

Cross-Party Group on Housing

22 February 2023, 18:00-19:30

Minute

Present

MSPs

Graham Simpson MSP – Convener
Ariane Burgess MSP – Deputy Convener

Invited guests

Catherine Kirkwood – Hope Cohousing CIC
Margaret Whitelaw – Lenzie Community Development Trust
Deirdre Campbell – Lenzie Community Development Trust
Ailsa Raeburn – Community Land Scotland
Ronnie MacRae – Community Housing Trust
Mike Staples – South of Scotland Community Housing
Robert Toomey – Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
Lorenzo Martinico – Edinburgh Student Housing Co-op
Anna Gardiner – Scottish Land & Estates

Non-MSP Group Members

Gareth James – UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence
Alex Clark – Sanctuary Scotland Housing Association
Aoife Deery – Citizens Advice Scotland
Keith Baker – Glasgow Caledonian University
David Bookbinder – Glasgow West Scotland Forum
Helen Brown – Scottish Parliament
Colette McDiarmid – MND Scotland
David Aitchison – Shelter Scotland
David Petrie – Age Scotland
David Stewart – Scottish Land Commission
Emma Doyle – Public Health Scotland
Norah Fletcher – Glasgow HSCP
Josh Hill – Scottish Parliament
Jim Hayton – Scotland's Housing Network
Ken Gibb – UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence
Lisa Innes – Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living
Marie Hall - Independent
Ailish McCafferty – Scottish Parliament
Michael Tornow – Public Health Scotland
Neil Clapperton – Skye & Lochalsh Housing Association

Rose Forman - Propertymark
Scott Lamond – Persimmon Homes
Sherina Peek - ALACHO
Stephen Connor – Tenants Information Service
Steven Tolson - Independent
Tom Morton – Co-housing Scotland
Craig Sanderson – Independent
Pedro Cameron – Housing Options Scotland
Corrie Innes – Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
Carolyn Lochhead – Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
Alastair Cameron – Rural Housing Scotland
Jocelyne Fleming – Chartered Institute of Builders
Norrie MacPhail – Co-housing South Scotland
Morgan Eller – Independent
Mirin Benzie – Independent
Andrea Finkel-Gates – Scotland’s Housing Network
David Somervell – Co-housing Scotland
Vikki Manson – Homes for Scotland

Apologies

John Boyle – Rettie & Co.
Catherine Wood – E&A Partnerships Ltd.
Ruth Whatling – Homeless Network Scotland
Archie Rintoul – Independent
Daryl McIntosh – SHARE

Agenda item 1: Welcome

Graham Simpson MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Agenda item 2: Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved by Andrea Finkel-Gates and seconded by Colette McDiarmid.

The following applications for membership were approved:

- Scottish Land & Estates
- Edinburgh Student Housing Co-Op
- Existing Homes Alliance
- Smith Scott Mullan Associates

Agenda item 3: Homeless Housing Options

Pedro Cameron provided an overview of HOS activities and the Homeless Options project, noting that:

- HOS offers housing advice, information and support to people with disabilities, older people, and members of the armed forces community across Scotland.
- In 2021, HOS were funded by the Scottish Government's Third Sector Homelessness Fund via the Corra Foundation to launch Homeless Housing Options, which offers specialist homelessness and housing advice, information and support to those same groups.
- The project has supported 4 times the number of people originally envisaged.
- The project provides person-centred service to prevent crisis in housing and address specific needs of those who are, or at risk of being, homeless.
- Clients can self-refer or be referred by a third party via the Get Help form either online or by phone. Paper copies can also be sent by post.
- Previously, HOS contacted clients within 6 weeks, but the Homeless Housing Options project has reduced this to 24hours for urgent cases.
- Brokers act as a single point of contact and take a flexible, nationwide, cross-tenure approach. Advice thus not limited to one local authority area.
- The project also involves influencing the housing and third sectors to change the way they think about homelessness, and working with clients and partners to ensure positive relationships for homelessness prevention.
- The HOS team have opened up positive lines of communication with local authorities and frontline case workers, acting as a conduit between applicants and caseworkers and helping to simply and condense things for both parties. This can also help to counter distrust of statutory services.
- The project has improved the way that HOS and local authorities work together.
- Another core aspect of the work is the Homeless First Aid programme, which supports frontline information and advice services to identify hidden homelessness and those at risk of homelessness among their own service users. It has empowered staff and led a rise in referrals across organisations.
- Another strand of work focuses on Equalities, which acknowledges that those with protected characteristics are at greater risk of homelessness. HOS has partnered with CaCHE on a new "In Conversation" series of podcasts to highlight work on housing and equalities taking place in real time.
- A key challenge is sharing lived experience. To address this, HOS have made available an anonymised Client Gallery which allows users to recognise the many ways in which people can become homeless and access support.

The following issues arose during the subsequent discussion:

- **Mismatch of supply and demand.** It was noted that there is a mismatch in supply/ availability of appropriate properties and need/ demand in given locations. It was noted that people do not always want to leave their areas or established social networks.
- **Reach.** Pedro noted that Housing Options Scotland assists about 1,000 people per year. The Homeless Housing Options project was funded to assist 60 people but has already helped 250 this year.
- **Referrals.** Pedro noted that people can self-refer via the HOS website (<https://housingoptionsscotland.org.uk/>) or they can be referred to the service by, e.g., health workers, local authorities, etc. It was noted that working in partnership with local authorities enables HOS to take more time and work flexibly with clients.

- **Student housing crisis.** It was noted that the student housing crisis has seen a marked increase in the number of students with disabilities unable to access suitable housing and self-referring or being referred to HOS. As students cannot claim benefits they are also unable to pay for temporary accommodation
- **People with disabilities and housing adaptations.** The difficulties associated with adaptations to council housing were also noted (resources, speed of adaptations , etc.) as well as the potential for/barriers to adapting private rented accommodation. It was noted in the online chat that Stirling University 'Match me' research covered many of the reasons why there are difficulties with letting adapted properties. The potential benefits of the HOS service to people with autism (e.g. independent living) were also noted.
- **Measuring and evidencing impact.** It was acknowledged that measuring the impact of the service is difficult because the main deliverable is providing advice and not everyone returns/end results are not always known. However, key successes are recorded.
- **Rural communities and repeat homelessness.** Pedro observed that the pandemic has resulted in shift in demand and what people want from a home, which for some people means moving to rural areas. Some landlords are also selling-up. However, it is difficult to gauge the extent of repeat homelessness presentations through this project as it is still early days.

Agenda item 4: Community-led housing

Ailsa Raeburn spoke on behalf of Community Land Scotland, which represents community land owners across rural and urban Scotland, to introduce the general concept of community-led housing, noting that:

- Community land owners now own a broad range of assets (houses, pubs, shops, lighthouses, forestry). It is a growing sector.
- Important in rural areas where public services have been withdrawn and communities have stepped in.
- Community-led means identifying a local need and working with local assets to meet that need, building community wealth, and developing local skills, etc.
- Outcomes include more than just new housing units (e.g. rural repopulation, building local skills and capacity to deliver projects development, etc.)
- CLH projects aim to address local need which is not always visible on the housing list (people don't put name on list because houses never come up, so problem of hidden homelessness) and to address local demand (communities aware of opportunities that come with repopulation).
- CLH provides opportunities in housing development "cold spots" where there's no private sector development and RSLs are more focused on retrofitting.
- Support available from Scottish Government through the Scottish Land Fund (to help acquire land or buildings) and the Rural and Islands Housing Fund and others, however there are issues with these funds (e.g. how they are delivered, criteria, failure to understand local context, etc.), and there's a need for more technical support.
- Still waiting on Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan which will hopefully address some of the issues around delivering CLH.

Mike Staples spoke on behalf of South of Scotland Community Housing, noting that:

- SOSCH is a CLH-enabler and takes a holistic approach to housing, communities and placemaking, promoting projects that create more sustainable and resilient communities, and meet local needs.
- CLH cuts across an array of policy areas, beyond the supply of affordable homes to include placing assets in community ownership, addressing net zero, empowering communities, regeneration, etc.
- Bulk of SOSCH work in Dumfries and Galloway, working with over 35 communities on 26 live projects and a big pipeline of potential projects, which demonstrates momentum but resources for scaling-up is a challenge.
- Several examples were discussed (e.g. Closeburn Passivhaus Project, The Old Police Station in Langholm, and the former Grapes Hotel). All SOSCH case studies are available here: <https://sosch.org/project-work/>
- No grant funding available for urban projects. A joint report with Community Land Scotland in 2021 advocated for more support.
- Housing to 2040 also committed to investigate an urban equivalent to the Rural Housing Fund.
- Further strategic considerations include: need for resources to back up Remote Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan which will put CLH front and centre; need a joined-up approach to CLH across policy areas; and need to address key challenges in supply chains.

Ronnie MacRae spoke on behalf of Community Housing Trust, noting that:

- CHT supports about 150 communities with a pipeline of about 1,000 affordable housing units and supporting infrastructure.
- Key ask is to keep crucial funding sources (Scottish Land Fund, Rural and Islands Housing Fund) in place.
- Communities recognise need for wide range in affordable housing options plus schools, health centres, sports facilities etc., which strengthens communities and builds community wealth.
- Gairloch example (which includes 3 housing providers and 5 different housing tenures, tourist information centre, shop selling produce from 40 local producers) was discussed. This and other case studies can be accessed here: <https://www.chtrust.co.uk/case-studies1.html>
- Benefits include: economic, repopulation, enhanced and improved health services, retrofit and reuse of buildings as well as new supply.
- Currently looking at requirements (legislative, skills development, resources, etc.) to enable more CLH to take place.
- Key challenges include: decentralisation of the construction sector, growing skills and talent attraction, stabilising materials, housing for businesses, etc.
- Key asks include: 1) public sector to recognise value of CLH and the resource needed for communities to do this. Relies on volunteers, not always fully appreciated; 2) need more partnerships working and cross-portfolio cooperation across policymaking; 3) avoid risk of over regulating; 4) need more public investment because self-funding is unsustainable for social enterprises.

In response, Ariane Burgess MSP noted that:

- She, Ronnie and Norrie MacPhail discuss CLH in a forthcoming podcast.
- Even if funding is obtained there are challenges associated with operation and maintenance, and there may be a need for more public funding to support that.
- There is a need to consider an urban fund to address town centre regeneration.
- Retrofit costs include 20% VAT on materials. The Scottish Parliament does not have the power to change this, but it can highlight and call into question.

The following issues were raised by members during the discussion:

- CLH elsewhere in the world has been urban-focused but in Scotland it is mainly rural. More funding is needed to mainstream town centre regeneration. Some towns fall just outside of the eligibility criteria for funding.
- Some CLH projects have taken a long time to deliver, but confidence of communities has increased and CLT/SOSCH have provided proof of concept which means future projects could be delivered faster.
- Co-housing was acknowledge as an option and part of CLH. It has been more popular in England. In Scotland, there are more options and it may take more time for people to see co-housing as a desirable option.
- The skills gap and VAT reform were again highlighted and CIOB has done work in these areas that could be discussed at the next CPG.

Action point: Graham Simpson MSP suggested that the CPG could write to Scottish Government to highlight a number of issues noted above.

Agenda item 5: AOCB

Gillian Campbell submitted a request in advance of the meeting to be considered as a speaker for the next CPG. She would like to present research undertaken by the Existing Homes Alliance on the legislative and enabling framework needed to deliver a just transition to net zero homes. Graham Simpson MSP approved.

Agenda item 6: Next meeting

TBC – Graham Simpson MSP will liaise with the secretariat and deputy convener to plan future meetings and topics.