been provided in modern flats in London with costs as low as 4s. per week, and in Dundee at a cost of between 3s. and 3s.9d. a week, etc.

(3) More efficient hot water supply including hot water on tap from a central source where district heating is practicable. The Committee point out that the London and Dundee figures quoted include unlimited provision of hot water.

(4) Refuse disposal. The Committee are very impressed with a special system of refuse disposal incorporated in the Quarry Hill Flats in Leeds under which all domestic refuse can be washed down the kitchen sink and carried away down glass line pipes to be "dehydrated" and burnt.

(5) Lifts in Flats. All blocks of working class flats above three storeys should, in the Committee's view, be provided with lifts. They give details (including photographs) of an English Scheme where automatic lifts have been installed.

STANDARD FITTINGS. The Committee prescribe a wide range of standard equipment and fittings for the house with special concentration on built-in kitchen equipment. The dimensions of each fitment are precisely specified and are illustrated in detailed drawings. Examples of the fitments recommended include storage units for dry goods,

brooms and cleaning materials, linen cupboard, built-in wardrobes etc. The Committee have taken out costs of their recommendations based on pre-war prices and find that by mass-production and standardisation all the fittings which they advocate could be provided between £20 and £30 a house, which works out at about 4d. per week on rental.

In this connection the Committee recommend that the Government should forthwith enter into direct consultation with industry so that by standardisation, bulk production, and guaranteed orders, industry can make immediate arrangements to manufacture all the fittings required for the post-war housing programme. The Committee, with this in view, have adopted "standardised" dimensions for the fittings which they themselves recommend.

Interesting detailed recommendations include suggested raising of the heights of sinks which the Committee find far too low; provision of coved recesses at the base of fittings to prevent damage; provision of hooks in coat cupboards at a height to enable children to hang up their own overcoats, so encouraging good habits; rounded skirtings and rounded corners for easy cleaning etc.

STANDARDS OF CONSTRUCTION. Under this heading the Committee lay special emphasis on thermal and sound insulation. They point out that as much money is spent in Scotland alone each year on heating houses as would provide the capital cost of building 25,000 new dwellings annually. On sound insulation the Committee point out that modern research has shown that new materials and new methods of construction can radically improve sound insulation at comparatively reasonable cost. The Committee deplore any attempt to cut down cost by reducing standards of sound insulation.

The report advocates more intensive developments in pre-fabrication both of building components, windows, doors etc. and of structural sections. On the latter point they recommend that the Government should embark upon a comprehensive programme of experiment and research.

DESIGN, LAY-OUT AND AMENITIES. The Committee are very critical of the design of houses built in the inter-war years and recommend that all building authorities should be required to employ an architect. On lay-out they recommend more variety in siting of houses, length of block etc., the provision of open space especially playing space for children, grouped as opposed to ribbon development, and the creation of residential zones in which the houses are grouped into neighbourhood units, each "neighbourhood unit" being provided with essential community services, such as churches, schools, shops, entertainment centres, health clinics, libraries etc. The Committee also hint at the possibility of a radical change in the method of siting houses by the adoption of the park-way principle of layout.

Points of detailed amenity advocated by the report include the omission of fences and railings in housing schemes, preservation of old trees and the planting of new trees, a much high standard of design in "street furniture," viz. lamp standards, traffic signs street name-plates etc; the provision of seats in shelters in housing schemes, especially for aged people.

Part II of the report deals with the provision of furniture in houses built by local authorities. Local authorities have power under the Housing Acts to provide furniture to their own tenants, but these powers have not been very widely used. The Committee recommend that wider use should be made of the powers but they do not advocate that local authorities should go in for the wholesale marketing of furniture. What they have in mind is that local authorities should supply essential items of furniture to those tenants who really need them. On the wider problem of furniture shortage in the immediate post-war period the Committee recommend an extension of the utility furniture scheme. They suggest that the range of designs, types of materials to be made available etc., should be extended and that the scheme should be operated in close consultation with local housing authorities. The Committee express their fears that the acute demand for furniture immediately after the war may give rise to a "price ramp" in second-hand furniture and advocate the maintenance and strengthening of the existing control of prices of second-hand furniture.

The report - "Planning our New Homes" - is published by H.M. Stationery Office (price 3s.) and will be on sale on Friday, March 24, at the Stationery Office and through all booksellers.

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