

Cross-Party Group on Housing

Annual General Meeting

24 October 2023, 18:30-20:00

Minute

Present

MSPs

Graham Simpson MSP – Convener
Ariane Burgess MSP – Deputy Convener
Paul McLennan MSP – Minister for Housing

Invited guests

Janine Kellett, Head of Homelessness Unit, Scottish Government

Non-MSP Group Members

Gareth James, UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence
Abigail Fletcher, Scottish Parliament
Craig Sanderson, Edinburgh Poverty Commission
Mike Heffron, Under One Roof
Craig Stirrat, Grampian Housing Association
Ken Gibb, UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence
Moira Bayne, Housing Options Scotland
Jennifer Kennedy, Homes for Scotland
Andrea Finkel-Gates, Scotland's Housing Network
Robert Toomey, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors
Amrou Motawa, Edinburgh Student Housing Co-operative
Jocelyne Fleming, Chartered Institute of Builders
Abhishek Agarwal, Grampian Housing Association
Ashley Campbell, Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland
Niamh Roberts, Edinburgh Student Housing Co-operative
Laura Taylor, Edinburgh Student Housing Co-operative
Lorenzo Martinico, Edinburgh Student Housing Co-operative
Sonny Scott, Edinburgh Student Housing Co-operative
Shelley Hutton, Places for People
Collette McDiarmid, MND Scotland
Aoife Deery, Citizens Advice Scotland
Alex Clark, Sanctuary Scotland Housing Association
Lisa Innes, Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living
Archie Rintoul, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors

Daryl McIntosh, SHARE
Donna Young, Rural Housing Scotland
David Aitchison, Shelter Scotland
Norah Fletcher, Glasgow Health & Social Care Partnership
Michael Tornow, Public Health Scotland
Shona Mitchell, Home Group
Emma Doyle, Public Health Scotland
Jenny Russon, MCS Foundation
Susan Aktemel, Homes for Good

Apologies

John Boyle, Rettie & Co.
Pedro Cameron, Housing Options Scotland
Lorna Cameron, Horizon Housing Association
Susan Webster, MND Scotland
Alastair Cameron, Rural Housing Scotland
Stephen Connor, Tenants Information Service
David Cowdrey, MCS Foundation
Norrie McPhail, Co-housing Scotland

Agenda item 1: Re-election to Office Bearers

Graham Simpson MSP was re-elected as Convenor.
Ariane Burgess MSP was re-elected as Deputy Convenor.
Gareth James/CaCHE reappointed to the role of secretariat.

Agenda item 2: Minutes and Matters Arising

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

There were no applications for membership from non-MSP individuals or organisations.

Agenda item 3: Opening Address by Minister for Housing

Paul McLennan MSP, Minister for Housing, delivered an opening address. The Minister outlined his own background in local government and acknowledged that housing is often the number one issue raised by constituents. He confirmed that the Housing Bill will address issues relating to homelessness, rental sector reform, etc., and noted the Government's aim to adopt a tailored approach to addressing these issues given the different context in different parts of Scotland. While the Minister noted that the detail of the Housing Bill must first be put before Parliament, he did also confirm his willingness to attend future CPG meetings to discuss further the provisions that will be included in the Bill. Among other things, the Minister also acknowledge the challenges facing the Affordable Housing Supply Programme and noted that £60m

has been allocated to a national acquisition plan. The Minister also referred to the Rural Housing Action Plan published last week which includes a £30m Rural Housing Fund. Lastly, the Minister noted that the Programme for Government includes plans for a Cladding Remediation Bill, which is coming soon.

Agenda item 4: Questions to the Minister

Questions were submitted in advance and organised thematically, as follows:

Affordability.

Q1. Last year, SG established a working group to look at the possibility of a definition of 'affordable' which would be acceptable to all. Update on progress, please?

Q2. Do you agree that the lack of consistency on how we discuss and operationalise different meanings and measures of affordability is unhelpful and damaging to our wider goals as in Housing to 2040? In particular, would you seek to sustain an ambiguous difference between what rents and cost burdens are for people in social and affordable renting; and that affordable housing policies locally clearly distinguish between social and affordable supply?

Summary response: The Minister agreed that the lack of consistency is unhelpful. Ken Gibb, who chairs the short life working group on affordability, confirmed that the group will report on its findings in April or May 2024. The Minister said he will wait for that report but accepts the need to address affordability challenges, referring also to issues with Local Housing Allowance.

AHSP & New Supply.

Q3. Does The Minister think that the target of 110000 new 'affordable' homes (and the more important target of 70% of those being for social rent) by 2032 can be met?

Q4. Is the Minister worried at the downward trend in housing starts, recognising that starts are tomorrow's completions?

Summary response: The Minister noted that the number of completions is encouraging but the number of new starts is a concern. However, he remains confident that the AHSP target will be met. The Minister acknowledged the challenges (inflation, interest rates, skills capacity, etc) and noted his priorities include working with local authorities and attracting institutional investment to overcome the challenges. The Minister confirmed he meets regularly with key stakeholders, including Homes for Scotland, SFHA, COSLA, and others.

Homelessness.

Q5. My question is in relation to the requirement for other public agencies to help landlords prevent a household becoming homeless – and ask if that will compel the Health & Social Care partnerships to engage more effectively with the social housing sector?

Q6. Whilst we welcome the new proposal in the Housing bill to apply a duty on public bodies to require them to take specific actions to reduce the risk of homelessness- do

you expect the requirement to extend to bodies such as Health & Care partnerships to have them formally engage with social landlords in more effective collaborative strategies and commissioning strategies?

Summary response: The Minister noted the establishment of a Ministerial Oversight Group including all Ministers with responsibility for homelessness and related issues (e.g. substance misuse, mental health, domestic abuse, etc) and that COSLA is also replicating this structure to encourage collaboration across portfolios. The Minister confirmed that he will be meeting with Crisis soon to discuss immediate priorities. He acknowledges the need for an acquisition strategy in short term and the need to build more social homes over the longer term.

Housing as a profession.

Q7. Staff turnover seems to be at an all-time high within local authority housing teams. How can the government help to attract more people to the sector, and keep them there?

Summary response: The Minister acknowledges the problem and confirmed that he has asked CIH Scotland to bring forward a paper on building and maintaining the workforce in the sector.

Housing to 2040.

Q8. Can the minister update on what progress there has been to date in progressing the Housing to 2040 route map and what plans there are going forward for its implementation?

Summary response: The Minister noted the establishment of the H2040 Strategic Board, which he co-chairs with the COSLA Community Wellbeing spokesperson. The group has met once and will meet again soon. The group will establish key priorities and discuss challenges including data collection and existing evidence.

Housing, Health & Care.

Q9. The number of older people in Scotland is expected to increase very substantially over the next ten years, yet Scotland has no up to date strategy for this, the previous policy being enshrined in "Age, Home and Community: A Strategy for Housing Scotland's Older People 2012-2021" which has now expired. Much has changed since 2012, and in England this has resulted in the formation of the Older People's Housing Taskforce, to provide insight into the current challenges and identify policy requirements. Can the Minister say what he intends to do to develop new strategies to ensure provision of the necessary range of housing options for older people in Scotland?

Summary response: The Minister noted the consultation on Housing for Varying Needs and encouraged members to respond. He also confirmed that he has met/will meet with Age Scotland to discuss this issue. Again, the Minister noted the need for collaboration and a tailored approach, while noting the lack of robust data on need.

Rent Regulation & Alternative Tenures.

Q10. Currently Purpose Built Student Accommodation management companies go totally unregulated with no obligation to create any affordable options forcing students into private lets worsening the housing crisis. Why is Purpose Built Student Accommodation not classed as housing in legislation, and why are students, being a particularly economically disadvantaged demographic, exempt from the protection of Scottish tenancies when living in these dwellings?

Q11. Will the government consider further distinctions between for-profit landlords and RSLs in legislation? There are many legal entities that can govern housing that are not for profit but won't qualify for charitable or RSL status because of positive discrimination (e.g. student housing, elder housing, women-only etc). If the government believes these alternative forms of collective housing are a net positive for Scotland, they should qualify for the same type of legislative exceptions that RSLs do (e.g. the ADS exception on the LBTT we have previously corresponded about).

Q12. How can you as Housing Minister and a member of Scottish parliament ensure that co-operatives are considered a meaningful and viable form of housing, both in legislation and in strategy?

Q13. Currently Scottish legalisation defines community on a geographical basis, thus excluding community of interests from access to grants and community assets transfer. This impedes co-housing groups such as housing cooperatives from acquiring assets that are under-utilised and put them to a better use. Will the government consider widening its definition of communities to promote alternative forms of housing?

Q14. What can be done about the lack of regulation surrounding the rents landlords/PBSA/Universities can charge their student tenants? Can the Scottish government ensure that a guaranteed proportion of all student housing is leased to students at genuinely affordable rates and put an end to the exploitation of young people by private landlords and investors in PBSA?

Summary response: The Minister confirmed his support for the co-operative model. He noted the review of PBSA and the research undertaken by CaCHE. The Minister noted that the Housing Bill aims further to strengthen renters rights and offered to meet with ESH Co-op to discuss the specific issues raised.

Standards, Repair & Retrofit.

Q15. The tenement housing stock in Scotland is facing the twin pressures of building disrepair and challenging retrofit conditions. With so many competing housing priorities, can you assure us that the Government still understands the importance of legislation involving mandatory owners associations, five-year tenement inspections, and building funds, and that the issues of disrepair and retrofit in the tenement stock will not be able to be solved without ensuing passage of these measures first.

Q16. Will the Minister send an official to the next CIOB Retrofit Roundtable?

Summary response: The Minister confirmed this remains a priority. The Law Commission will report next year and the tenement maintenance group has been reconstituted. The Minister also noted that the Green Finance Taskforce will also report

soon and reaffirmed his commitment to working collaboratively to tackle the issue. He confirmed that he will send an official to the next CIOB roundtable.

Additional Questions.

Time allowed for the following additional questions (paraphrased) from members:

Q17. Is there any news on reviewing LHA rates?

Summary response: The Minister has met with and written to his UK government counterpart on this matter but has yet to receive a response.

Q18. Will the Housing Bill address accessibility?

Summary response: Yes. The Minister will meet with MND Scotland soon to discuss specifics.

Q19. When will the additional £2 million RRTPs fund be distributed.

Summary response: COSLA will soon make decision on how this is to be distributed.

Q20. Will the Minister declare a 'Housing Emergency' to focus minds?

Summary response: The Minister acknowledged that problems need to be dealt with regardless of what we call the 'crisis'. He expressed a preference for action to deal with the problems.

Q21. Is the government looking to address between tenancy rent increases?

Summary response: This is being looked at in the Housing Bill.

Agenda item 5: AOCB

The convener expressed an interest in visiting the Edinburgh Student Housing Co-operative to learn more about the tenure model.

It was suggested that the next meeting could be hosted by Crisis.

Action: Secretariat to liaise with ESH Co-op to arrange a visit and with Crisis to organise the next meeting.

Agenda item 6: Next meeting

TBC – Secretariat to liaise with Convener/Deputy Convener to plan future meetings and topics.