

Cross-Party Group on Housing

1 September 2021, 18:30-19:30

Minute

Present

MSPs

Graham Simpson MSP
Elena Whitham MSP
Kaubab Stewart MSP
Ariane Burgess MSP

Invited guests

Andrea Finkel-Gates - Scotland's Housing Network
Alex Clark – Individual
Roddy MacLeod – Individual
Keith Baker – Glasgow Caledonian University
Craig Sanderson – Individual
Catherine Wood – Individual

Non-MSP Group Members

Josh Hill – Parliamentary staff
Ashley Campbell CIH Scotland (secretariat)
Grant Carson - GCIL
Jennifer Kennedy and Tammy Swift-Adams - Homes for Scotland
Ken Gibb and Gareth James – CaCHE
Craig Stirrat – Grampian Housing Association
Deborah Hay - JRF
Andrew Fyfe – Sovereign Property Partnership
Stacey Dingwall – SFHA
Steven Tolson - RICS
Andrew McCall – Salvation Army
David Stewart – Scottish Land Commission
Michael Tornow – Public Health Scotland
David Aitchison – Shelter Scotland

Apologies

Alasdair Cameron – Rural Housing Scotland
Carolyn Lochhead – SFHA
Moira Bayne – Housing Options Scotland

Agenda item 1: Welcome

Ashley Campbell welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that this is the first Cross Party Group on Housing meeting of the new Parliamentary term.

Agenda item 2: Election of Office Bearers

Graham Simpson MSP was elected as convenor of the group.

Elena Whitham MSP and Ariane Burgess MSP were elected as deputy convenors of the group.

Ken Gibb and Gareth James of CaCHE were elected as secretariat for the group. Ken explained that CaCHE is based in Glasgow but works across the UK and has an extensive network of contacts across the housing sector and beyond who can help to support the work of the group.

Graham Simpson MSP thanked Ashley Campbell and CIH for providing secretariat support to the group for the previous four years. He also stated that as Convenor he wants to ensure that the CPG is a proactive group with a wide range of participants. The group should aim to achieve real outcomes, not just become a talking shop.

Agenda item 3: Overview of Housing to 2040 report

Steven Tolson gave an overview of the Housing to 2040 report published by the Housing CPG Sub Group. A copy of the presentation will be circulated but main points included:

- A sub-group of the Housing CPG was established in 2019 to respond to the Scottish Government's draft vision for Housing to 2040. It included a diverse range of experts from across the housing, health and third sector.
- The sub-group published a [report](#) and [synopsis](#) and submitted the findings to the Scottish Government.
- While the Scottish Government's final vision and route map for Housing to 2040 includes some promising commitments, it is important to focus on delivery. Policy must be evidence based and draw on the experience of the sector.
- Better collaboration and a move away from silo working will be required to achieve radical change.
- The climate change agenda is one issue that requires immediate attention and there will be significant challenges in persuading the general public to contribute to the decarbonisation agenda in the housing sector. Behaviours, rights and responsibilities will need to be carefully balanced.
- Numerical targets for delivering new homes can be politicised and the longer term goal must be to focus on delivering the right homes in the right places. We need to develop a better understanding of housing needs – housing for older people in particular has been lacking.
- The recent report from the Scottish Land Commission highlighted the need for a different approach towards housing delivery. There is potential for the state

to take more of a proactive role in shaping the housing sector and consideration should be given to establishing a national land agency.

Graham Simpson MSP opened up the floor for questions and discussion:

Elena Whitham MSP reflected on her time as Community Wellbeing Spokesperson for COSLA and on the Social Renewal Advisory Board and stated that there is a need to ensure that the whole housing sector is working towards delivering the vision set out in Housing to 2040. There should be a stronger role for planning in creating places and focus on ensuring developers contribute to local communities.

Steven Tolson agreed that planning has a fundamental role but unfortunately resources have been eroded in recent years.

Tammy Swift-Adams agreed that planners need more tools and support – staff have the required skills to make substantial and positive changes to housing delivery but lack resources. Tammy suggested that as there are so many challenges in Housing to 2040, this group should draw on its strengths and focus on understanding housing need and demand and how this can realistically be delivered. There are other groups that will focus specifically on issues such as climate change. Developing an understanding of housing need could be a key piece of work for the group.

Ken Gibb highlighted the commitment in Housing to 2040 to break the links between housing and wealth and the upcoming review of taxation, asking for Steven's perspective on how realistic this might be.

Steven Tolson questioned whether the use of taxation would be appropriate at this time, especially given the need to engage with members of the public around climate change issues and persuade people to invest potentially significant sums in upgrading their homes. It could be politically unpopular and divisive.

Ken responded by mentioning a recent [report published by Bright Blue](#) which includes recommendations on tax reforms to support environmentally friendly choices. For example, Stamp Duty (or the Scottish equivalent Land and Buildings Transaction Tax) could be scrapped and replaced by an annual tax for all households (alongside reformed Council Tax) including reductions based on how environmentally friendly the home is.

Grant Carson raised the issue of the significant shortfall in accessible housing for people with disabilities. Various research has been published (including work published by [CIH Scotland and Horizon Housing Association](#) and the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#)) but recommendations have not been taken up by Scottish Government and there is widespread unmet need. We do not need further research, action is required to deliver more accessible housing across all tenures. Grant highlighted that GCIL run an accessible housing register for the Scottish Government (www.home2fit.org.uk) and there are currently around 450 clients looking for more accessible housing, mostly within the Greater Glasgow area.

Graham Simpson MSP suggested that accessible housing need could be a potential topic for a future meeting.

David Stewart commented on the earlier discussion on tax reform advising that the Scottish Land Commission will be publishing recommendations on taxation in relation to encouraging development on vacant land and bringing existing homes back into use.

Stacey Dingwall shared a link in the chat box to the recent report published by [Zero Emissions Social Housing Taskforce](#) (ZEST).

Craig Stirrat highlighted how Moray Council has been working to maximise developer contributions through the planning process to deliver the size and type of homes most needed in communities. He suggested the CPG should seek further details from the council.

Agenda item 4: Applications for Membership

Applications for membership of the CPG were received from the following:

- Taylor Wimpey
- Pentland Communications

Roddy McLeod offered apologies from Barrie Cunning who had been due to represent Pentland Communications at the meeting. Roddy explained that the purpose of the organisation was to build connections between developers, communities and local authorities to support the vision for the housing sector and deliver good quality homes across Scotland.

Both applications were approved by the group.

Agenda item 5: AOCB

Graham Simpson MSP encouraged members to share ideas for topics for future meetings

Agenda item 6: Next Meeting

TCB – Graham Simpson MSP will liaise with the secretariat and deputy convenors to plan future meetings and topics. It is hoped that the group will be able to meet in person soon.