I very much welcome this opportunity to provide written evidence to the Scottish Parliament Local Government and Communities Committee on Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention on behalf of the Glasgow Housing Options Steering Board. This has representation from Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership, the Wheatley Group, Glasgow City Council, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations, Glasgow Homeless Network and Shelter.

This response is based on our experience of implementing Housing Options in Glasgow since 2012 and the findings of the second independent evaluation of Glasgow Housing Options which demonstrated the clear shift that has been achieved in front line practice to a more person centred, preventative model of delivery which reduces housing crisis and delivers substantial economies to the public sector in Glasgow.

1. How do you feel housing options and homelessness prevention is working in practice? Are there any examples of good practice?

We feel that housing options and homelessness prevention in practice in Glasgow is working very well as evidenced in the second comprehensive independent evaluation which encompassed: statistical analysis of Housing Options data, RSL business impact analysis, customer interview programme, engagement with staff, managers and leaders and prevention savings analysis. The evaluation also highlights many examples of good practice.

We would wish to see the Legislative framework amended to in order that it supports a person’s right to access a comprehensive housing options approach when they present as homeless. We believe that this would enhance a person’s ability to access services that would provide them with the opportunity to sustain their accommodation. Any amendment to the homelessness legislation should not diminish a person’s right to access emergency and settled accommodation.

The development of Housing Options in Glasgow has had to take account of massive structural challenges in the city including deindustrialisation, income and health inequality, and major reductions to public expenditure. It has also had to take account of the complex nature of the housing system in Glasgow and the complexity of customer need. The scale of the challenge in Glasgow dwarfs that of any other Scottish city – in fact, the number of people using the Housing Options route is
almost three times higher here. No single organisation or agency can take on a challenge of this scale alone. From its inception as a 'coalition of the willing' we have designed and developed a housing options model which reflects this context. Our model is founded firmly on partnership with a strong focus on building relationships to meet both the housing and underlying needs of the customer. Key development principles are prevention, capacity through collaboration and innovation to meet housing and underlying needs focusing on the connectivity, resource and expertise provided by partners working across housing, health, social work, financial inclusion and the third sector agencies. By developing the model around the principle of meeting housing and underlying needs, the model enables integration between housing management and care management creating a basis for a strong housing contribution to the City’s integration agenda and national Health and Well Being Outcomes.

Good practice is at the heart of the infrastructure which supports the Glasgow Housing Options model. For example, the development and implementation of a consistent integrated assessment tool used across all partners:

- Supports a full diagnostic assessment of customer needs and personal circumstances including a detailed financial assessment during a comprehensive housing options interview
- Delivers a series of options and interventions that prompt the identification of tailored customer solutions
- Enables the sharing of information across housing options partners, with data protection standards, to enable collaboration across agencies to address complex needs.

This creates a seamless service for customers supported significantly by standardised paperwork across a diverse network of housing providers, statutorily homelessness services and health and social care partners.

There are a range of other good practice examples to support staff across all partners enhance and develop their knowledge, skills and confidence in delivering housing options. These include:

- ‘Preparing the way’ meetings with managers and awareness sessions for local housing, health and social work front line staff and managers
- Bespoke housing options training
- On site coaching and mentoring for eight weeks in each partner location as they ‘go live’ with housing options
- An infrastructure of named contacts in each sector of the city established across health, social care, housing benefit, Scottish Welfare Fund and third
sector partners to support staff address the housing and underlying needs of customers

- Support to implement effective case management through facilitation at case discussions and conferences
- Advice, information and practical assistance for complex cases
- Delivery of the Housing Options toolkit in each location which provides comprehensive information on the range of services and options available to frontline staff
- Briefing sessions to meet identified knowledge gaps
- Support to deliver performance management and measurement
- Financial inclusion and debt advice model aligned to homelessness prevention and funded by the Scottish legal Aid Board (SLAB) enabling colocation of Financial Inclusion and Debt Advice workers with the Community Homeless Teams. This evaluated extremely positively with £2.2 million in direct client gain and a further £1.5 million in debt management. Regrettably, this funding was no longer continued after March 17.

The evaluation found very strong evidence that Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention is working very well in practice with a 29% drop in homelessness; up to 7000 housing options interviews per annum; the protection of a rights based approach to homelessness; and strong evidence that it is successful in addressing and preventing the crisis of those with the greatest level of housing and underlying need. The evaluation also assessed the impact of Housing Options on City resources and identified a series of prevention savings benchmarks which demonstrated there are significant resource efficiencies achievable via the Glasgow Housing Options approach.

2. How effective is the relationship between all relevant agencies, including the health sector and charities working on homelessness prevention?

The evaluation found that Housing Options has succeeded in making huge progress in building partnerships, capacity and commitment across all the delivery partners. The Glasgow model now covers 72% of the social housing stock in the city. The development of such an extensive and diverse partnership network has developed a capacity within the model that delivers substantial opportunities to offer preventative information, advice and support to customers at or facing housing crisis across the city. The evaluation notes that anecdotal evidence from the Scottish Government suggests that whilst the publication of national Housing Options Guidance for RSLs should have a positive impact on engagement levels, to date the delivery of Housing Options in Scotland has often been led by local authorities and delivered largely though statutory homelessness services. The development of such an extensive and diverse partnership network in Glasgow has developed a scale and capacity within
the model that delivers substantial opportunities to offer preventative information and advice and support to those experiencing housing problems across the city.

The named contact system is an integral component of the Glasgow housing options model and operates as an embodiment of the effective relationships central to the development of Housing Options. So too is the Link Officers network which meets on a sector basis across the three sectors in the city building relationships in each locality amongst the link officers from partner RSLs, and Community Homeless Teams and the GHSCP Housing and Homeless Leads who coordinate named contact referrals.

The Steering Board with representatives from Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership, the Wheatley Group, Glasgow City Council, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations, Glasgow Homeless Network and Shelter work has overseen the development and roll out of Housing Options across the city promoting the relationships amongst us all which are critical to homelessness prevention in Glasgow.

The transferability of the Glasgow Housing Options model has been shown by the development of Housing Options for Older People, funded via the Integrated Care Fund Accommodation Based Strategy to help prevent delayed hospital discharge and help people move on from Intermediate Care. This has had excellent feedback from health, social care colleagues, older people themselves and their families and carers.

3. **What needs to happen to improve the delivery of housing options and homelessness prevention services and the outcomes achieved by for service users?**

The challenges around homelessness accommodation are well documented. Supply and demand is an issue in the City and more about managing customer expectations – for example, customers want to live in specific areas and accommodation types. The Wheatley group report that most turnover is in multi-storey and tenement flats which are less popular with customers. The evaluation includes an assessment of the Glasgow Housing Options model with regard to compliance with the new Scottish Government Housing Options guidance. This assessment outlined detailed evidence supporting compliance with 10 of the Housing Options Guidance principles:

- Appropriate links between Housing Options and Homelessness
- A supportive organisational culture
- Robust policies and procedures
- A well trained workforce
• Effective partnership working
• High standards of customer care
• Preventative services
• Person centred services
• Holistic services
• Links with housing support.

The evaluation commented on the first principle - appropriate links between Housing Options and Homelessness - being perhaps the most contentious element of the guidance with the insistence from the Scottish Housing Regulator that Councils err on the side of caution and undertake homeless assessments whenever they had reason to believe that an applicant was homeless or threatened with homelessness, were undermining the preventative, problem solving aspect of housing options. In turn, the SHR was concerned to establish that local authorities did not achieve reductions in homeless applications at the expense of upholding statutory rights. The evaluation found compelling evidence that the Glasgow Housing Options model firmly protects a rights based approach with the provision of proactive and preventative housing information and advice. More customers who engage with frontline homeless services in Glasgow proceed to homelessness assessment (57%) than is the case for Scotland (48%). Furthermore customer engagement survey intelligence demonstrates a strong rate of retention for those who engage with the model to activate their rights under the homeless legislation. Survey outcomes suggest that 20% of customers engage with the model with the intent to make a homeless application but that following the housing options interview process, this increase to 24%. Post interview 26% of customers proceed to make a full homelessness application. In addition, guidance issued to staff across all partners implementing the Glasgow Housing Options clearly indicates that the immediate priority is to deal with any crisis and prevent homelessness.

Of the two guidance principles that did not fully comply the assessment found a clear need for better understanding of PRS options in respect of tenure neutral services, referred to in section 4. In respect of fully auditable record keeping the assessment found a strong commitment and effort from partners in developing a voluntary recording database which offers a total sample of records exceeding 10,000 customer interactions over the last few years. The assessment recommends improvements in the functionality of data capture systems which the Steering Board is aware of and recognised will require substantial financial and resource investment to set up and maintain.

The Glasgow model has been developed to align with the principles of Chapter 2 of the Code of Guidance on Homelessness (2009) and the Scottish Government’s Housing Options Guidance. Within this framework, the protection of a rights based approach meeting the needs of homelessness household has been prioritised. We
believe that preventative and problem solving housing options approach we have
developed and invested in with our partners in Glasgow is crucial to homelessness
prevention.

4. **What role should private sector housing providers play in preventing
and responding to homelessness?**

Private Sector housing providers have very significant role to play in preventing and
responding to homelessness. This encompasses:

- affordability in terms of rent charges and deposits in the context of
  Welfare Reform
- willingness to accept tenants on benefits
- appetite to work with Community Homeless Teams and offer longer
  tenancy agreements
- willingness to invest in adaptations and agree to the use of key safes
- PRS knowledge of support services to assist tenants in difficulties
- maintain and ensure safety of properties.

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