

Cross-Party Group on Housing Meeting

4 June 2024, 18:30-20:00

Minute

Present

MSPs

Graham Simpson MSP – Convener
Ben Macpherson MSP
Sarah Boyack MSP
Jeremy Balfour MSP

Invited guests

Fergus Murray, Argyll and Bute Council
Julie Whitelaw, West Lothian Council
Jennifer Sheddan, Glasgow City Council
Derek McGowan, City of Edinburgh Council
Cllr Allan Casey, Glasgow City Council
Cllr Jean Meagher, City of Edinburgh Council
John Kerr, West Dunbartonshire Council
Donna Bogdanovic, Scottish Borders Council
Frances McMeeking, Glasgow City Council
Sharon Egan, South Lanarkshire Council

Non-MSP Group Members

Gareth James, CaCHE
Ashley Campbell, CIH Scotland
Pedro Cameron, Housing Options Scotland
Abigail Fletcher, Scottish Parliament
Ken Gibb, CaCHE
Craig Gurney, CaCHE
John Boyle, Rettie and Co.
Robert Toomey, RICS
Deborah Hay, JRF
Craig Stirrat, Grampian Housing
Carolyn Johnstone, Salvation Army
Lara Balkwill, Rock Trust
Ursula Hofeldt, Cyrenians Scotland
Alex Clark

Shona Mitchell, Home Group
Ken Wilkie, Arcadis
Viki Fox, Cyrenians Scotland
Anna Gardiner, Scottish Land and Estates
David Bookbinder, Glasgow West Scotland Forum
Kelly Innes, Fore Square
Lyndsay Clelland, Age Scotland
Michael Tornow, Public Health Scotland
Jennifer Mackessack, UWS
Aoife Deery, Citizens Advice Scotland
David Aitchison, Shelter Scotland
Keith Baker, Glasgow Caledonian University
Carol Morton
Shelley Hutton, Places for People
Moir Bayne, Housing Options Scotland
Colette McDiarmid, MND Scotland
Anastasia Kourtis, Scottish Parliament
Kevin Murphy, Homes for Scotland
Tom Ockendon, SFHA
Lorenzo Martinico, Edinburgh Student Housing Co-operative
David Cowdrey, MCS Certified
Andrea Finkel-Gates, Scotland Housing Network
Donna Young, Rural Housing Scotland
Sharmili Lama, Parkhead Housing Association
Catherine Wood
Craig Sanderson
Paul Hilton, ESPC

Apologies

Miles Briggs MSP
Tony Cain, ALACHO

Agenda item 1: Welcome

Graham Simpson MSP opened the meeting and welcomed members and guest speakers.

Agenda item 2: Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved. There were no matters arising.

Agenda item 3: Update on Student Homelessness Short Life Working Group

Ashley Campbell (chair of the short life working group on student housing and homelessness) provided an update on the work to date. Ashley thanked members of the SLWG for their participation and contributions to date.

There have been two meetings of the SLWG so far, at which the following issues were discussed:

- the lack of data on student projections and student housing needs
- the need for higher education institutions to work more closely with local authorities to plan better to meet student housing needs
- the growth of PBSA and whether the mix of accommodation options is right
- concerns about affordability
- tensions between local communities and student accommodation in the context of the housing emergency
- hidden homelessness and the fact that the system doesn't record student homelessness
- stigma and knowing where to go to get help

Ashley also noted other work that is ongoing (i.e. a survey of landlords and students, a focus group with students in Edinburgh, and written responses received from local authorities, higher education institutions, and private providers) and confirmed that the aim is to produce a report for the CPG by the end of the summer.

Cllr Jane Meagher offered to contribute to the work of the SLWG.

David Bookbinder drew connections with the Housing Emergency and the volume of purpose built student accommodation being approved/delivered in Edinburgh.

Aoife Deery referenced a report by Citizens Advice Scotland on homelessness, which references student homelessness.

Moira Bayne raised the issue of disabled students. Gareth confirmed that accessibility has featured in the discussions held by the SLWG.

Agenda item 4: Housing Emergency

The CPG heard from guest speakers from Edinburgh, Glasgow, Argyll and Bute, West Dunbartonshire, West Lothian and Scottish Borders councils.

Edinburgh

It was noted that the number of households living in temporary accommodation is increasing and that this has knock-on effects for health and wellbeing, especially for children. As of 3 June, there were 5,100 homeless households (7,000 people) in Edinburgh – 1,300 of these are living in unsuitable accommodation and this is expected to continue. There is an average of 3,500 homeless presentations every year and need for 9,500 new homes over the next few years. However, it was noted that the reduction in affordable housing supply grant means it is unlikely that any new homes will be approved this year or next. The homelessness budget in Edinburgh for 2018/19 was £28m, but last year the council spent just under £65m on homelessness services. Average house prices were said to be 92% above the national average and average rentals £1500 pcm compared to £1100 nationally. Some factors (asylum and refugee policy) were also said to be outside the control of the council.

Glasgow

Many of the issues experienced in Edinburgh also apply to Glasgow. The scale of the problem is similar in these two cities (Glasgow has 6,500 open homelessness applications, just under 4,000 in temporary and 1,500 in unsuitable accommodation). There has been an increase in the number of people rough sleeping in Glasgow, particularly those with no recourse to public funds. The added pressures of local connections legislation without additional resource allocation were also mentioned. Likewise, the resettlement of Ukrainian refugees and the fast tracking of asylum cases by the Home Office. The cost of living crisis, higher rents and evictions were also discussed. Glasgow City Council has no housing stock of its own and is therefore reliant on registered social landlords but there is not enough supply. It was also suggested that the difference in homeless legislation between Scotland and England is driving single homeless men to present as homeless in Scotland.

Argyll and Bute

The first local authority to declare a housing emergency. Despite new build programmes and bringing empty homes back into use, it has not been enough to meet need and demand. Homelessness numbers have risen by 28% over the past couple of years. Waiting list is at 3,300 people – up 8% in one year. Private sector rents are increasingly unaffordable and many landlords are leaving the sector for short term lets or to sell or leave vacant the properties. House prices and the cost of mortgage finance were also mentioned. Grid capacity and infrastructure challenges are a particular issue limiting new housing supply in rural areas. The lack of housing exacerbates depopulation and economic decline – businesses cannot hire new staff because there is nowhere for them to live. Recent experience of teachers and police not able to find homes and therefore not taking up jobs. The council has appointed a dedicated officer to address these issues and has doubled council tax on 4000 second homes, as well as identifying key housing sites and what infrastructure is needed to unlock development potential. Call for more funding as well as flexibility in how existing funds can be used.

West Dunbartonshire

Declared in May primarily due to the failure to meet statutory homelessness obligations for the first time as well as wider pressures on the housing system and cuts to the affordable housing supply programme. The latter has upended councils plans to build their way out of the crisis. Similar problem of homelessness to other parts of Scotland (1 in 40 households present as homeless each year; and the problem is greater among younger households). 274 households in temporary accommodation last year, including 104 children and some have been in temporary accommodation for more than a year. £600,000 additional expenditure on temporary accommodation last year which could have gone to acquisitions. Waiting list at 5,500 people and acute lack of family homes. Growing constructions costs and reduced grant mean it's likely that no new projects will be approved in 2024/25.

West Lothian

Similar pressures in terms of budget and increasing number of homeless applications and use of temporary accommodation. Council has access to 140 bed and breakfast and hotel places for those presenting as homeless, but regularly need around 190, so people are instead being placed outside the local authority area. The council has been breaching the unsuitable accommodation order for the last couple of years. No new

funding allocation to homelessness budget. Demand for social housing outstrips supply by 10:1. Heavy reliance on private rented sector but landlords are leaving the sector. Particular difficulties sourcing larger family accommodation so families spend longer in temporary accommodation. Temporary cessation of non-urgent repairs as part of void improvement plan to get homes let more quickly but this has not stemmed the flow. High levels of tenancy sustainment so little throughput of accommodation for homeless people. Real concern that new affordable supply will be impacted by cuts to AHSP budget.

Scottish Borders

Declared last week. Similar issues to Argyll and Bute and Glasgow (in terms of no council housing stock at SBC's disposal). 60% of housing association lets already go to homeless people putting pressure on other parts of the system. It was suggested that 100% of social lets could go to homeless applicants and it would still not solve the issue. Depopulation and the higher costs of construction in rural areas were also mentioned, similar to Argyll and Bute. The use of temporary accommodation is at its highest level and people are spending longer in temporary accommodation than ever before. Planning and infrastructure challenges were also discussed.

Wider discussion

Craig Gurney noted the drivers for the declaration of a housing emergency by local authorities in 2023 were "transparency" (Glasgow) and "raising awareness of the dire situation" (Edinburgh), and that public awareness and engagement in the scale of the problem Scotland faces is an important priority given the General Election, the uncertainties about Westminster-Edinburgh financial resolution post GE and the fact that the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Stage 2 report is likely to use up all available housing policy bandwidth from September onwards.

Sarah Boyak MSP noted the scale of the problem and the impact on families and children. She encouraged people to lobby their MSPs and called for the reversal of cuts to the AHSP budget.

Ben McPherson MSP also acknowledged the scale of the problem and referenced the cost of land and the Land Reform Bill currently going through parliament.

Keith Baker spoke about infrastructure challenges and called for cross-party collaboration in mapping out infrastructure capacity issues (grid, water, IT, social, etc.) in order to unlock development opportunities.

Craig Stirrat suggested that local authorities should consider pressing for a freeze on some current statutory requirements (e.g. local connections was mentioned). There appeared to be broad agreement that this needs to be considered at least.

Tom Ockendon suggested that the shift away from public grant to private finance will push up rents which is a cost that will be passed onto tenants. Similar approach in England has resulted in a model that delivers fewer social homes.

Derek McGowan noted the additional prevention duties in the Housing Bill and the added pressures that will bring.

ACTION

<p>The CPG agreed to write to the Minister in the first instance and also to invite him to the next meeting to respond to the points raised in discussion and in the letter.</p>
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<p>The CPG will also issue a press release following this meeting.</p>
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Agenda item 5: AOCB

No other business.

Agenda item 6: Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place on 11 September 2024.