Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee

1st Report, 2012 (Session 4)

Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2012 [Draft] and the Scottish Social Housing Charter

Published by the Scottish Parliament on 12 March 2012
Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee

Remit and membership

Remit:

To consider and report on infrastructure, capital investment, transport, housing and other matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, apart from those covered by the remit of the Local Government and Regeneration Committee.

Membership:

Malcolm Chisholm
Adam Ingram (Deputy Convener)
Alex Johnstone
Gordon MacDonald
Margaret McCulloch
Aileen McLeod
Maureen Watt (Convener)

Committee Clerking Team:

Steve Farrell
Ruth McGill
Lewis McNaughton
Lauren Spaven-Donn
Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee

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Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2012 [Draft] and the Scottish Social Housing Charter

The Committee reports to the Parliament as follows—

Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2012 [Draft]

1. The Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2012 [Draft], which is subject to the affirmative procedure, was laid before the Parliament on 31 January 2012. The Committee considered the Order and took evidence from Keith Brown, Minister for Housing and Transport, at its meeting on 7 March.

2. The Minister confirmed that the specific purpose of the Order was to enable payment of a grant in 2012-13 to any local authority that has difficulty in balancing its housing revenue account. He stated that only Shetland Islands Council continued to qualify for a grant and that it would receive the amount of £760,950, which would be payable in 12 equal monthly instalments.

3. Housing Support Grant (HSG) is a central government subsidy paid to those councils unable to balance their Housing Revenue Account. These are costs that relate to the day-to-day maintenance of the Council’s housing stock, including supplies and services for improvement and repairs to the buildings, as well as the cost of council employees that are involved in the management of the housing function. HSG is expected to be abolished in the forthcoming Local Government Finance (Unoccupied Properties Etc.) (Scotland) Bill, and as such, 2012-13 should be the final year that this grant payment is made.

4. In considering the Order, the Committee noted that the Subordinate Legislation Committee had not made any comments in relation to the Order.

5. The Minister for Housing and Transport moved motion SM4-02166—

That the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee recommends that the Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2012 [draft] be approved.

6. The motion was agreed to.
Scottish Social Housing Charter

7. Also at its meeting on 7 March, the Committee considered the Scottish Social Housing Charter and took evidence from Keith Brown, Minister for Housing and Transport. Whilst the Charter was not an item of subordinate legislation, it was subject to consideration under the affirmative procedure.

8. The Charter represents a part of the modernised regulatory regime for social landlords introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, and defines the standards and outcomes that social landlords must aim to achieve when performing their housing activities.

9. Previously, the Committee took evidence on a draft version of the Charter from local authority housing associations and tenant support services on 25 January 2012. The Committee also took evidence from the Minister for Housing and Transport on 8 February 2012.

10. As a result of the evidence it received, the Committee agreed to write to Scottish Government requesting that the Charter be revised to include reference to the Scottish Government’s homelessness commitment, whereby any unintentionally homeless person should be entitled to settled accommodation. The Minister for Housing and Transport responded to the Committee indicating that the Scottish Government would incorporate the suggestion in the final version of the Charter. The text from these letters is included at the Annexe.

11. The Committee considered the final version of the Charter at its meeting on 7 March. The Committee welcomed the Charter, which had been amended in line with its suggestion.

12. The Committee noted that the Subordinate Legislation Committee had not made any comments in relation to the Charter.

13. The Minister for Housing and Transport moved motion SM4-02201—

   That the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee recommends that the Scottish Social Housing Charter [draft] be approved.

14. The motion was agreed to.
Letter from the Convener of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee to the Minister from Housing and Transport, 9 February 2012

Thank you for the evidence you provided on the Scottish Social Housing Charter at the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee meeting yesterday.

The Committee recognises the extensive consultation that has been undertaken in respect of the Charter and the considerable work carried out to reflect the views heard in the final draft.

The Committee understands that the Charter is to operate as a document of measurement that is compatible with statutory obligations and that as such it is not appropriate or necessary for the detail of all of these obligations to be included in the Charter. However, in response to views heard during evidence taking, the Committee is of the view that it is important to include reference to the 2012 commitment to settled accommodation for every homeless person and suggests the following revision included in square brackets—

**Outcome 12**
Local authorities perform their duties on homelessness so that:

- homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice, are provided with suitable, good quality temporary or emergency accommodation, when this is needed, and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep a home [insert: the home they are entitled to]

I should therefore be grateful if you would consider including this or an appropriate alternative reference in the final version of the Charter.

The Committee noted concerns that were raised in respect of tenant participation during evidence taking and will examine this further within the context of monitoring the implementation of the Charter and the work of the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Maureen Watt
Convener, Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee

Reply from the Minister from Housing and Transport to the Convener of the Infrastructure and Capital Investment, 22 February 2012

Thank you for your letter of the 9 February 2012 and for the keen interest the Committee has taken in the development of Scotland's first Social Housing Charter.

I welcome the Committee's suggestion for strengthening the Charter's outcome on homelessness and am pleased to confirm that we have reflected it in the version of the Charter that we are laying before the Parliament for its approval. This
version has been amended at a number of points on the recommendation of the Plain Language Commission and has been awarded the Clear English Standard. A copy of the revised Charter showing all changes that we have made is enclosed for the Committee's information.

I share the Committees concerns in respect of tenant participation and I plan to use the launch of the Charter as an opportunity to impress upon landlords and the Scottish Housing Regulator the importance that Alex Neil and I attach to landlords achieving the participation outcome in the Charter. We will also be paying particular attention to the Regulator's assessments of landlord performance in this area.

Keith Brown
Minister for Housing and Transport
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