

Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee

(Sent by Email)

22/06/22

Dear Mr Lockhart MSP,

Further to my evidence heard at the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee on 14 June 2022, I wanted to expand on some of the issues raised to further support the work of the committee.

As managing director of Places for People Scotland, I am committed to ensuring that our organisation, along with partners across Scotland, effectively contribute to providing the homes that Scotland needs, sustainably. We strive to create and manage living places that are sustainable – economically, socially and environmentally.

Places for People Scotland owns and manages around 8,500 homes for almost 10,500 customers in Scotland, making us one of the leading charitable housing associations north of the border. We build thriving and sustainable communities for people across the country. We build and maintain homes, not simply houses.

We have taken a fabric first approach, investing in our bid towards net zero and reducing our impact on the planet. We continue to invest in energy efficiency, providing customers with cleaner energy options, at rates that are affordable and sustainable for their incomes, especially as the cost of living crisis deepens.

We are all agreed that we simply must move to net zero, as soon as we can. The question is how we do this in the most effective and efficient way, and in such a way that is positive for tenants.

The sector currently faces two linked, but distinct areas, of challenge; new build and retrofit.

Cost of living

The cost of living crisis is significantly impacting our customers and wider society. Simply put, everything we do must be to drive down energy usage and provide affordable warmth. We need to find good and lasting solutions to decarbonise and reduce bills.

We're piloting solutions, for example, supporting older people in Midlothian to benefit from lower fuel bills with the help of smart mini district heating networks providing low carbon warmth in their homes. The grant funded Heatshare project was the first of its kind in the UK, a partnership with Scottish thermal storage specialists Sunamp, and the Green Economy Fund from SP Energy Networks.

This is one example, but we need more innovative solutions like this across Scotland, delivered in a joined-up way.

Energy Efficiency Standards

We need a national approach to energy efficiency standards that has high ambitions, while recognising the challenges of the current climate. There are currently conflicting objectives, and I'm pleased that the government has taken on board industry concerns and brought forward its review of EESSH2, temporarily pausing 2025/32 net zero milestones. This will allow us to align everything around net zero and avoid conflicting requirements between EESSH2 and Net Zero which has been a real issue for us when trying to access funding for decarbonisation.

Retrofitting

While it is right to work towards improving the energy efficiency of homes, both saving customers money on their energy bills and the impact on the climate, retrofitting is a costly and intrusive process. We must always remember that these are people's homes, and we must aim to minimise the disruption to them and their neighbourhoods, while helping to reduce their energy costs.

We would like to see government policy reflect some of the challenges with some of the most difficult buildings to retrofit, such as tenements, to prevent them from being sold, demolished, or redeveloped. The government should use many definitions of sustainability in terms of net zero targets for the diverse housing stock. If a property can only get to EPC band D but in all other ways it's a good social home, it would be nonsensical to sell it. Therefore, a non-disruptive policy is needed based on property analysis to determine what is best to do with each type of housing.

New Build

There are different challenges to building new homes. While it is easier in some ways, with legislation able to help drive change, it's vital we have the skills, experience and supply chain to drive change sustainably.

There is a real opportunity to take a national approach to net zero housing and to collaborate to share knowledge, expertise, lessons, and good practice. However, we first need a clear definition of what a net zero home is. A clear definition will ensure accountability and that we are all measuring impact in the same way.

I wish to thank the committee for your time and considering the evidence put before you. Places for People Scotland want to be part of the solution to providing sustainable, energy efficient homes. We are committed to working with the committee, with the Scottish government and a wide range of partners to play our part in finding the right solutions.

Should you wish to discuss any of the issues raised or have further questions about the work of Places for People in Scotland, I would be pleased to meet with you soon.

Sincerely,

Tom Norris
Managing director
Places for People Scotland