



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Local Government and Communities Committee

Wednesday 20 September 2017

Session 5



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LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
22nd Meeting 2017, Session 5

CONVENER

*Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

*Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

*Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Dave Aitken (Local Authority Building Standards Scotland)

Raymond Barlow (Glasgow City Council)

Rhys Campbell

Thomas Lyon

Alan McAulay (Local Authority Building Standards Scotland)

Julie McCallagh

Emma Pearce

Saffron Rohan

Simone Smith

Michael Thain (Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers)

John Wood (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Jason Nairn

Jane Williams

LOCATION

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)

Scottish Parliament

Local Government and Communities Committee

Wednesday 20 September 2017

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:46]

Building Regulations (Fire Safety)

The Convener (Bob Doris): Good morning and welcome to the 22nd meeting of the Local Government and Communities Committee in 2017. I remind everyone present to turn off their mobile phones. As meeting papers are provided in digital format for members, they may use tablets during the meeting—that is what we are doing if anyone sees us using our phones or tablets. We have a full house of committee members; no apologies have been received.

In agenda item 1 the committee will take evidence for the scrutiny of building regulations and fire safety in Scotland. I welcome John Wood, policy manager for the communities team at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities; Michael Thain from the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers; David Aitken and Alan McAulay from Local Authority Building Standards Scotland; and Raymond Barlow, assistant head of planning and building standards for Glasgow City Council. Thank you to everyone for coming.

There are a number of opening statements. I will take them in the order that has been provided to me.

John Wood (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities): As the committee will be aware, COSLA is a membership organisation that represents all 32 Scottish local authorities. We welcome the committee turning its attention to building standards and fire safety in the wake of the Grenfell tragedy. We would like to place on record our sympathy for every member of the community who was affected by the fire at Grenfell tower. At their meeting on 25 August, COSLA leaders asked me to convey that message to the committee.

COSLA's focus in the weeks following the Grenfell tragedy has been on supporting the work undertaken by the Scottish Government, including the ministerial working group on building and fire safety, and by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to gather relevant information at a national level in support of the reassurance activity at a local level. We welcome the creation of the ministerial working group and have found the

communicative approach of that group to be particularly helpful.

From what COSLA can understand, three key policy developments have occurred at a national level in Scotland over the summer. First, the ministerial working group has agreed to bring forward a consultation on the regulation of smoke and fire alarms in homes for social rent. Secondly, the ministerial working group has endorsed a fire safety campaign, which will be led by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and supported by a number of other organisations. Finally, the ministerial working group has undertaken a commitment to review relevant standards and regulations.

COSLA welcomes each of those developments. It has also been reassuring to learn, through the group's information gathering exercise, that no council housing tower block has been covered with combustible cladding material of the sort that is suspected to have been used at Grenfell tower.

In their response, our members' primary focus has been on reassuring the public, particularly the communities that live in high-rise domestic properties. Our understanding is that councils and the fire service have worked extremely well to reassure tenants and that their early and comprehensive response should be commended. COSLA believes that a holistic approach to fire prevention should be taken and that building standards form only part of that picture, albeit an important part.

For today's evidence session, I hope that I can provide a helpful insight into some of the national conversations that have happened and on local authorities' broad views on fire safety and domestic properties. Colleagues from LABSS and ALACHO will be able to provide a more comprehensive level of technical detail than I can. I hope that my contributions will be of value to the committee.

Dave Aitken (Local Authority Building Standards Scotland): I am the chair of Local Authority Building Standards Scotland and, on behalf of colleagues in LABSS—as we are commonly known—I welcome the opportunity to attend the meeting with specific regard to building regulations and fire safety.

As I attended a previous committee meeting on the wider building standards system, members may be aware that LABSS represents the interests of all 32 local authority building standards services in Scotland. We hope that the specific skills, qualifications and experiences of those who represent LABSS today will assist the committee in its scrutiny of building regulations and fire safety. Acting solely in the public interest, we work closely with the Scottish Government's building

standards division on procedural and technical matters relating to Scotland's building standards system. The primary aim is to ensure that the verification and enforcement are as effective as possible.

My day job is team leader of building standards in Dundee City Council; I am a chartered building standards surveyor. I am accompanied by Alan McAulay, who is team leader of building standards services in South Lanarkshire Council; he is a chartered surveyor and past chair of LABSS, and he has a fire engineering degree.

Raymond Barlow (Glasgow City Council): I did not provide a written submission to the committee; I was aware of the LABSS submission. I am also a past chair of LABSS—I was chair in 2014-15—and I welcome the opportunity to contribute today. I am the assistant head of planning and building standards at Glasgow City Council with more than 30 years' experience in the building standards field. Like Alan McAulay, I am a chartered surveyor with a degree in fire risk engineering. We see much of that type of approach in Glasgow with the nature of its developments. I welcome the opportunity to contribute to today's meeting.

The Convener: Thank you for those opening statements. I will kick off before we move to fellow members. The good news—if there was any good news from the tragedy of Grenfell—is that it would appear, and I stress “appear”, that no high rise in Scotland has the combustible material or systems that were discovered at Grenfell and which led to that dreadful tragedy. I know that confirmation of that has been given by housing associations and local authorities to the Scottish Government. I ask for more information about how local authorities know that. My constituents will say that it is brilliant to have those reassurances, but how can it be stated with such certainty that those materials do not exist in the housing stock in your areas?

Dave Aitken: Would Raymond Barlow like to take that question, given the amount of high rise in Glasgow?

Raymond Barlow: We recently completed our submission to the ministers and are waiting for further feedback. I am not sure whether the information that you have is fully up to date. I do not necessarily want to go into the detail of what I have given over.

Glasgow City Council responded previously about the social landlords in the city. Glasgow does not carry its own council housing any more, so our links are with the housing associations, the Wheatley Group in particular. Glasgow asked them to report back to us, and we responded initially on that; there were no properties reported in that tranche. That would have been based on

the records of how they had reclad their buildings, most of which would have building warrants.

We have been completing the exercise for private flatted developments, but it has been very difficult, first, to ascertain which buildings fall into the category by meeting the height criteria and, secondly, once we have established that, to go to whatever records are available—initially, building warrant records—although we have had some feedback from factors following the ministers' request. We have completed that exercise only recently. We have notified the ministers of some properties and we are awaiting further feedback.

The Convener: Before I invite Mr Thain to speak, I will explore that a little bit further with you, Mr Barlow. Can we break it into two parts? Are you content that none of the combustible material or cladding such as was used on Grenfell tower exists in social rented housing in the city of Glasgow?

Raymond Barlow: Yes. That is the information that we obtained from the social landlords themselves.

As I said, there was some difficulty in getting the information in the first place. We first had to establish which properties fell into the category of domestic flatted buildings above a certain height. Local authorities do not hold records of the heights of buildings, and we have many buildings in the city that are over 18m in height. A lot of them are commercial premises—offices and so on. We had to start from there.

That is why, when we went to the social landlords—our colleagues in our housing investment team have very good relationships with social landlords—we said to them, “You know your buildings better than we do. Could you look at what you have had done to your buildings and look at the building warrant records and so on?” The information that they fed back was relayed to the ministers a month or two back. I was on leave when the initial request came, and I know that the information was fed back quite quickly. That took care of that part. The social landlords, as the buildings' owners, fed back the information on what alterations or improvements they have had done to their properties—for instance, recladding, whether that was with insulation with render over it or with some other form of cladding. They reported back and we passed that information on to the ministers.

The Convener: Okay. That is the social housing. There are also hospitals, commercial office blocks and a variety of other buildings. Can you tell me a little bit about those? I will bring in the other witnesses in a second. I sense, from your initial answer, Mr Barlow, that some of the information that has been given to the Scottish

Government highlights that there is more of this form of cladding on commercial properties than we initially thought.

Raymond Barlow: No—sorry. I perhaps misled you. We never reported back on commercial properties, because we were not asked to do so. We reported back only on domestic buildings over 18m in height.

The Convener: Did I detect a slight nervousness in giving us that assurance? Where do you feel that this type of cladding and cladding system may exist in Glasgow?

Raymond Barlow: The properties that we have reported back on in the past couple of weeks are private flats, not social rented housing. I apologise if I was not clear. The initial reporting was on the social landlord side of things, and that confirmed, from their information, that this type of cladding does not exist on any of the social rented housing. Our trawl and our research from then on was very much on private flatted developments, and we have managed to complete that research only in the past couple of weeks. I have passed that information over to the ministers via the building standards division.

The Convener: So combustible cladding has been found on some private properties.

Raymond Barlow: Yes. It is just not public information yet.

The Convener: It is now public information, because you are telling us.

Raymond Barlow: Absolutely. I am simply responding to the question and would prefer not to go into the detail of the properties, if you understand.

The Convener: Okay. I will not push you on the details, but can I push you on the scale of the issue?

Raymond Barlow: I am wary of that as well, simply because we have not released any figures to anyone about that. Because we got the request from the ministerial working group, we are providing the information to that group. As a council, we are responding to press inquiries and so on, too. We are supplying the information to the Scottish ministers and we will then see what they want to do with the information before we take the matter further.

The Convener: Let us pretend that I am a journalist. Is it 30 properties in Glasgow that have this type of cladding? Is it more? Is it less?

Raymond Barlow: At the moment, I would prefer not to say. We have not answered that question to others because we are respectful of the fact that the Scottish ministers have asked for

that information. We will see what they want to do with the information.

The Convener: I apologise to the other witnesses, but I must explore that point a bit further.

Has the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service been to see each property as a matter of priority?

Raymond Barlow: No, because the process that we have been asked to follow is to notify Scottish ministers and that is what we have done.

The Convener: Have you notified the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service?

10:00

Raymond Barlow: No. We are waiting to find out what the Scottish ministers wish to do. The ministerial working group will include the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in its meetings.

The Convener: I want to move on to let other witnesses comment, and I will leave this issue shortly. However, Glasgow City Council does not have a relationship only with the Scottish Government. It has direct lines of responsibility for building standards and a variety of other areas, irrespective of whether there is a ministerial working group.

Given that you have established this information, would it not be sensible to ask the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to carry out, for example, intrusive fire safety assessments of the properties?

Raymond Barlow: The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is involved in the ministerial working group and goes to its meetings. Therefore the fire service at the highest national level in Scotland will be party to the information that we have provided. It can decide at that point, working in conjunction with the ministerial working group, what matters it wishes to take forward. We will happily work with the ministerial working group once it has decided what it wishes to do with the information provided.

The Convener: My only reason for not pushing that point further is that there will be families who stay in the properties and it might be that the properties are absolutely safe.

There is a technical building standard that deals with how the whole system that is put together should become non-combustible—

Raymond Barlow: Yes, BR 135.

The Convener: Are the properties compliant with BR 135?

Raymond Barlow: All the properties on which we provided information predate the current regulations.

The Convener: Because of the sensitivities for the people who live in the properties, I am not going to pursue the point further. We may wish to come back to it.

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab): May I ask a question?

The Convener: Absolutely. There are a lot of questions that I would like to ask. I am conscious of taking a measured approach, but other committee members must be able to ask questions.

Elaine Smith: If there were not a ministerial working group on the subject at present, and Glasgow City Council found out the information, what would it do?

Raymond Barlow: We would speak to the property factors to notify them.

In terms of legislative powers, there is not much that local authorities can do, other than notify people. We are cognisant of the risks to families and others, but we want to make sure that the information is controlled as well as possible so that people understand the context of the information that they are given.

The ministerial working group asked the factoring agents in Scotland to assist local authorities in researching the position. We got some assistance from factoring groups, but their information was limited. We would be giving information that we were made aware of to the owners of the buildings through the factors or other such bodies.

We need to know what the ministerial working group wishes to do with the information, as it is the group that asked local authorities for it. This is a national issue and it is best that the group decides what should be done. The group is in contact with factoring agents and others.

Elaine Smith: My concern, and it may be shared by colleagues, is that some tragedy occurs while a red-tape administrative line is being followed.

Raymond Barlow: I do not see it as red tape. We are simply being respectful of what the information means. The properties predate the current standards.

The Convener: We will continue with the questioning a bit further.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Where has the information come from?

Raymond Barlow: We researched our building work records.

Graham Simpson: So it was a desktop exercise.

Raymond Barlow: Yes, and as necessary we tried to speak to the developers of the time, or their agents and architects, some of whom are no longer in existence.

Graham Simpson: Have you been out to see any of the private flats?

Raymond Barlow: Some of the flats have been looked at externally. If it was a cladding product that was in question, looking from the outside would not give much information. Google street view would provide the same information.

Graham Simpson: You said that the buildings predate current regulations. What age of buildings are we looking at?

Raymond Barlow: They were built under consents that were applied for prior to 1 May 2005.

Graham Simpson: So some of them could be fairly modern.

Raymond Barlow: Absolutely. Some of them were completed after 2005 with a consent that was applied for pre-2005. As you might be aware, a building warrant has a life of three years.

Graham Simpson: Having discovered that some private flats in Glasgow have cladding that is combustible, did you inform the owners of those flats?

Raymond Barlow: No. I provided the information to the ministerial working group as requested, because it is a national issue. We would be no different from any council that was asked for and discovered that information.

Graham Simpson: Do you not think that Glasgow City Council has a responsibility to the citizens of Glasgow, rather than to a ministerial working group, given the information that you discovered?

Raymond Barlow: Nationally we do, which is why I fed the information back through the ministerial working group, through the Government.

The Convener: I apologise for ending this line of questioning.

Graham Simpson: I have one more question, convener.

The Convener: Okay, ask the question, then I will make a suggestion to Mr Barlow, which will allow us to move on to ask the other witnesses some questions.

Graham Simpson: Has anyone discovered the same thing in private flats elsewhere in Scotland?

Dave Aitken: We certainly have not in Dundee. The ministerial working group will have collated all that information.

The Convener: That is helpful. Mr McAulay and Mr Thain have been very patient, but I want to make a point to Mr Barlow before I let them come in. We are not content to leave this line of questioning and we will pursue it further by seeking information from the Scottish Government as soon as possible. I seek from Glasgow City Council as detailed a briefing as it can provide, as soon as humanly possible. We will maybe ask Glasgow City Council to come back to the committee in short order to answer further questions on this matter, if that is agreeable to Mr Barlow.

Raymond Barlow: I will speak to our chief executive on the matter. I can come back. Bearing in mind the sensitivity of the information, I am fully cognisant of why you are asking these questions. I do not disagree with any of the opinions that you have expressed about the concerns that the matter raises—I do not detract from those. I would simply say that I have provided information to the Scottish Government and we wish to allow it to advise us what it wants to do with the information, because it is a national issue.

The Convener: It is a national issue, but the council has a direct local responsibility irrespective of whether the national working group exists. People who are listening to this meeting or who read about it tomorrow in the newspapers will want to know whether their flat is affected, whether it is dangerous and what the risk is to their family. They will want those questions to be addressed speedily and effectively with a view to being reassured as quickly as humanly possible. The only reason why I am ending the line of questioning now is that we do not want to create unnecessary alarm—reassurances might be able to be given speedily, but we simply do not know that yet. I am also conscious that there are 32 local authorities in Scotland—there is not just Glasgow. We will move on to other lines of questioning, but we have to return to this matter. Mr Thain has been waiting patiently to come in.

Michael Thain (Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers): I refer back to an earlier point about social housing. I am a chief housing officer with the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers. I thought it would be helpful to give a wee bit of context about the response of local authorities and housing associations, with which we have a close relationship, from an organisational landlord point of view.

Even on the morning of the fire, when my colleagues and I switched on the news, we knew what effect it might have on our tenants and residents. There was a reasonably quick response, with housing officers deployed to tower blocks to reassure tenants and hear their concerns, given the huge amount of media coverage.

Our second organisational response was to review the landlord records and local authority housing records. I know from having spoken to my colleagues who are directors or chief executives of housing associations that, almost prior to any requests for information from the Scottish Government, exactly the same checking process was being carried out as details of the materials used emerged over the hours following the start of the fire.

The feedback that was given, probably within the week, to Scottish Government colleagues by local authority housing services and housing associations was provided through the checking of records. As the bodies that develop, build and maintain those houses, our records are probably more complete than would be the case under any regulatory system for building warrants.

That work concluded comprehensively that no social housing blocks or blocks owned by councils or housing associations used the same materials as were used in Grenfell tower. The work was done fairly quickly—it was a management and customer reassurance response. We were exercising our responsibility as landlords to ensure that our tenants are safe and feel safe.

I wanted to give a bit of context to the response of social housing landlords in the immediate hours and days after the tragedy.

Alan McAulay (Local Authority Building Standards Scotland): I will make a general point in response to the initial question about how local authority verifiers establish whether aluminium composite material—ACM—panelling has been used. It is a case of working with our local housing and technical departments—with those who are responsible for the maintenance, upkeep and oversight of the buildings. We do that through researching our historical archives, which Mr Thain alluded to; Mr Barlow touched on that, too. Archive records related to building warrants, completion certificates and material specifications, and, in our council, housing and technical resources, have been made available to those who were initially responsible for responding to the ministerial demands. I think that that has been the general approach throughout the country.

To clarify the original point, as local authority verifiers, we are involved in assisting with the collation of that information. However,

responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the buildings is outwith the verifier role. We provide information to allow those who are responsible within each council to submit the information required by Scottish ministers.

The Convener: I will mop up this line of questioning with a question for Mr Wood. Are you confident that all 32 local authorities are content that the same type of combustible cladding was not used—or at least not in the social housing sector? Have the other 31 local authorities been interrogating the private sector? How many of them have said that such cladding has not been used in their areas?

John Wood: I was just going to speak to the national picture that has been built up by the ministerial working group and through Scottish Government officials. In the 10 days to two weeks immediately after the fire, a number of requests went to local authorities—they were directed to chief executives and chief housing officers—for information on the construction types and number of high-rise properties above 18m in their areas, and on the type of cladding used. A separate questionnaire went out about cladding that had been installed using funding from Scottish Government's home energy efficiency programmes for Scotland and area-based schemes. That information was collated by the Scottish Government, but we understand that what was fed back to COSLA and put on the ministerial working group's web page is that confirmation came back that there was no cladding of the sort that was suspected to have been at fault at Grenfell tower on any of the houses that were surveyed.

In building up a national picture, it seemed as if there was quite a lot of bureaucracy within a short period of time, but it has been useful in allowing ministers, COSLA and local elected members to provide the reassurance that might be required from them.

The Convener: I have a final question before I bring in other committee members to explore other lines of evidence. It is our understanding that the Scottish Government will create a national database of all high-rise properties across the country, whether they are social rented, private or whatever, and that that database will include information on the types of cladding used. Given what we have just heard from Mr Barlow, I assume that that would be a pretty positive and fairly essential step towards a better understanding of the state of Scotland's current housing stock, be it social rented or otherwise. Would you all support that view, noting the obligations of local authorities to help keep that database fresh, updated and accurate?

10:15

John Wood: It would certainly be useful. I cannot speak to the challenges that there would be in getting the relevant information about private rented properties. However, I think that the information on social housing is there in council records at the moment, so accessing it would not be an onerous task and would serve a purpose.

The Convener: Okay. Is there any other information that should be in that national database? I am conscious that in a few years' time, something else could happen in relation to building standards. We would then have to scurry about, check building warrants and historical archives, and work out what material was or was not used in a building and what the construction type was. That is a laborious, long-drawn-out process. Is a compelling case being built for a much more accurate, detailed national database of high-rise properties in Scotland?

Michael Thain: I would say that local authorities absolutely have a role in supporting the maintenance of and providing information for that database. To refer back to our earlier discussion, it is worth reflecting on the responsibility of owners, property managers and factors of private properties to know their buildings and giving them specific responsibility for making that information public on such a database. I do not know what the mechanism for achieving that would be, but the issue is worth reflecting on, given the earlier discussion about the challenges.

Some of these buildings go back to the 1990s or the 1980s or whenever—that particularly applies to high-rise buildings in urban areas. Many such buildings are in private ownership or managed by private property agents. It is worth reflecting on what responsibilities owners or their agents would have to update such a database.

The Convener: Is it currently an offence for owners not to provide relevant information when it is requested by local authorities? You can contact the people in the private sector as much as you like, but getting back a good-quality, detailed response may be another matter. Do they have to respond to you?

Michael Thain: In the context of the debate about the safety of these buildings, I think that, however a database is set up—whether that is done through a national agency or administered through local authorities, for example—the requirement for owners or property agents to provide information should be looked at as well.

In setting up a database of such properties for the purpose of making them safe, there are two things to consider at this stage: who owns those buildings, and which statutory body—whether it should be a central agency, a Scottish

Government agency or local authorities themselves—will administer the database. Somewhere in the discussion, we need to consider requiring the owners and property managers of those buildings to provide information to whoever administers the database.

The Convener: I do not want to add anything to that—I think that you have summed up my thoughts. If the witnesses have nothing to add on this section of questioning, we will move to a question from Elaine Smith.

Elaine Smith: Actually, something else that sprang to mind and which might need to be addressed is last week's reports about fake fire-resistant glass being sold across the United Kingdom and Ireland.

I turn specifically to the challenges that have been mentioned. In their written submissions, COSLA and LABSS said that building standards should remain a local authority function. I want to explore that slightly more. Do the witnesses have any comment to make on the suggestion that local authority building standards departments might be underresourced and, if they are underresourced, how could that be tackled? To tie in with that, do the witnesses have a view on ring fencing the income from building standards fees, which would be used exclusively to provide building standards services? I ask COSLA to respond first, as it specifically said that

"building standards should remain a local authority function".

John Wood: That is correct. COSLA's response contained that line. There is benefit from ensuring that there is no geographical overlap between the 32 building standards authorities and that there is a line of accountability directly to the local communities that those councils serve. That is our line and we stick to it. I am no expert in this, but I have heard reports about building standards changes south of the border that have led to a bit of confusion.

On the ring fencing of income from building standards fees, COSLA responded separately to the call for evidence before the summer. As a point of principle, we do not support the ring fencing of funding. When funds are gathered, the local authority should have discretion to use them as it sees fit.

To be honest, I do not have a view on your point about the resourcing of building standards departments. However, we always need to be mindful of the capacity that exists in councils and other public bodies to enforce regulations. After Grenfell, a lot of the focus in Scotland and in the ministerial working group has been on the existing regulatory framework. Although I cannot speak to exactly what the situation looks like on the ground

at the moment, there is no point in having a regulatory framework if we do not have people to enforce it.

Alan McAulay: We made what we feel is a very strong case for the reappointment of local authorities as sole verifiers in 2011 and again more recently, based on our independence. Local authority verifiers are experienced, skilled and qualified and provide services locally, according to the needs of their geographical areas. Local Authority Building Standards Scotland still stands by that.

It is fair to say that local authority building standards services have not been immune to the cuts that local authorities throughout the country have faced but that is not to say that that has affected the quality of the verification service that local authorities provide. It simply means that we need to prioritise better and use our resources where the risks are highest. That is happening in local authorities and each one is different.

Everyone in the local authority environment is always hopeful that fees will be ring fenced. On the back of the recent fees increase, we welcomed the more explicit expectation that the fees should be directly invested in the delivery of local authority services, in bringing on trainees and in bringing younger people into the service. That is our aim and drive in our authorities, although it is still a challenge in each one. However, some authorities are moving on from the challenges of previous years. Each authority is at a different stage, but there is significant recruitment in Glasgow City Council, the City of Edinburgh Council and in authorities around the central belt and in other parts of the country. More and new people are coming in, which means that we are turning the corner with regard to the challenges that we had with local authority cuts.

We are moving in a positive direction. One of Local Authority Building Standards Scotland's key aims is to ensure that anybody who comes into the verification service is provided with the skills and support that allow them to be an effective verifier, have a good career and support verification in a local authority environment.

Graham Simpson: Mr McAulay, we know each other because I used to be a councillor in South Lanarkshire. You commented that everyone was providing a good service but that is not quite the case, is it? Some councils have been given permission to verify only for another year—I think that the City of Edinburgh Council is one of them—so I think that we can accept that they are all performing at different levels.

My question is about the desktop exercise on fire safety. Have all councils done that exercise, or

have any gone further than that and gone out and tested stuff on the ground?

Dave Aitken: In Dundee City Council, the housing department led on that, and I cannot speak on behalf of the housing department. We have assisted where we have been able to, through the desktop exercise and by looking at archive records.

Michael Thain: In addition to checking and verifying records, my local authority checked blocks on which maintenance was being done, and I know that other local authority housing departments have been going through similar processes. We have around 50 tower blocks, so maintenance is going on all the time. On blocks on which maintenance was being done, we took the opportunity to go and check that what was in our records as being on the buildings was what was on them. We also commissioned some work, which is under way at the moment, to do that check across all the blocks and give us further peace of mind. The checks that we have done verify what is on our records.

Alan McAulay mentioned the balancing of risks and priorities. Unless we took off every panel from every block and checked the insulation, we would never have 100 per cent certainty. However, the quality of the records and the processes by which projects are managed—particularly in the local authority/housing association sector, where clerks of works and project managers are used, and a lot of checking and verifying is done—should provide some reassurance. Landlords have taken opportunities to check the material that is on buildings. As I said, on blocks on which my authority was undertaking maintenance, we checked the material and verified that, on those blocks, our records were accurate. Some invasive follow-up checking has been going on.

The Convener: Mr Wood, do you want to add anything?

John Wood: I do not have much to add, other than to say that that is what we have heard, too. From speaking to COSLA members, I think that most of the work has been desktop-focused research. There has sometimes been a demand for intrusive inspections to be undertaken, but those requests have not often been granted—such inspections have been few and far between—partly because, if we were to open that door, when would we stop? In addition, there is a need for local authorities, in particular, and other social landlords to continue to reassure the communities that live in the tower blocks. In the immediate aftermath of Grenfell, we have tried to avoid people having to see scaffolding going up and walls being drilled into when that is not necessary.

Raymond Barlow: I support what Mr Wood and Mr Thain have said. They have summarised the situation fairly well. From Glasgow City Council's point of view, it has been predominantly a desktop exercise. Any of us would have difficulty in speaking on behalf of all the authorities, because there is such variation in the number of high-rise properties that we have. Glasgow City Council probably has the most, with the City of Edinburgh Council close behind. I think that, in most cases, it has been a desktop exercise that has been carried out.

The Convener: Mr McAulay, do you want to come in?

Alan McAulay: No, thank you.

The Convener: Jenny Gilruth has a supplementary to Graham Simpson's line of questioning.

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Good morning, panel. Mr Wood, you said that you think that most of your members carried out desktop exercises to assess what was going on. Does no central point of contact at COSLA have that evidence? As an organisation, did you survey your members as a matter of course?

John Wood: We considered that, but we work extremely closely with the relevant Scottish Government department, which asked the right questions quickly. We did not think that it would be useful to carry out an identical survey, so we let the Government get on with the work. It has the contacts; if it had not held them, we would have provided them. We really appreciate the fact that the Government has kept an open line of communication with us about what the responses to its surveys have been.

Jenny Gilruth: So you did not act as a central point of contact to enable your members to feed into, for example, the ministerial working group. You allowed your members to do that themselves.

John Wood: We did not do that on this occasion. We sometimes provide that function but, given the swiftness of the Scottish Government response, it was not necessary for us to do so.

10:30

The Convener: Does Mr Simpson want to follow that up?

Graham Simpson: Yes—my question is for COSLA or anyone else who wants to jump in. COSLA's evidence said:

"building standards systems and regulations for high-rise domestic properties in Scotland mean the type of product used on Grenfell Tower should not be used in their cladding systems".

However, such cladding has been found in new-build properties, such as a large development of student housing in Edinburgh. Your evidence is not entirely correct if people have found the product in certain types of properties, so I wonder how far the desktop exercise extends across Scotland. People have looked at student housing, but have they looked at commercial premises, such as hotels, that are over 18m? How far has the exercise gone?

Raymond Barlow: I am happy to answer—again, I will speak from a Glasgow perspective. The request that we all responded to was purely about domestic buildings—for example, in relation to the verifier side of things for flats. I know that separate requests went to local authorities about, for example, their education premises, and I think that a separate request went to the health boards. We did not get a request about hotels, for example; we were not asked to look at such matters.

I will pick up on the student housing point. Quite often, although something is described as student housing, it might not be classed as a house or a dwelling for the purposes of the building regulations. A traditional hall of residence's classification in the building regulations depends on how the architect wishes to approach the design. Some halls may be designed purely as a mainstream dwelling where the option has been taken to rent to students, but other properties are not designed like that, even though they are commonly called student housing.

Graham Simpson: You have confused me. Such properties are clearly dwellings.

Raymond Barlow: No. For the purposes of the building regulations, they might not be. If someone wishes to design a property to be designated as a dwelling under the regulations, it must meet various criteria, from thermal performance to fire precautions and so on. People could be sleeping in a hotel, but we would know that it was not a dwelling.

Over the past 10 years, student residences have been in various formats, and the designers have used varying approaches when they have applied to us for building warrant consents. Some residences have followed a mainstream dwelling design, and others have been what we might call a hybrid that reflects the layout of a hotel. There might be a whole load of bedrooms, one after the other, which is perhaps no different from a hotel, but people commonly call such properties student residences. They are not dwellings for the purposes of the building regulations, so different regulations apply.

Graham Simpson: Gosh. So different regulations can apply—

The Convener: Mr Simpson, I will let you back in to pursue the issue immediately after Mr McAulay has added something.

Alan McAulay: I seek to clarify the point. Additional and significant fire safety features are required in a hall of residence or a hotel to mitigate the risks of that building use. They might involve extensive alarm and detection; depending on the height of the building, there could be suppression systems; there could be built-in limited travel distances; and there could be compartmentation. There are therefore other features that work along with a suppression system, if that is required, to make sure that such buildings are safe for people who occupy them.

A building may in effect be used as a dwelling, but additional measures in the building regulations seek to make sure that it is safe. Such buildings are considered to be non-domestic, which means that the regulations allow us to ask for additional fire safety features that would not necessarily be needed to the same extent in a true dwelling as we know it.

Raymond Barlow: One point to highlight is that, if a building is a student residence of the type that is not a domestic building, it is a managed building and it does not have the stay in place and defend in place approach that applies to domestic high-rise properties. As a managed building, it has in place the different precautions that Alan McAulay highlighted.

Essentially, such properties are managed buildings, rather than the typical single-stair domestic high-rise buildings that have a defend in place approach, which might apply in a building like Grenfell tower.

The Convener: Are you any less confused now, Mr Simpson?

Graham Simpson: The position is a bit clearer, but I am concerned, because people live in student residences most of the time, and I regard such buildings as dwellings. I expect halls of residence to be built to the highest standards and to have non-combustible cladding. That is what I would want if my son or daughter were living in such places. If different regulations apply, that is a concern, and the committee will need more information on that. It is a worry that we have found that student accommodation in Edinburgh does not meet the standards that we would expect. I will leave that point there.

The Convener: I should say that, although we said that we would finish this part of the meeting at 11 o'clock, we will carry on until at least 11.20 to allow members to ask their questions.

Let us take cladding out of the equation for a moment, although I know that it seems almost

impossible to do that. Are some fire safety standards for the managed student accommodation that we have been discussing higher than those for, say, dwellings? I want to focus on the fire safety standards and I do not want to get caught up in semantics, but are there higher fire safety requirements for large complexes of student accommodation—where there are 100 students in halls—that are classed not as dwellings but as managed accommodation, such that those buildings might be able to have such cladding, which we have found in Edinburgh? Are there higher fire safety standards than those that are required for domestic dwellings? I want some clarity on that.

Raymond Barlow: Your question highlights the fundamental difference in the building regulations. Throughout the UK—not just in Scotland—domestic high-rise buildings and others that include sleeping accommodation take different approaches to fire safety. Domestic buildings have defend in place, while managed buildings have different features and precautions, such as a full-building early-warning alarm system that links into every bedroom and common area. A domestic building would not have such a system. In addition, there is building management and other aspects, such as sequence, travel distance and other matters that we deal with daily on a technical level. The precautions try to achieve the same end, which is to have a safe building, although there is a different way of approaching the same thing.

The Convener: The committee has to wrestle with whether such cladding is ever acceptable on a building of a certain height, irrespective of whether it is a dwelling or not. That is the issue that we must consider.

Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green): I have questions on two separate topics. First, we have heard general evidence on the skills shortage in building standards. Elaine Smith talked about a lack of resources and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors has told us about a chronic skills shortage, with very few higher education institutions offering a building control option. What do you consider to be the state of play with the building control profession, particularly in light of the fact that we have heard concerns about the need for more inspection of new-build property, yet the resources and skills seem to be declining?

Dave Aitken: As I said to the committee on an earlier occasion, it is vital to consider building standards holistically. We should not consider building standards services in isolation. You mentioned the RICS statistics and we should not lose sight of the fact that, industry-wide, there is a shortage of skills in construction. If we do not have the skilled tradespeople on the ground and if the

numbers of people who go through colleges are dropping, that affects the pipeline. We need to skill up project managers. Everyone needs to have an awareness of building standards and an input into them in order to achieve compliance with them.

LABSS has worked closely with the construction sector. Recently, we had an event in Dundee with 150 delegates from across the industry. We scoped out what the perceived gaps were in the compliance agenda. We are producing a paper from that event that we will be happy to share with the committee, as it was mentioned previously that the committee wants to be more proactive about building regulations.

LABSS is engaging with Glasgow Caledonian University. We have had several meetings to look at what can be done to encourage greater numbers to go through the colleges and the universities in order to fill the gaps. Workforce planning is a big issue, although that is true across the public sector. There is an ageing profession, and we need to be sure that we are on top of it and have proactive approaches in place to address any shortfalls.

Generally speaking, building standards services are well placed. I do not think that the shortages that Mr Wightman described are at a critical stage, although I am not saying that there are no gaps. LABSS as a body is taking the lead from the Government on where we can share services and skills across the board. That is the type of thing that LABSS, as an organisation, is working on. We know that the issue is there and we are trying to deal with it.

Andy Wightman: Thanks—that is helpful.

The Convener: Mr Wood wants to add something.

John Wood: I endorse what was said about not focusing purely on building standards. As my colleague Dave Aitken said, across the public sector, there is a concern that a reducing workforce means that trainees coming into various professions have an impact on the capacity of those services and the skills that lie within them.

The anecdotal evidence is that less resource is available for general staff training on fire safety—for housing officers, building standards professionals and others. At some stage, the public sector has to recognise that and invest in a skilled-up workforce that can last into the future.

Raymond Barlow: Seven months ago, I attended a meeting on behalf of LABSS that was organised by the Scottish Government but chaired by Homes for Scotland. It brought together representatives from across industry, such as planning and building standards officers, with representatives of universities and representatives

of various industry bodies. The meeting was about bringing people through training across the industry, because it was recognised that if we are to deliver, for example, the social housing targets that we all have over the next number of years, we need the capacity to do that. All areas—not just local authorities—are being looked at to bring people through.

As a local authority, we have brought in some graduates over the past few years—we have been more fortunate than others. However, it is recognised across the industry that we need to staff up all the way through and bring through the next generation.

The Convener: Does Mr Wightman want to pursue that?

Andy Wightman: Thanks, but I will leave that there—I am conscious of time.

A number of witnesses have stressed that building standards and building warrants are for new builds and, once a building has complied with them, it is over to the owner to maintain the building. The properties that Mr Barlow highlighted apparently meet building standards, because they were built prior to the upgrading of the fire standards in 2005. Is there any merit in having a better system for recording the upgrades and refurbishments that are done on older buildings?

At the City of Edinburgh Council recently, I was taken into a little room where I was shown banks and banks of index cards. They showed inspections that the council had done—for example, on all the tenements in Edinburgh up to about the mid-1980s. The council looked at everything, such as the roofs and the closes, and picked up any problems that might arise in relation to access; I presume that fire safety was part of that, too. However, there is no such regime and no obligation on building owners to have any kind of logbook that records maintenance. Given that a lot of our buildings are very old, that means that consumers who buy them do not have a clue what is in them or when the roof was last inspected, for example. I seek a broad indication of whether there is any merit in exploring that in the future.

The Convener: I thank Mr McAulay for offering to respond to Mr Wightman's question—everyone else was trying to avoid eye contact with me.

10:45

Alan McAulay: For the verification role of building standards, the records on building work that we are required by legislation to keep go back only a number of years—maybe back to the late 1960s. They are detailed and will continue to be so in the future with electronic recording. The records for the relatively recent past are robust;

we are their custodians and they are available for inspection by anybody.

We draw the line at the point of completion. It may be for others on the panel to provide advice on the level of information that is provided and available after the verification role ends. If there is refurbishment work, that may be warrantable, and we have the building warrant process to record the information that is to be held by the verifier: the level of work done, the materials used, the inspection processes undertaken and the certification that was given for the completion certificate to be issued.

I cannot answer about anything that is more routine for fire risk assessments or on-going maintenance schedules that apply to such buildings—perhaps other panellists can fill that gap.

Michael Thain: Andy Wightman referred to the City of Edinburgh Council and index cards from the 1980s. To carry out that level of public sector-led inspection would be a very expensive task and quite resource intensive. It also probably raises the question of what would be done with that information when considering broadly the condition of buildings.

I return to my point that we need to reflect on individual property owners' responsibilities. The social housing stock that is owned by local authorities and housing associations is subject to a regulatory regime that requires set standards to be met, such as the Scottish housing quality standard and environmental standards, as part of maintenance of, upkeep of and investment in existing stock.

In private sector-owned buildings—there is a further complication when properties are in common ownership—the responsibilities for owners are less onerous. If we are to look more broadly at how we inspect and how we look after the condition and safety of buildings that have already been built, we probably need to reflect on the responsibility of individual owners. Andy Wightman said that there is no requirement to keep logbooks. Can measures be put in place to raise awareness among building owners of the condition of property and require them to meet minimum standards for looking after buildings? It is worth exploring those options, while recognising our discussions about the challenges in resourcing local authority skills and the financial cost of taking on responsibility for knowledge and ownership. The 1980s were a different fiscal period for local government from now.

Andy Wightman: Thank you—that was useful. My question was targeted at whether there is merit in exploring the obligations that are placed on

owners to maintain records within some kind of light-touch regulatory regime. I will leave it there.

Jenny Gilruth: I return to John Wood—I am not picking on him, honestly. I want to consider the role of COSLA and what it did in the week of Grenfell. COSLA’s written submission spoke about housing office managers going out to reassure tenants and said that there were

“an additional 900 home fire safety visits”

by the Fire and Rescue Service. At last week’s meeting, we heard from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, which said in its submission:

“Housing associations ... made tenants aware that the Fire Service offered free advisory home visits.”

The visits are not compulsory. Have your members done likewise?

John Wood: Yes, they will have done. I cannot speak for every member, but I know that in every local authority area there has been close work between the housing department and the Fire and Rescue Service’s local senior officer—the LSO is the single point of contact for an area. In most places, there has been communication at community planning level, and councils’ housing departments have made their tenants aware of the service that the Fire and Rescue Service provides.

It is probably safe to say that that will not cover absolutely everyone in every single apartment. A proposal that has emerged from conversations at national level, which has been endorsed by the ministerial working group, is that there should be a national fire safety campaign, led by the Fire and Rescue Service and supported by councils, which will provide basic but important information to tenants of high-rise apartments about how they should behave in the event of a fire, as well as advising them of the service that is available from the Fire and Rescue Service.

Jenny Gilruth: David Stewart told us at last week’s meeting that the fire service’s visits are focused on vulnerable people. Do your members target groups of individuals who might be more vulnerable?

John Wood: Yes, they absolutely do. We use the relationships that exist between housing officers and health and social care workers, where possible, to ensure that we engage with the most vulnerable people and those who might not be able to find the information for themselves.

Earlier this week, I was at a meeting with officers to discuss the brief for the campaign that the Fire and Rescue Service will run. There is a clear focus on inequalities and ensuring that messages that public services deliver are targeted at the most vulnerable people, such as people

who do not have English as their first language, elderly people and disabled people.

Jenny Gilruth: We also heard last week that some housing associations require a safety visit as a condition of the tenancy. Are you aware of local authorities that do likewise?

John Wood: I am not, but I imagine that that is the case. A housing manager will probably be able to answer that question better than I can.

Jenny Gilruth: I appreciate that. I have one wee final question—I promise. On the final page of your submission you said:

“we are aware that a common problem is residents removing self-closers from fire doors or leaving fire doors open.”

We heard something similar from the SFHA last week. How widespread is that problem? Have you surveyed your members nationally on that?

John Wood: We do not have quantitative evidence of the problem, but we cannot deny that the issue comes up a lot—it reminds us that whatever tried and tested system we have in place, human behaviour will often get in the way. Concierges and housing managers often have to deal with issues such as doors being held open or replaced without permission and objects being left in closes. We must always take account of human behaviour and human error.

I suppose that we could get you quantitative evidence, if you wanted it, but the issue is certainly something that we are all aware of and know needs to be addressed.

Michael Thain: On the point about the relationship between local authorities, landlords and the fire service, in addition to promoting visits to individual tenants, the regime—certainly in my authority—involves a daily inspection of tower blocks by concierge services or housing officers, to identify immediate risks, such as broken door closers, rubbish or furniture on a landing or blocked bin chutes.

On a quarterly basis, the fire service comes in and does a block inspection, in a familiarisation visit for its teams, to check fire risers and ensure that the fire crews are familiar with the blocks. After Grenfell, we immediately did a joint inspection with the fire service of all our tower blocks—that happened in the four to six weeks after the fire. Following that, we have agreed to do a joint inspection of property as one of the fire service’s quarterly inspections, so once a year property teams, housing managers and the fire service will do a thorough inspection of the joint areas.

In addition, we are working closely with individual vulnerable tenants to ensure that we

prioritise visits to those who are most vulnerable and in need of advice, although the information and advice are provided to all tenants. Some tenants can make arrangements to improve fire safety themselves, like any other resident, but we try to ensure that the most vulnerable and those who would have most difficulty with that are supported to do it.

I will finish by giving a wee bit of context. Shortly after the Grenfell fire, we conducted a review, with the fire service, of how often there are fires in our tower blocks. In my local authority area there are about 40 blocks and, on average, there is a fire each month. Over the period for which we have had those tower blocks, there have been probably 400 or 500 fires in them, which is broadly the same incidence of fire as we see in the non-tower block stock. In my local authority area, the fire safety measures that have been put in place—I am talking about the construction of local authority housing—have contained the fire and protected against its spread.

Some of the arrangements that are in place on the management side recognise the risk of fire, and there are pretty good, strong relationships with the fire service in most areas. Recognising the risks, the fire service prioritises the blocks and works with the owners—the local authorities—as well as the tenants.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I have a question for Mr Wood, first, and I will then ask a more general question about materials.

COSLA notes that there is no national standard fire risk assessment. It has been suggested that a group should be established to develop such a standard, especially for domestic high-rise buildings. How is that going to be progressed? You have noted that there is a gap in the process. How can that proposal be progressed?

John Wood: The issue was raised by the Fire and Rescue Service and the Fire Brigades Union. I guess that the ministerial working group might be a catalyst for developing such a standard. If there was agreement across agencies that a standard assessment was required, the agencies could come together at a national level and discuss how to take it forward.

Alexander Stewart: You believe that there would be a real benefit if that took place.

John Wood: It would certainly help. It was identified over the summer as something that agencies would welcome. There would not be a one-size-fits-all assessment for every property but, if there were general principles on which fire safety assessments were undertaken and consistency in how they were dealt with, that would help professionals to undertake the assessments

properly and make clear the next steps following those assessments—which, I suppose, is the most important aspect for people to be clear on.

Alexander Stewart: Do the other members of the panel have views on that proposal?

Alan McAulay: It touches on some of our evidence relating to the consistency of understanding of design principles, from construction and the warrant assessment process to how the building is managed in practice. We are routinely asked about the design philosophy of a building and where the key areas are. However, the relationship tends to drift as the building becomes established and people move in and out, and improvements could be made through having a national standard for fire risk assessment. I think that that would be of benefit.

Knowledge of the design process, where a building's fire safety features are and why they are there would also be an essential part of that. It could even simply highlight where the protected walls and floors are, where the fire safety features are contained, how often they should be maintained and so on. Some of that will be covered already, but joining up the verification and fire regulations assessment processes would, in general, be of advantage to the on-going level of fire safety in a building as it is used.

11:00

Alexander Stewart: We have already touched on materials, especially, with reference to the tragedy, those that are combustible. However, concerns have recently been raised with the committee about materials that, when originally tested, were thought to be non-combustible but which, after retesting, had their classification changed because they were found to ignite in a certain situation. How widespread is that issue, and if it is happening, how can we allay the community's fears in that respect? With some materials, it was thought that the box had been ticked but, after retesting by the fire service and others, further evidence has emerged, suggesting that they have limited non-combustibility. Is that not a problem?

Raymond Barlow: The simple answer to your question is that we will not know how widespread the problem is until we identify buildings containing materials that are supposedly compliant but which we then find are not.

As I understand it, the difficulty might arise from materials that had supposedly met the BR 135 criteria through what you might call a desktop exercise. For example, you might get a fire safety expert looking at a certain product and saying, "Well, I've seen a very similar product pass the building standards tests under BR 135 many times

before.” That process has built up over the years, and aspects of the wording of BR 135 appear to allow it. That is possibly where the failures might be found, but I am not aware of any product that was actually tested under BR 135 criteria and British standards and which has since failed. That sort of thing might well come out, but I am not aware of any such materials at the moment.

Alexander Stewart: In the tests that the fire service carries out, it will normally take a block of material, tape up the edge and apply a flame to the centre. However, when it has carried out some tests on the perimeter of a block, it has found certain materials becoming combustible. You are saying that the issue is the type of testing that was carried out in the past on certain products.

Raymond Barlow: Last week, Dave Aitken and I attended a conference in Birmingham that was organised by our counterparts in England and Wales, and we heard various industry professionals, some of whom are involved in the testing side of things, talking about the robustness of British standard tests under BR 135. Those professionals think that it is just about as robust a test as you can get, but the difficulty with any testing regime—and this applies to all tests across building standards and various British standards—is that the test is carried out under laboratory or factory conditions with, for example, a standardised fuel load. The question, then, is whether the test covers all the detail of how things will be built on site.

The test is clearly robust; after all, you have to put quite a large fire under the material in the crib. It also compares well with international tests—it might even be more robust than them. However, does it provide a 100 per cent guarantee? I do not know.

Alexander Stewart: Thank you.

The Convener: I just want to mop up a couple of things before I go to Mr Gibson. [*Interruption.*] Mr Gibson does not want to ask anything, so we will go to Elaine Smith next—I am just giving her a wee warning.

Mr Stewart explored the issue of fire risk and safety assessments, and the four-a-year standard for high-rise properties. Before I ask my question, I make it clear that I am not saying that my social landlords in north Glasgow would do this; I have a very good relationship with them, and they seem to be incredibly proactive. However, if I as a landlord knew that the fire service was coming in a week on Tuesday, I would be getting my concierge to sort as quickly as possible the mattress that had been sitting at the fire escape on the fifth floor for the past three weeks, say, or the fire door that never quite fitted properly. The knowledge that we are going to be assessed, the expectation that

goes with that and the planning and co-ordination that will go into that fire service assessment gives all of us the opportunity to step up to the mark and make things as smooth and compliant as possible.

The FBU, which wanted intrusive inspections, did not call for on-the-spot random assessments. It was happy with pre-notification. Is there a case for the fire service to pitch up occasionally at a building that is owned by the private sector or a social landlord, whether a council or housing association, and say, “We are the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Show us your paperwork. We are doing the assessment now”? Would that be a reasonable way to keep everyone on their toes?

Michael Thain: That is how we do things in my local authority area. The fire service turns up, does the familiarisation visit, does the inspection and lets us know what it thinks needs to be fixed so that we can follow that up. If anything, after Grenfell the discussion has been more about co-ordinating the visits. I take the point, however, that a snap inspection from the fire service is a way to keep owners and us on our toes 24 hours a day.

The Convener: I am happy to have asked an ill-informed question and be told that what I want is already what happens. Is that the understanding of everyone on the panel?

Alan McAulay: Verification is a stage removed from that part of the process. There is some notification around the inspections that are undertaken by building standards, although not to the extent of information on the exact date. There are similarities with the way building standards inspections operate. When people know that we are coming, there can be some degree of preparedness. However, we have to ensure that those undertaking the management of the properties for the life of the building are appropriately skilled and trained to undertake their core duties, without considering who will be watching them at any particular time.

The Convener: That is fine. I am not saying that every inspection should be random. The example that I gave to the FBU was the Care Inspectorate, which has planned social care inspections of care establishments. Every care establishment knows, however, that there is an outside chance that there might be an unannounced inspection at some point. It focuses the mind.

That said, in my area we are fortunate in the relationship that housing associations have with the fire service. I will not explore the matter further.

Elaine Smith: Throughout our inquiry, we have heard evidence that clerks of works are not used on building sites as much as they used to be. Do you have a view on the role of clerks of works in

ensuring compliance with building standards in both public and private sector developments?

Related to that, do you think that public sector procurement could play a role in ensuring that new build and refurbished council and registered social landlord housing meet the building standards requirements?

Dave Aitken: The holistic approach is to be welcomed. All stakeholders who are involved in the construction process, including clerks of works, have an input. There is no magic bullet for the problem of any perceived compliance gap. A clerk of works would have a role to play, as would others.

Elaine Smith: If a clerk of works has a role to play, could it cause problems if there was no clerk of works? That might be the case in particular if there are a lot of small subcontractors involved once a building has been procured and is part of a big housing development.

Dave Aitken: As the convener pointed out, even the threat of a clerk of works being on site would be enough to keep workmen on their toes. The absence of one would clearly mean a chance that shortcuts would be taken.

Alan McAulay: The presence of a clerk of works on site is generally welcomed by the verifier, because it tends to lead to a better regime of inspection and checks. The role supports those who are procuring the building in their duty as the relevant person to ensure compliance with the building regulations. It is there to help them to discharge their responsibility.

In turn, it assists us when we undertake reasonable inquiry, because we know that, if there are three or four clerks of works inspecting various parts of the building in conjunction with our visits, there is a higher chance of compliance. As a verifier, we welcome clerks of works.

If, when we undertake an initial inspection after being notified of the commencement of work, we have concerns about such things as the set-up of the site or attention to health and safety legislation, alarm bells start to ring. In the absence of a clerk of works or a site foreman, or if there are concerns around the subcontractor's quality of work, our risk assessment, through a regional inquiry, is upped and we pay more attention to that particular project.

On the other hand, when we are confident that a development is progressing well, we can step back to an extent, which allows us to use our resources in the most appropriate way.

Elaine Smith: I will push you a bit further, if I may, on the subject of public procurement, which I mentioned initially and on which you commented. If a council was procuring a company to build

schools or a health board was procuring a company to build a hospital, would it be possible as part of the procurement process for them to insist on the presence of a clerk of works? Do councils insist on that?

Alan McAulay: With regard to our role and responsibility for verification, it would be for others to see whether the role of a clerk of works would allow them to get value for money during the procurement process. I cannot really comment further than what I said previously.

Raymond Barlow: I do not know whether councils can insist on that through the procurement process, as I am no contractual expert, but I can relate some of the experience of Glasgow City Council. We put our own council clerk of works on a lot of our school projects, even though the schools were being built by other bodies, and that proved to be very effective for the council, because, when we went back to look at aspects of the schools' construction in relation to the issues with schools in Edinburgh and so on, we did not find the same issues. It was acknowledged that some areas were not perfect—no building is perfect—but we certainly did not find the areas of concern that were found in some Edinburgh schools, and we were confident that that was because of the regime that we had put in place with our own council clerk of works.

Elaine Smith: I have one final question, convener, but it is not on that issue.

The Convener: Andy Wightman might have a supplementary question on the clerk of works issue. I will come back to him in a second.

I want to double-check something first. The witnesses said that they do not know the answer to the question on procurement. With regard to local authority building standards, can a local authority insist that it will issue a relevant building warrant and comply with the verification process—irrespective of whether it is a public or private sector project and of whether procurement is involved—only if there is a clerk of works present, given the risks on the site?

Raymond Barlow: No.

The Convener: Would such a power be desirable?

Alan McAulay: Anything that could assist us in our role in achieving compliance should be explored.

The Convener: I know that I have plucked this point out of the air, but if someone is building an extension to their property and they know the architect and so on, they might think that the risks are lower and they might do only one site visit. However, if a council is building a 250-unit development and it does not have a clerk of works

on site—it might have an insurance indemnifier on site who does various other things, but that is not a clerk of works—would it be reasonable for it to have the power to say, “We expect, for risk management purposes, that there will be a clerk of works”?

Raymond Barlow: There is currently a good bit of guidance from the Scottish Government that tells developers what their responsibilities are before they sign the completion certificate for a project. The guidance makes it clear that they must have in place appropriate contractual arrangements to ensure that, when they sign the certificate to say that the building complies with the building warrant and building regulations, they do so on the basis that someone has given them enough information.

LABSS—I am speaking on behalf of LABSS here—has found that that aspect has never been firmed up in legislation. The guidance tells people about their responsibilities but there is no legislative way for us to enforce those. If the relevant person, as they are known, signs the certificate, we have no mechanism for questioning the processes that they carried out before they signed the certificate to enable us to allow occupation of the building.

The Convener: That is helpful. Andy Wightman has a supplementary question. After that, we will come back to Elaine Smith for the final question of the session.

Andy Wightman: I do not have a supplementary question, convener—it is another question entirely.

The Convener: Okay. I will take Elaine Smith’s question now and will let you finish off, Mr Wightman.

11:15

Elaine Smith: My question ties in with what Mr Barlow just said. We have heard calls for the introduction of new building standards enforcement powers. I am interested to know whether you would support that and what powers you might want to see introduced.

Raymond Barlow: It is difficult to say what powers could be introduced—I genuinely do not know—but I think that we have to ask what system the developer has gone through and what checks and balances have been put in place to ensure that the contractor that they have employed has employed the right subcontractors and the right qualified persons. At the moment, I could work as a joiner on a site without having any qualifications for that job. Unfortunately, the problems start at that level in the industry. That has always been the case in the UK—it is not unknown to us all. That is

not to say that contractors do not have to try to have quality systems in place, but there are those who do not try.

It is a big issue but, for us, any legislation would have to be about whether we had to be informed about, for example, whether a contractor had qualified staff, whether steel erectors had put up the correct size and weight of steel and whether fire-stopping provisions were in place. Would there be certification for each stage of the process for a particular building that would then be collected and given to us to demonstrate that the developer had at least signed something off at each relevant part of the process? That would not be self-certification and just a contractual matter for developers but would provide an assurance that contractual measures were in place that ensured compliance with building regulations.

Andy Wightman: I have a brief point. It has been raised in evidence to us that private owners, particularly in mixed-tenure blocks, have been removing fire doors and replacing them with doors that do not comply with the fire regulations. Can you confirm whether people have a legal right to do that? Given the number of mixed-tenure blocks that there are, is that potentially a concern?

John Wood: What Mr Wightman says is the case. There is certainly an issue with fire safety and, more widely, with the enforcement of standards among owner-occupiers in mixed-tenure properties. The issue is coming to the fore at the moment in conversations about energy efficiency. There are a number of areas in which the lack of means of enforcement for privately owned apartments in a multi-tenure block can be an obstacle to the enforcement of standards, whether for fire safety or energy efficiency.

Alan McAulay: A number of alterations can be made in high-rise buildings that do not require a building warrant. Those generally involve repairs and require like-for-like replacements. If someone replaced a fire door with a non-fire-rated door, that would not be a like-for-like replacement and would therefore be an issue. That is not an uncommon occurrence, not through any malicious intent but because somebody is trying to upgrade their property and make it look better but is not aware of the consequences of that.

When my local authority is made aware of such situations—I am sure that this approach is shared nationally—we tend to work with the owner-occupiers and those who are responsible for the upkeep of the building to make them aware of the performance standards that the fire door should meet. Our council provides financial support in the form of a grant to carry out the replacement work, and we provide the labour for the work. We work with the owner to remove the door that might not be compliant and ensure that the replacement

door is a fire door that complies with all the relevant regulations. We use our knowledge and education as opposed to using strict enforcement powers.

We have had a good success rate because of that, and the numbers in South Lanarkshire are very low because of that engagement. We also work closely with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. There is a bit of a grey area in that we know that uPVC fire doors are now available on the market that are not as easily identifiable as a compliant or non-compliant door, which means that we need to get the manufacturer's information and test data. We have the knowledge to establish that and we work with the owner-occupier to ensure that the door achieves the appropriate level of fire safety.

Andy Wightman: Once the building has been completed and has met all the legal requirements, is the owner under a continuing legal obligation to maintain a fire door where a fire door was originally specified?

Alan McAulay: Yes.

Andy Wightman: You have said that it is an issue.

Alan McAulay: Yes, and that touches on the challenges around some of the existing enforcement powers. The owner is allowed to carry out repairs and alter aspects of the building, like for like, without a building warrant—a fire door is an example of that.

Andy Wightman: If those are permissive powers and someone used them outwith the circumstance in which they are allowed to be used, would that constitute a breach?

Alan McAulay: Yes, because it would not be an exempt alteration. The legislation is challenging for us because the unauthorised alteration could result in a section 27 notice but such a notice asks for the submission of a building warrant, which is not needed in that situation. In that respect it is a catch-22 situation. We have to use our knowledge and communication skills and engage with the person to ensure that the door is replaced. That can be tricky, because although there is legislation in respect of dangerous buildings—it is one of the most powerful aspects of the Building (Scotland) Act 2003—the fact that a door does not reach not the appropriate level of fire safety does not necessarily make the building an immediate danger such that it would trigger the dangerous buildings provisions.

The Convener: That was a helpful line of questioning, Mr Wightman.

Mr Barlow, thank you for the information that you gave us at the start of the meeting. You will appreciate that the committee was concerned to

hear that there are private properties in Glasgow that have combustible cladding of the type that was used on Grenfell tower. You have said that you are not able to give us additional information today, but it would be helpful if Glasgow City Council were to give us the maximum amount of information possible. We want to scrutinise the situation in Glasgow robustly and help to provide reassurances to the people who live in those flats. We are keen to do that in a measured way.

It has been an informative evidence session and I thank everyone for taking the time to come to the committee.

Subordinate Legislation

Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2017 (SSI 2017/273)

11:23

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of Scottish statutory instrument 2017/273. It is laid under the negative procedure, which means that its provisions will come into force unless the Parliament votes on a motion to annul the instrument. The Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee considered the instrument on 12 September 2017 and determined that it did not need to draw it to the attention of the Parliament on any grounds within its remit. No motion to annul the instrument has been lodged. I invite members' comments on the instrument.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I know that it is a negative instrument, but it is a positive step forward.

In the second paragraph of section 2 of the policy objectives, we are told that the instrument will

“reduce the time to a maximum of 7 days, unless there are exceptional circumstances.”

I wonder what those exceptional circumstances might be—I cannot see any examples. Sometimes, the phrase “exceptional circumstances” can be used to nullify an instrument such as this one, and I have concerns that a coach and horses could be driven through the instrument if there are no parameters to that.

The Convener: Thank you for putting that on the record.

Elaine Smith: I share those concerns. My worry is that the exceptional circumstance might be that there is nowhere else to move the family to. Given that the committee is looking into homelessness, we might want to consider the issue as part of our inquiry. In his statement to Parliament yesterday, the minister mentioned reducing the limit on the use of inadequate temporary accommodation from 14 days to seven days, but no one should be in unsuitable accommodation for any length of time. If a family is in unsuitable accommodation that is not wind and water tight, that is not suitable for occupation by children or in which there are no cooking facilities—those issues are mentioned in the policy note—seven days is seven days too many.

The Convener: As no other members want to comment at this stage, the committee must decide what to do with the instrument. We can write to the Scottish Government to raise those points. Do we

agree that we do not wish to make any recommendation in relation to the instrument, with the caveat that we will write to the minister about the themes that members have outlined? The clerks are indicating that that is the competent way in which to deal with the instrument. Do members agree to take that approach?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We now move into private session to consider evidence.

11:26

Meeting continued in private.

11:50

Meeting continued in public.

Homelessness

The Deputy Convener (Elaine Smith): Welcome back to the meeting. I will chair this round-table evidence session. The committee has been looking into the causes of homelessness and possible solutions since February, and today we will hear from some people who have direct experience of homelessness. I welcome everyone and propose that we quickly introduce ourselves, starting on my left.

Jason Nairn (Clerk): Hi there. I am one of the clerks to the committee.

Jane Williams (Clerk): Hi. I am also one of the clerks to the committee. On my left are my two colleagues from the official report, who write down what is being said.

Kenneth Gibson: I am a member of the committee.

Saffron Rohan: I am a member of the Life Changes Trust care-experienced advisory group.

Alexander Stewart: I am an MSP.

Thomas Lyon: I am a Shelter Scotland service user.

Andy Wightman: I am an MSP.

Julie McCallagh: I am a volunteer with Shelter Scotland.

Jenny Gilruth: I am an MSP.

Emma Pearce: I am a volunteer with Shelter Scotland.

Graham Simpson: I am an MSP.

Rhys Campbell: I am a homeless person.

Simone Smith: I am a care-experienced young person who is part of the Life Changes Trust care-experienced advisory group.

The Deputy Convener: I am an MSP for Central Scotland and the deputy convener of the committee.

The committee is really pleased that you have joined us in this round-table format to share information. Committee members might have some questions for you as we go along. Would you mind sharing your stories and a bit about your backgrounds, just to open up proceedings? I am looking for a volunteer to start.

Emma Pearce: I will start. I am care experienced as well, but I am here to talk about my experience of homelessness. I currently stay in Salvation Army accommodation, and it is the

second time that I have been there. I am here to share what I feel could be changed and improved.

The Deputy Convener: That is great, Emma. Rhys—would you like to tell us a bit about yourself?

Rhys Campbell: I have been in the homeless sector for two years. I have probably been through nearly every hostel in Dundee. I spent a lot of time in a next-step flat—I cannot remember what it is called, but it is like a flat that you get just before you would get a flat, if you know what I mean. I was there for nearly a year but something happened and I was sent back to another hostel. I have just got to ride it out, but I am near the top of the list for a council flat, apparently. I am waiting to hear word about that at the moment.

The Deputy Convener: Thanks very much. Simone Smith is next.

Simone Smith: As I said, I am care experienced. After I left foster care, I became homeless numerous times and went into different hostels and temporary accommodation, but it was not really a safe environment for me and my daughter. I am here today because I believe that we can make a difference for homeless people.

The Deputy Convener: Thanks very much, Simone.

Saffron Rohan: After my care experience, I moved into my first tenancy when I was 17. It was a supported accommodation unit, which we felt would be better than going down the homelessness route and trying to get a council flat on my own. It was not very supported, though. There were quite a lot of negative influences, and it was quite a bad environment to be in at that age, when you are quite easily influenced. I am here to talk a bit about my experience and that of other care-experienced young people, and about how we can prevent homelessness.

Thomas Lyon: I spent six and a half years on the street in Glasgow. I did every hostel three, four or five times each. I was never offered any temporary accommodation. I had to go to the Legal Services Agency to get put into a temporary furnished flat. I ended up getting involved in a lot of violence in that flat. I went into an institution and was then told that I had to return to that flat. I went to the MSP Bill Kidd, who sent a letter to the head of health and social care, David Williams, to get me moved into proper accommodation, because I was being sent back to a violent place. I am here to give my experience of the help that Shelter gave me with that.

Julie McCallagh: I brought my four daughters up through homelessness. Through me being homeless, they had to go to 11 different primary schools in 11 different areas and it affected their

education. Something more should be done, especially when kids are involved.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you all very much for sharing that with us.

Graham Simpson: I thank the witnesses for coming. You have obviously all had different experiences, and you will all want something individual out of this evidence-taking session. What should the committee do? What asks do you have of the Government? What should change and what would help you in your individual circumstances? You will all say something different.

The Deputy Convener: Saffron, will you start? I think you mentioned that supported accommodation is not supported. Perhaps you could tell us something more about that on the back of Graham Simpson's question.

Saffron Rohan: I got moved into a two-bedroom flat because it was the only one that was available at the time. I had no qualifications—I had left school at 15—and I did not have a job, so I was on full benefits. That also meant that going back into further education was not an option, because one of the effects was that I would lose those benefits.

One of the biggest issues for me at the time was that, with the bedroom tax, the change to the criteria for discretionary housing benefit meant that I lost that benefit. By that point, I had got a job as a modern apprentice, but the wage was very low—it was something like £600 or £700 a month, and I had to manage a tenancy as well. Because I lost my discretionary housing benefit, my rent doubled and I started getting charged £70 a week for the extra bedroom, for which there was no appeal process. On top of that, because I had just turned 18, I started having to pay council tax.

Five years later, I am still paying off the debts that I got into in a supported temporary accommodation unit. That is one of the biggest issues for me, but there are quite a lot of challenges for care-experienced young people in particular, because they come from more deprived backgrounds. They also tend to leave care around the age of 17, which—as many of you know—is not really old enough to know what you are supposed to be doing.

There is a massive lack of options. Because there were no other supported accommodation units, I ended up stuck in an area where I did not feel safe. I never went out of the house. When I was younger, I had stayed in a nicer area and had some friends there, but there were absolutely no council flat options in that area because it was very desirable and I was 17. I found the housing association cold and unhelpful as well. Benefits are very difficult to get at that age, and the

authorities are very quick to remove them for any reason they can.

I am trying to think what to go into next. There are so many things.

There need to be a lot more options for care-experienced young people and young people who present as homeless. Local authorities now have a duty to be corporate parents to young people who are in care, so why are they presenting as homeless? They should also get support with things such as living costs. My situation only improved because of the new legislation that meant that if I went to college, the local authority had an obligation to support me, so it started paying for student halls and I was eventually able to move out of the area. However, it took three and a bit years. Like I said, I still have a lot of the debt.

12:00

I have met other young people who are often put into temporary accommodation where there is virtually nothing in the flat, and if they want to watch television, they are expected to purchase an aerial for a flat that they might be in for six weeks. If you are on £55 a week, that is not an option. The ones who are lucky enough to get a tenancy, even if it is not in the area that they want, do not have the money to make it a home or the support to prevent them from ending up with negative peer influences or letting people in their house all the time, and they end up losing their tenancy and going through the same cycle again.

The Deputy Convener: Does any colleague want to ask Saffron about that before we move on and put Graham Simpson's question to the other witnesses?

Kenneth Gibson: Thank you, Saffron. The paper that has been presented is excellent.

In your paper and just now, you talked about the need for more housing options and support services in local authority areas. Can you expand on that a bit more and tell us what kind of housing options you feel should be considered?

Saffron Rohan: For a start, there needs to be supporting accommodation that is not run by housing departments, because they have a complete lack of understanding of the sort of challenges and adversity that care-experienced young people face. They also do not understand the vulnerability of people in that group. There is obviously a lot of council housing out there, but none of it is specifically allocated to care leavers. Because of the vulnerable nature of people in that group, they should be placed in safer areas so that they do not get dragged into local trouble, which happens all the time. I know one boy who will not

leave the house in the area that he is in because he has been placed there—he has no other options. From when he was younger, he has issues with other local boys who live in that area, so he is stuck there and he literally will not even go to the shop.

Kenneth Gibson: If housing departments or housing associations are not to run the accommodation, should it be run by a charity such as Who Cares? Scotland? Do you think that that would be more appropriate?

Saffron Rohan: Yes, or it could be done by youth intensive support services. I know that social work is extremely stretched, but there could be something similar that worked alongside it, or even just people with experience of working with care-experienced young people. There are not enough permanent options, either; a lot of the options are just for temporary accommodation and things like bed and breakfast, where young people can be put with drug users. Putting a 16 or 17-year-old with 30 or 40-year-old people who have drug or alcohol problems makes them susceptible. It is certainly not a safe environment for young mothers such as Simone and their small children.

The Deputy Convener: We want to hear from everyone else, but Jenny Gilruth has a follow-up question for Saffron.

Jenny Gilruth: You talked about debt, Saffron. Was that debt to the Government or was it debt that you accrued yourself?

Saffron Rohan: It was to the local authority for council tax, although I paid off some of my rent arrears and the rest were eventually written off after a throughcare worker hounded the authority for several months. It took a long time.

There is no appeal process for the council tax, so I am still paying off that debt. I did not pay it at all because I was struggling so much to pay for food and travel to get to work. Council tax exemption for care leavers would be beneficial. The corporate parenting law states that care leavers should be supported up to the age of 26. If someone was living with their parents up to the age of 26, they would not have to pay council tax.

The Deputy Convener: I will go to Simone Smith next, because Saffron mentioned her. The original question from Graham Simpson was about what you think could change to make a difference.

Simone Smith: Being care experienced, the main thing that always pops into my head is that there should be an allocated worker for care-experienced young people. That should be a priority in all local authorities because those young people have faced so many challenges.

I remember that, when I presented as homeless, those who dealt with me were not really

supportive. They did not really understand that I did not know the areas and I did not know people. They were just like, “Go here, and deal with it.” There should be an allocated person in every local authority, so that people have somebody who can understand what they have been going through. That person should understand that they might have challenges and should support them every step of the way instead of quickly writing them off.

The Deputy Convener: Rhys, could you tell us what you think could change and what might make a difference?

Rhys Campbell: This would be very beneficial to people in a homeless situation. Drug use was one of the main reasons I was in a homeless situation. It took me a lot of time to get myself back on my feet. “Temporary accommodation” is the phrase that I was looking for earlier. After spending a year in temporary accommodation and getting myself back to normal, I was told that I would not be put out of there and put into direct access again until I was found a flat, because I had been on the housing list for so long.

I had been told that people from a company called Positive Steps were apparently meant to be sorting things out. That did not happen, however. The 28 days had come up, and I was told that it was going to be happening, but I was then stuck back into direct access, which was probably the worst situation for me to be put straight into. I then had to practically beg on my knees to ask the girl to move me from the dorms along to the flats, just to get away from certain things and certain people surrounding me so that I could keep myself safe in those situations.

Now I am in a hostel, where everything is rife and right on our doorstep. Even though I am feeling better and feeling safe, it is still a constant thing that I have to deal with for the rest of my life.

When people are homeless, at the end of the day they need some place to stay. However, I see people coming in and out of some hostels who I do not think should be in those hostels. I see them coming in there and I see them leaving worse than when they came in.

Graham Simpson: How long have you been in the hostel that you are in now?

Rhys Campbell: Three weeks. I was told that I would only be in there for two days.

The Deputy Convener: Did you have problems in the first place getting accommodation at all? Secondly, were you dealt with on a housing-first basis? That is something that we are looking into.

Rhys Campbell: I used to work abroad and I had my own business. Everything was fine for a while. I had everything going well: houses, cars and everything. I lost everything. I lost my family. I

lost my son. I lost the lot. I couldn't keep it together. From that point, I felt depression, then I went towards drugs.

I had no problem getting private lets at that point, as I had money at the time, then I was put on a council list. I had a council house previously. I then left that council house to move to Birmingham for a period. I moved there and worked with Jaguar, Land Rover, Aston Martin and so on. I spent a year down there, and everything was going great. I moved to Oxford for a year, and then I came back up to Dundee. Spending a bit of time in Dundee gave me access to my son twice a week, which was good. Certain things happened with the girl I was with at the time, which got that stopped. Before I knew it, that relationship went a wee bit sour, so I was now back in my own city. I did not want to move back to my mum and dad's, so I chose to say that I was homeless—to present as homeless and get myself down on the list.

From there, it has taken an awful long time to get anywhere. Basically, after spending nine months, near enough, in Burnside Mill, which is the temporary accommodation where I pulled myself together, I was promised that I would be relocated to a house, flat or whatever, away from the hostel environment—as in “hostel living”, not “hostile environment”—you know what I mean.

Basically, I feel that I was fed a lot of nonsense, to put it bluntly, and I am almost back to square 1. I have been told by many well-respected people, including from the Salvation Army, that they were supposed to have done some work on this, but they have not done it, and here I am, stuck in a hostel with all sorts surrounding me. It is probably the worst hostel in Dundee.

The Deputy Convener: Do colleagues have any follow-up questions for Simone Smith or Rhys Campbell before I move on?

Alexander Stewart: You both explained some of the harrowing experiences that you have had. We hear a lot about joint working, partnership and co-operation between agencies. Do you feel that that is happening?

Rhys Campbell: I have done all sorts of engagement. I engage with everything possible. I have expressed that I will engage with anything that I need to to get out of the situation. I have been to recovery groups and all sorts. It has not been plain sailing.

Throughout the time that I have been in hostels and temporary accommodation, the people there are aware that the recovery process is not plain sailing. I have done the best I could. I am clean—I have given them clean samples and whatever. I have done everything as I should and engaged with everyone as I should. Don't get me wrong—I

am not in this situation because my life is perfect, but it is getting back to what it used to be.

In my opinion, when I am in certain hostels, I have to be aware that certain issues are going to arise at certain times. When at times in my life I have had difficulty with family or other things, I have used all sorts of tools that have been given in recovery groups to get me through situations, but sometimes it is not that easy when you are in a hostel where the drugs are on your doorstep—a five-minute walk away. From what I have been taught, usually you get a 20-minute urge and if you can beat that 20-minute urge, you have an 80 per cent chance of beating it, but there is not much chance of that when you have a five-minute walk.

The Deputy Convener: I will ask Simone Smith something, on Alexander Stewart's behalf. Do you think that there was enough partnership working—which I think was the question—between health, housing and social work?

Simone Smith: I do not think so. I lived in the same place as Saffron Rohan, in supported accommodation, and I got moved for my own safety. My social worker organised a meeting with the supported accommodation people to find out what had happened, but they did not even turn up for the meeting. We were sitting there for about 30 minutes wondering why they were not there—we did not know.

I got moved out and put in Overlee house in Clarkston, which is like a hostel. I got diagnosed with depression and anxiety. The doctors tried to get me counselling for my mental health, but I was not allowed to be on the waiting list because I had no permanent address. I think that homeless people are probably the most vulnerable, with high statistics of poor mental health, but we are not allowed to be on a waiting list because we do not have a permanent address. That is not right.

Personally, I do not think that the organisations have good partnership, but I suppose everybody has different opinions.

The Deputy Convener: I think that Jenny Gilruth was catching my eye.

Jenny Gilruth: On the point about partnership, I have met previously with Who Cares? Scotland and some care-experienced young people along with other MSPs. There seems to be a disconnect between school and going forward as care-experienced young people.

I was a teacher before I was elected, and it seems to me that schools have a good opportunity to signpost folk to the right places, especially care-experienced young people. For vulnerable young people such as care-experienced young people, perhaps schools could be more forthcoming in looking after them and making sure that they are

provided accommodation. Was it the experience of anyone here who is care experienced that schools helped in relation to homelessness? Did they support you? What was their role?

The Deputy Convener: I ask Simone Smith to answer that, and then I will move on with the original question, but bearing that question in mind.

Simone Smith: The school did not support me when I was homeless. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 had not come out at that time but, since it has come out, all schools have signed up to be corporate parents. Now in every school there is a care-experience professional who links with all the care-experienced people in the school to help them work out their different situations. I think that is quite good, but that was not there for me.

The Deputy Convener: Julie McCallagh mentioned problems with her children in different schools. Could you tell us more about that, but also bear in mind the original question, which was about what could change to make a difference to the situation that you were in.

Julie McCallagh: I just feel that when kids are at a school and the family breaks down, it is hard enough for them, never mind getting moved away to the other side of the city, put in temporary accommodation and left there for a wee while so that they get settled in a school again, just to get moved. Eleven times is just too much for bairns to put up with.

My 17-year-old daughter is in the homeless system now, and her school has nothing to do with her—they have just said that she is 17, so she is of that age—because she never came through care. I kept her and she came through the homeless system with me.

When I was with my partner, he ran everything in the house. He paid bills and did all that, so I did not know how to. When we split up, he kept the house and I had to leave with my four daughters. I did not know how to run a house. I am 44 now, and I have still not had any support in that area. I have just come out of homelessness and out of supported accommodation, and I have my own flat. I am supposed to have support workers coming in, but I have never seen anybody and I have been there for a year and a half.

12:15

The Deputy Convener: Was there any option for you to stay in the house with your children? Was that explored at all, or did you feel that you had to leave?

Julie McCallagh: No, I could not stay with my children in the home with my partner. I fled from

his violence, and that is how I ended up going through homelessness.

The Deputy Convener: I should have said at the beginning of the session that I do not want anyone to answer questions that they are not comfortable with. If anyone is not comfortable with any line of questioning, please make that clear, and please do not feel that you have to answer.

What would have been the solution for you, Julie? Would it have been to go into a house straight away?

Julie McCallagh: They ask if you have a local connection, but they do not take into consideration the kids' school and where they are settled. You need to have a local connection to get a house—it does not matter if your wean goes to school there; you are still not going to get a house. They will put you wherever they have a flat.

The Deputy Convener: So they do not count children's schooling as a local connection.

Julie McCallagh: No, they do not count education. That is a big issue; it has affected my daughters all through their lives. None of them have had an education. They are now all grown women with their own kids, and they never got any education. They have had to go back to college and university after school.

The Deputy Convener: If nobody else wishes to follow up on that, I will move on to ask Thomas Lyon the original question from my colleague Graham Simpson. What changes would you like to see that would have made a difference to what you went through?

Thomas Lyon: The reason that I became homeless was that I had a private let at the time and the council was paying for it, but my landlord went bankrupt. This was nearly 10 years ago, and I did not know anything about being homeless. I did not know about the Hamish Allan Centre or Shelter. Personally, I think that it should start with the DWP, because I dare say that 95 per cent of homeless people are on benefits, and there should be some sort of information for them.

I went to the buroo, and the next minute I was sleeping under a bridge with a jacket. I did not know about the street team, where you can go to get a sleeping bag. I did not know anything about Shelter or my rights. I was in every hostel in Glasgow, four or five times each. I was put out of the hostels for silly reasons—it was not for violence or anything like that. The curfew was at 12 o'clock at night, and I was turning up at 20 past 12 and being put back on the street. That is a joke.

I was in my son's life until he was 10, but I never saw him for about six and a half years, until he was 17. I was the same as Rhys Campbell. During all that hostel time, I ended up with an addiction to

drugs and alcohol—both of them. I ended up in a rehab centre; that was the institution that I was talking about.

When I was put in a flat, I got in about a lot of violence, so I went to rehab to escape it. I told my care manager, my housing officer and the casework team, and they all just said to me, “Too bad—you caused it. You’re going back home there.” I went to Bill Kidd, the MSP for Knightswood, which was where I was. He sent a letter to David Williams, the head of health and social care, who sent a letter back to the casework team. After leaving rehab, I was put in a hostel where everybody was using. I had just spent six months cleaning up my act, and there I was stepping over people curled up on the floor of the hostel. I had to spend three weeks there. I would have spent longer in there if it was not for Bill Kidd sending a letter to David Williams, who sent a letter back to the casework team.

I went to see the casework team. They were supposed to do an investigation because I was fleeing violence, but they never did it. I went to Shelter, where they told me my rights. I contacted the casework team through Shelter, and they said that they would sit down with me, but then they got the letter from David Williams. It was through Shelter and David Williams that I was put in abstinence-based supported accommodation, which is where I am now.

I really think that there should be more information out there. I was in a flat, and suddenly I had the High Court officers at the door with a writ, and I had to be out in seven days. That was me out on the street, and I knew nothing. My mother stays in London and my brother stays in Ireland—those are my family connections. I was not going to phone them and say, “I’m on the street,” so I ended up sleeping under bridges and this and that.

I went to the Legal Services Agency in Glasgow because I was getting nowhere—after a while, I was not even getting into the hostels. At the Hamish Allan Centre, I was getting two bus tokens and a “See you later”. That was it for years. I went to the Legal Services Agency—

Emma Pearce: I am sorry—I am hearing everything and getting really agitated, because I really want to say something but I do not know when the right time is.

The Deputy Convener: I was going to bring you in just now.

Emma Pearce: Sorry.

The Deputy Convener: I ask Thomas if he wants to finish, and then I will bring in Emma.

Thomas Lyon: I went to the Legal Services Agency and it told me that what the Hamish Allan

Centre was doing to me was illegal. The centre had me barred from hostels that I had never even been in and I was called a DNA—do not accommodate. I do not know why.

The Deputy Convener: My colleagues might want to come back with questions about that, but I will bring in Emma Pearce at this point. The original question, just to remind you—

Emma Pearce: Yes, could you ask it again, please?

The Deputy Convener: The original question was from Graham Simpson, who is sitting next to you, Emma. The question was—what changes would you like to see that might have made a difference to your situation?

Emma Pearce: Before I go on to the changes that I would like to see, I would need to go into detail about my homeless experience, which started way back when I was a little girl. I moved up to Dundee from London with my mum and I left my dad’s care—obviously my family broke down. When I moved up to Dundee with my mum, we went to the homeless hostels and to Women’s Aid. I remember all the experiences that I had in the hostels—I remember what they were like.

I have been through foster care—I was in three different foster placements—and I left all my foster placements. It all ties in to being homeless because, at the end of the day, although I have been in all these places and stayed with all these families who had all these things in their houses—these perfect family settings—I came away from it at a certain age and I did not get to speak to them. You do not see them at all—you do not see any of them. You are left there.

Technically, I was left with no home from the age of seven years old. I left my home at seven years old and I have been pushing and pushing and pushing through, doing all that I can. I have worked for Who Cares? Scotland and I have done the champions board, but I feel that there is still no change.

I left Who Cares? Scotland last year and things started to go really wrong for me. My life was starting to spiral out of control because I had blocked things up for so many years. I have not been able to get those things out because of the care that has not been provided to me and because of discrimination that I now realise I was not able to understand as I grew up.

Today is the point where I have managed to gather it all in my head. I feel that I need to get all this out because it is going to end up coming to a breaking point and I could end up maybe being in Thomas Lyon’s situation—I could get aggressive and end up taking drugs. I have seen drugs—I have been through that. I have not been through it

personally, but I have seen it within my family and I know how much effect it has.

So many things need to be brought together to change the homeless experience. You cannot even talk about changing the homeless experience without thinking about everything else that is involved around it. For example, there are care plans for people when they are growing up that do not get followed. They do not get looked at properly—they just get left. People are left to think, “Where does that leave me? Where’s my place in the world?” Everybody else has a place in the world and you think, “Where is my place?”

Sorry, I am losing track of what I am saying.

Graham Simpson: What would you change, given what has happened to you?

Emma Pearce: I would say that there needs to be more support within an actual family rather than families being split up left, right and centre. Fair enough, maybe the parents are doing something wrong, but families need to be kept together because otherwise, at the end of the day, you go to these homeless hostels. You do not know this person from the next person but you still speak to them because you think, “What else is there to do?” What else is there to do in these hostels? What is it possible to do? Your state of mind when you are homeless is, “I’ve got so much potential but there is no support.”

You want to access support, but you do not know how to do it—you do not know how to get there. There is something blocking you. When you are in these hostels, you feel like you cannot do anything. It does not help that the staff in the hostels who are meant to help you do not help you. That is the sad reality—they do not help you. They help you to the extent that they can, but the help that you need to get through your homeless experience is not there.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you very much, Emma. For us as a committee, this is what we want to hear, because we are carrying out this inquiry and these are exactly the experiences that we need to know about from you all. It is all very well us taking evidence from local authorities and so on, but it is very important that we hear what the reality is on the ground.

Rhys Campbell: Could I follow on from that? I know Emma Pearce and I know the situation that she is in and where she is at. She is in Salvation Army accommodation and I feel that she is in the wrong environment because of the way she is and the person she is. What she is involved in is nowhere near the level that those people are involved in. I do not think that the seriousness of her situation or how bad it is—how wrong it could go for Emma and how quickly it could go wrong for

her—have quite hit home. I have seen it happen so many times.

Emma Pearce: It is just lucky that I am strong enough to know my barriers and where my loyalties lie. I could never turn to the side where I want to ruin my life or do anything like that. That is because I am strong enough. I have managed to hold so much together over the years and I have got to this point now. I am not just talking for myself to be selfish; it comes with that care-experience background and owning your identity and understanding the person that you are and not feeling ashamed or bad about the fact that you have had a terrible upbringing and have had to go through those things. At the end of the day, you are still standing there and you are still wanting to make a change.

The Deputy Convener: I agree that it would be much better for you if you had a secure tenancy with the support that you need around it.

Emma Pearce: I have had two houses before, but they were packed in because it was never the right time for me. I have had support in the past, but I realise that everything that I have done recently was all totally jumbled about.

I left school at 15 and went to college and got a couple of qualifications. I went into a job and left that, went into another job and left that, and got another job. I was doing anything that I could to just take my mind off the fact that I have got no place in this world. That is what I think: I have no place. I was born in London. At the end of the day, I still have a part of me that is missing—I do not know where that part is. Things happened to me throughout my life so that I had to be put under the looked-after branch. I had to come away from the care of my mum, who went through years of being given a terrible service from however many people. I lost contact with my dad for 15 years, yet I was living with all those other people. That comes into the bracket of being homeless. It does not matter whether you are living on the streets or living in a hostel, if you are not in your family placement with your primary carers from a point until you feel that you can have that family in your life, that is it—you are homeless.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you. Emma Pearce’s point takes us back to what Thomas Lyon said about the difficulty for people on benefits who become homeless and other reasons for people to become homeless. They might be sofa surfing or living with friends, or they might have lost jobs and even lost mortgages. There are lots of different circumstances for people to become homeless.

Thomas Lyon: I was in a flat and my landlord went bankrupt. That was how I became homeless.

It was not through any reason—the rent was getting paid and it was all fine.

When I was made homeless, I did not contact my mother in London because I did not want to give her the worries about me, and my brother was in Ireland. They were happy in their lives. I was left on the street. I went down to the burou and said that I was homeless, and they told me that I had to change my doctor to Hunter Street, because that is the homeless doctor. I had to get my methadone at the time, but I ended up with all that, going from hostel to hostel, and having to try to change my address. You are flung out of hostels for coming in at 20 past 12—that is a joke. It could be pouring with rain, but they say no and the door is shut. They say, “Too bad—it’s the curfew.”

Rhys Campbell: I second that.

Emma Pearce: If you are not in by a certain point, you are not getting back in. When you come in, you have closed circuit television cameras hounding you everywhere, and you think, “I’m meant to be living here. I have to pay rent to live here, but I’ve got cameras following me about like on ‘Big Brother’.” I do not think so.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you; we want to hear from everybody. It is important that we do that, and it is good that everyone feels that they can come in. However, our *Official Report* has to be able to record everyone, so I need to take people one at a time.

Thomas Lyon: On the housing situation, there should be people in there with lived experience. Personally, I would not be in the place where I am without Julie McCallagh having lived experience. She took me to the casework team and fought for my rights with me through Shelter. I took to her right away—we clicked and I listened to her. People with lived experience are more understanding. She is the volunteer who helped me, and I ended up getting to where I am through Shelter and the MSP Bill Kidd. There should be people in the housing with lived experience, rather than just people who have been through college and read textbooks or whatever.

The Deputy Convener: That takes us back to Alexander Stewart’s point about trying to get everyone working together in partnerships. Do my colleagues have any additional questions? We have explored Graham Simpson’s original question quite thoroughly.

Andy Wightman: Thank you to everyone for coming and sharing your experiences. I want to put on the record, with regard to Thomas Lyon’s experience, that I do not think that anyone should be evicted because their landlord has gone bankrupt. That is an inadequacy in our rental laws.

I want to ask, on the one hand, about the roles of charities and voluntary organisations that work in homelessness and, on the other, councils, with their legal obligations and duties. Will you tell us a little about your experience of those two very different sectors and, if you believe that one sector is doing particularly well, or particularly badly, how that might be changed? In particular, have voluntary organisations been crucial in helping you with the issues that you have faced, or has a council, with its statutory obligations, helped you more?

12:30

The Deputy Convener: I understand that Emma Pearce’s accommodation is with a voluntary organisation just now.

Emma Pearce: Yes. My accommodation is with the Salvation Army.

The Deputy Convener: You said that you have had tenancies before. Were they local authority tenancies?

Emma Pearce: They were local authority tenancies with support from throughcare and aftercare.

The Deputy Convener: Would you like to think about Andy Wightman’s question and say what you think the differences are?

Emma Pearce: I have started to access support with Shelter for the past couple of months, although I first accessed support last year. Shelter has been really good with me. I have been doing stuff with the organisation and it is now helping me to look for a flat while I am in Salvation Army accommodation.

I had two tenancies with the council. At that point, I had left care and I was starting to rebel very badly. I was in a supported lodgings placement, but I wanted to get my own house and get away. I just wanted to have my own space. I did not feel as though I belonged in any of the families that I had stayed with. I just wanted to be on my own. I thought that that was the best option.

I got my first flat, but I accumulated rent arrears while I was at college and working. That council flat was great; the only thing that I was unhappy about was that I was given a four-year antisocial behaviour order because of noise and partying. I understand that I made the mistake and that I should not have done that, but I felt that it was not dealt with in the right way. I offered to do remediation for my neighbour downstairs. I do not mean to be rude, but the woman who worked in the ASBO team at the council was a complete b-i-t-c-h. I am sorry, but she was. I could have said the word, but I did not want to say it in here. I know that people are laughing and that I should

not say that. She totally had a vendetta against me and, no matter what I said, she said, “No. You’re getting your four-year ASBO and that’s it.” So, I have to say that my experience of getting houses through the council has not been good—even the earlier experience with my mum, which was two decades ago. I have had to deal with all that from the council.

I am sorry. What was the question, again?

The Deputy Convener: I do not think that we were laughing, Emma. It is just that we need to be careful because we are on camera. The question was really about whether—

Emma Pearce: I do this all the time. I always talk back.

The Deputy Convener: The question was about whether there were differences between your experiences of the voluntary sector and the local authority, but from what you say, it seems—

Emma Pearce: I am still getting a mix of help. There is the council, but I am also accessing Shelter. I have been doing well with Shelter. The support that I have had from it has probably been greater than I got from working with Who Cares? Scotland for three years, and I have only just accessed support from Shelter in the past year.

The Deputy Convener: The point that we would perhaps take from what you said is that it was good to get a house, but the support that came with that was conflicting. On the one hand, the council was a parent, but on the other, it was also giving you a house.

Emma Pearce: I was doing well at that point and was at college and was working, so everything behind what happened was not looked at, such as mental health—

The Deputy Convener: So more support in the house—

Emma Pearce: The support that I had in the house and my keeping on top of budgeting and so on were not looked at. Now, as Saffron Rohan did, I have accumulated rent arrears. Saffron has managed to pay hers off, but I am still in arrears.

The Deputy Convener: Maybe we could ask Saffron to answer the question that Andy Wightman asked about the differences between local authority provision and voluntary sector provision.

Saffron Rohan: The differences will depend on who you ask and where they come from. In my experience, working with young people from at least 10 or 11 different local authorities across Scotland, there is very much a postcode lottery of care provision and aftercare support. Simone Smith and I have been really lucky with throughcare and aftercare support. My experience

with social services was terrible. If anything, they made my life significantly worse; they did not improve it.

As for the differences between the voluntary sector and local authorities, the local authority was good to give me a flat in supported accommodation, but that was not supportive; I almost went bankrupt at the age of 18 and still have an awful credit rating that I do not know how I am ever going to get out of.

There are pockets of good practice in different local authorities, teams and agencies. I have met young people who have had awful experiences working with the Hamish Allan Centre and I have met others who have had positive experiences working with various charities. With regard to the third sector and local authorities, there is no accountability—there is no one who investigates examples of bad practice.

Emma Pearce: There is the “care experienced” bracket—I am care experienced—and such people are just thrown out into the world without any underlying support. It’s just, “Here’s me, and here’s my life. Here’s my story.”

The Deputy Convener: That is important for us to hear.

Andy—do you want anyone else to answer your question?

Andy Wightman: If anyone else wants to add something, that would be fine. Otherwise, we can move on.

Rhys Campbell: I will come in. My opinion of the local authority is really poor. My housing officer has more holidays than Santa Claus—she works two days a week and finishes at 12. I cannot get her when I try to call on certain days. I have had housing applications suspended because of what I asked for. I was given 28 days’ notice to move from supported accommodation because something had happened there, and I was promised that something would be put in place because I had been homeless for two years. I am top of the council’s list to be housed—

Emma Pearce: They have been misleading him for a while. He is told he is first on the list for years and then, when he phones, he finds out that he is third.

Rhys Campbell: The girl said to me, “Right, Rhys, it’s been over a year since we’ve seen you and you look 100 times better than you did then. You look a lot better than I expected to see. I’ll put you forward for a tenancy or a supported tenancy.” I tell you—I would be happy to take either. At that time, I did not know that I had 28 days’ notice. I said that I would rather investigate all possible opportunities, because they were only giving me one offer. Because I am homeless, I only get one

offer. Are members aware of that? I said that I did not have to just take what I was offered because a person who lives off the street gets up to three offers. I wanted to investigate all available opportunities to make sure that I was making the right decision and so that I would be keeping myself safe and putting myself in a safe environment. I want to make sure that, wherever I go, I am giving myself the best advantage and keeping myself safe.

Emma Pearce: You went all French for a minute there, with the way you pronounced “advantage”.

The Deputy Convener: Can I check something, Rhys? Was that person the only housing officer? If that person was not there, was there no one you could see?

Rhys Campbell: I asked and asked and the housing officer eventually came to see me in my supported accommodation. They were almost ushering me out. They said that I had been there a year and had made only so much progress, and was almost stagnating. I agree that a person can get to a certain point and either get better or fall backwards.

When the housing officer eventually came to see me, we went through my housing application. At the time when I made the application, I had just been made homeless, so I ticked every box in that application because I just thought, “I need a house”, and it looked like it was time to get all that sorted out. We went through the application and I set out certain areas where I would feel safe and would be happy to go. We agreed on certain areas and certain streets, and I was happy with that. She said that she would investigate getting me in touch with Positive Steps and New Pathways and other organisations. I said that I was quite happy with that, and she told me that she would do that before my housing application went live, and that she could contact me and tell me exactly where I would be on the list the following day.

The Deputy Convener: I think I need to hurry you up a wee bit, because we are running out of time, believe it or not.

Rhys Campbell: You are asking me questions so I am trying to give you an answer.

The Deputy Convener: I am just trying to keep the discussion moving, because we are over time.

Rhys Campbell: Basically, she went off on her jollies or time off or whatever, and her manager in Dundee City Council was not willing to make my housing application live because I had said that I wanted to look at supported accommodation first. Because the officer had not put in the notes that she was willing to give me a tenancy straight away, I was stuck, practically with a noose around

my neck, waiting for the 28 days to pass and then to come out to nothing, from supported accommodation. The woman told me that, when my housing application went live, I would be number 1 for a house in Menzieshill, and she said that it would undoubtedly be only two days until I got a house because the turnaround is 24 houses per month. She said that I would be top of the list for a house.

The Deputy Convener: You still do not have a house.

Rhys Campbell: I have had nothing.

The Deputy Convener: I have to apologise, because we are very limited for time. As we now know, we could have spent much longer on this session, so that might be an issue that we need to revisit. I should also say that we will have a more informal meeting after this.

I will bring in Thomas Lyon and then ask committee members whether they have any final questions for our guests.

Thomas Lyon: As I have said, when I was homeless, I did all the hostels. Eventually, I got barred from them, or they just kept saying that there was no place for me.

Rhys Campbell talked about his casework team. I used to go in at a quarter to nine in the morning for the office opening and lie across the chairs in my sleeping bag, just to get some heat. My housing officer would come and see me, and then she would come back at a quarter to five when they were closing—it is the only time you can present at the Hamish Allan Centre—and say, “There’s nowhere for you.” That went on for years.

Eventually, I got a card for the Legal Services Agency, and I went to see them. The lawyer there started to send an email. I asked what he was doing and he said that he was threatening to sue the district council lawyers in my name, because what they were doing to me was illegal. He then told me to go down to the Hamish Allan Centre again. When I did so, they said, “Aye, we know you, Thomas”, and they put me up in the Ibis hotel for three nights and the Clifton for two. On the sixth day, I got a flat. When I asked the lawyer whether I could have done that six months ago, he said that I could have done it six years ago because what they were doing to me was illegal.

Throughout my homelessness, I have been to Shelter, the Legal Services Agency and MPs. I have had to really fight just to get into supported accommodation.

The Deputy Convener: This is the kind of thing that we need to hear.

Do committee members have any specific questions before I ask our guests whether they

wish to make any final comments for the record? We will have a more private chat afterwards.

Andy Wightman: I want to follow up Saffron Rohan's response by pointing out that local authorities can be held accountable for what they do but the voluntary sector, in some cases, cannot. We should return to that later, given the extent to which the sector is being expected to fill in many gaps and provide services.

The Deputy Convener: I call Bob Doris.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Thanks, convener. As much as anything, you have given me an opportunity to apologise for being late.

Perhaps our guests might remark on this when they get the last word. One of the things that the committee is looking at is the whole stepping-stone process to giving a person a tenancy. A person might move from rough sleeping to a hostel to temporary accommodation to some kind of conditional tenancy and then, in the end, they might get a full tenancy—in other words, the home that Rhys Campbell was talking about.

What we are looking at is whether it would be a lot more straightforward to say to someone at a really early stage, "Here's your tenancy, and here are the four or five people who will give you the support that you require to keep it." We are not trying to pretend that a person gets a tenancy and suddenly everything in their life is rosy. We know that that is not how it works.

I suppose that what I am asking is this: if each of you were to be given a mainstream tenancy by a housing association or council, what kind of support would you need to help you keep your flat? After all, there is no point in giving you a tenancy if you are going to be evicted, or if you have to give it up because of some crisis moment in your life. The committee is not only looking at getting people houses—although that would be really nice—but at ensuring that, once they get those houses, support can be provided to give them a fighting chance of keeping them.

Emma Pearce: It is all about tough love. It comes down to staff having the time and resources to support the person who has the tenancy. The excuse that is given is always about time.

The Deputy Convener: Thanks, Emma. We need to draw the formal bit of the meeting to a close. Will you say any final words that you want to put on the record today, bearing in mind Bob Doris's question? We will start on the right-hand side of the panel, with Simone.

12:45

Simone Smith: People should get support in life skills. When I moved into my first tenancy I did not know how to boil an egg, and stupid things like that. I knew nothing about tax or budgeting. The smallest things can make a difference.

The Deputy Convener: Is there anything else that you want to say to the committee on the record?

Simone Smith: I do not think so.

Rhys Campbell: I know how to live. I know how to cook, clean and pay my rent. I have been to people on my hands and knees begging for supported accommodation, saying, "I'll follow any rules and stick to anything you want. I've put in enough work as it is to get to where I am. I'm asking you on my hands and knees for supported accommodation." But I am still in the same situation. I am willing to follow any rules that people implement and do what they want three times a week or whatever. I will go with that. I cannot say it any clearer than that. Whatever rules people have, I will stick by them.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you. Do you want to say a final word to the committee about anything else, to put it on the record?

Rhys Campbell: I just hope that the situation gets sorted.

Emma Pearce: When the person is given a tenancy, they should be given support for stuff that people might not see, such as mental health problems. They should be able to access extra support, like being able to phone somebody at any time of the day or night to say that there is something going on in the house, or that they are feeling a bit low. There should be somebody there who is like a one-stop shop—not a Mr Know-it-all, but somebody who is there for anything, to make it simple.

Thank you for the invitation to be here today.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you for coming.

Julie McCallagh: When I came out of supported accommodation, I had nothing to start up a house. I was just given my white goods and I was put into a flat with bare floors and bare windows. Because I had a fridge and a cooker, I was supposed to live in it.

I know a lot of people who came through the same supported accommodation with me who have gone right back round the circle because they have not had any support, and they are back in the same accommodation. They have had to go back through treatment for another six months, and a couple of them have even died. People are left in flats with no life skills. People have been told that they were going to get support but nobody

has appeared at their door. You are left, as an adult, still feeling like a teenager and not knowing how to live. You are just left to get on with it.

The Deputy Convener: Thanks, Julie. Is there anything else that you want to put on the record?

Julie McCallagh: I think that when the council says that it is going to support the person in their tenancy, it should stick with that. When you sign a tenancy, the council should sign something as well to say that it is going to go through with what it has promised.

The Deputy Convener: Thanks very much.

Thomas Lyon: When I went through all the homelessness, I went to the Legal Services Agency, and I got put up in a hotel. The Hamish Allan Centre gave me a thingummy to take to a hotel and I was put up there for five nights. I never spoke to another person. On the sixth day, I got told by a casework team to go to a flat. I went to the flat and there was a guy there with one sheet of paper, which was my tenancy agreement. He said, "Sign there" and "See you later." I had a drug and alcohol problem and I had problems in that area, but I just took the flat because I was off the street. That was it—I was just left there. "There you go. There's a temporary furnished flat. See you." I was in there for 18 months and I just could not get it together.

There should be follow-up care. I feel really strongly about this. There should be people with lived experience to take follow-up care to people. Homelessness is homelessness and drug addiction is drug addiction. It is not as if it has to be a specific person: I could probably relate to Rhys Campbell and he could probably relate to me. We all have lived experience, and when it comes down to it, it is all similar. Having people with lived experience—like Julie McCallagh—helping me really worked for me, and I think it would work for others.

Saffron Rohan: Being representative of care-experienced young people today, I think that more specific resources and accommodation need to be allocated to that group. There should be more support in terms of mental health services, services for addiction issues and things like that. As other people have said, the person may have a drug and alcohol problem and the council may want them to fix that before it gives them a tenancy. How can they sort out their mental health and drug and alcohol addiction issues when they do not even have a safe and secure home or environment in which to do that?

Emma Pearce: It is a basic need.

The Deputy Convener: What about the point that Bob Doris made about moving into a tenancy?

Saffron Rohan: That is a really good idea as long as there are people in place—even on a voluntary basis; it could be people like us—who will go and support people with life skills such as managing money. Access to mental health services is also a really big thing. I went through quite a difficult stage when I was about 17, and I ended up ruining my flat because of it. I did not have access to any support because the situation was not severe enough for me to qualify for that.

The Deputy Convener: Thank you. I think that we could continue the discussion for another hour but, sadly, we are just not able to do that in the formal meeting.

I thank you all for coming along and sharing your experiences with us. I am sure that there are more things that you would like to say to us. Maybe you can do that after the meeting.

Meeting closed at 12:50.

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