



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Local Government and Communities Committee

**Wednesday 1 February 2017**

**Session 5**



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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE**

**4<sup>th</sup> 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)

\*Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP)

\*Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)

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

\*Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Michael Boal (Scottish Government)

Tony Cain (Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers)

Gordon Campbell (Tenant Participation Advisory Service Scotland)

Christine MacLeod (Scottish Housing Regulator)

Hugh McClung (Regional Networks of Registered Tenants Organisations)

Craig McLaren (Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland)

Philip Revell (Sustaining Dunbar)

Kevin Stewart (Minister for Local Government and Housing)

Alan Stokes (Scottish Federation of Housing Associations)

Chris Wood-Gee (Sustainable Scotland Network)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Clare Hawthorne

**LOCATION**

The James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4)



# Scottish Parliament

## Local Government and Communities Committee

Wednesday 1 February 2017

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:32]

### “Draft Climate Change Plan: The draft third report on policies and proposals 2017-2032”

**The Convener (Bob Doris):** Good morning and welcome to the fourth meeting in 2017 of the Local Government and Communities Committee. I apologise for my voice this morning—I am a little bit under the weather. I remind everyone present to turn off their mobile phones. As the meeting papers are provided in digital format, members may use tablets during the meeting—if you see us with laptops or whatever, we are accessing our committee papers. We have received apologies from our deputy convener, Elaine Smith MSP, who unfortunately cannot be with us this morning. She must be feeling even more poorly than I am.

Agenda item 1 is an evidence-taking session on the Scottish Government’s “Draft Climate Change Plan: The draft third report on policies and proposals 2017-2032”, or RPP3. Today’s session will focus on local government and planning, and at next week’s meeting we will have a session on the plan’s housing aspects. I appreciate that there are clear connections between the two areas, but that is how the committee has decided to divide things up.

I welcome to the meeting Chris Wood-Gee, who is the chair of the steering group of the sustainable Scotland network; Philip Revell, who is projects co-ordinator for Sustaining Dunbar; and Craig McLaren, who is the director of the Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland. I thank you for coming along, and I will give you the opportunity to talk briefly about your organisations to inform MSPs and those who are watching the meeting. Chris Wood-Gee can go first.

**Chris Wood-Gee (Sustainable Scotland Network):** The sustainable Scotland network, which works across the public sector in Scotland, is looking to improve reporting, among other things. For example, we have been leading on mandatory reporting developments across Scotland with regard to climate change issues. We are seeking to share experience and expertise across the whole Scottish public sector, with a particular focus on climate change and sustainability.

**Philip Revell (Sustaining Dunbar):** Sustaining Dunbar is a community development trust that was founded in 2007-08. It is part of the global Transition Network, which is trying to find ways to involve communities in making the transition from dependence on fossil fuels and to offer positive opportunities to shape a better future and better, stronger communities. We are part of the Scottish communities climate action network, through which I am involved with the Scottish Community Alliance, and I am also on the board of Community Energy Scotland.

**Craig McLaren (Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland):** The RTPI is the professional body for town planners throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland, and around the world. We have 23,000 members in 82 different countries, including 2,100 members in Scotland. Our members work across the public, private and third sectors with the aim of advancing the art and science of town planning for public benefit. Our key roles are to set standards for education in planning and for planners themselves and to make sure that we promote the best possible planning system.

**The Convener:** I thank you all for those introductions. It is important to put on record that the plan, which is a rather sizeable document, was published only on 19 January; we appreciate that, as well informed as you are in your various fields, you have not had long to digest it. We also appreciate the fact that Craig McLaren agreed at the last minute to come to today’s meeting in order to assist the committee.

We now move to questions.

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** Good morning. Perhaps we can start off by hearing your reflections on how the planning system can best deliver development that favours sustainable travel modes.

**The Convener:** If no one is going to go first, I pick Philip Revell to respond. [*Laughter.*]

**Philip Revell:** We really need to join up the community empowerment and climate change agendas. You will probably laugh at me for saying this, but a crucial part of creating sustainable places, where people are actively involved in local decisions that impact on them and are involved creatively in finding solutions to fossil fuel dependency, is to invert the planning system completely. We need to ensure that the process starts from the bottom up, with local place plans that connect people with a vision of what their community could look like, and of the possibilities of moving to a low-carbon future and what that might mean for local food supply, employment, energy, health and wellbeing and so on. Those plans can be collated at area and local authority

levels and brought together at a strategic level so that people can deliberate on where the conflicts of interest lie and consider them in a creative way.

**The Convener:** I am sorry for dropping you in it a little bit, Philip, as the three of you were debating who was going to answer the question. Craig McLaren can go next.

**Craig McLaren:** Planning is all about creating great places for people, and that is what we do as a profession. A key part of our work is to ensure that we put things in the best possible place—in other words, that we put them in the right place at the right time as soon as possible and as best we can.

Planning is all about trying to do that in a sustainable way, and we think that the planning system needs a number of things in order to make that approach work. As the committee will know, a review of the planning system is under way, and we have been talking about how the system needs some newish principles to make it more effective and ensure that it delivers much more sustainable development. For a start, the planning service in local government and in the Scottish Government needs to be seen much more as a corporate function. We are slightly worried that it has been sidelined and is not part of the key mainstream approach to deciding what is built where and what infrastructure is required. We need the corporate, influential and collaborative working that planning can bring.

We also feel that the system needs to be a bit more front loaded. In truth, the system at present is more reactive than we would like it to be. Planning performs best when it sets out a vision of what the future of a place should look like and provides a route map for reaching that future and achieving the outcomes.

We would like there to be much more debate about, and agreement on, a place's constraints and opportunities at the start of the process so that we can develop a route map to get there, and so that everybody knows what their responsibility is and what resources are required. It is important that a new planning system focuses much more on delivery. At present, we have a slight problem in that planners plan and others deliver. We need to try to bridge that implementation gap and have a clear idea about how we can resource sustainable infrastructure and development.

At present, the planning system is underresourced, and needs to be better resourced. Our research has shown that between 2010 and 2015 there was a 20 per cent drop in planning staff in local authorities across Scotland. The average amount in a local authority's budget that goes directly to the planning service is 0.63 per cent, and the money that is recovered to cover

the processing of planning applications amounts to only 63 per cent of the total. I have in the past quoted those figures liberally, so you might have heard them before.

Planning is well placed to deliver development that favours sustainable travel modes. To be honest, more thought could be given to how the climate change action plan could set out how the required changes to the planning system might be made.

**Chris Wood-Gee:** Was there a specific mention of transport in the question?

**Ruth Maguire:** Yes, there was.

**The Convener:** I was waiting to hear whether one of you would address that aspect.

**Chris Wood-Gee:** I will try. Transport planning is about understanding how people get about, and we are going to have to make changes. I am from rural Dumfries and Galloway, where we are struggling in relation to electric cars. We have them in our work environment but we cannot get from one end of the region to the other—we are not yet allowed to buy Tesla cars. I know that local bus services and other local services present challenges. I am not sure how the planning system could address that issue, but it is important that it looks at it from the perspective of where the infrastructure is—for example, infrastructure in out-of-town shopping facilities would be handy, and would certainly suit me on the way home from work. We need a planning system that recognises where people live and considers transport and movement around those areas. There should probably be more of a presumption in favour of cyclists and so on.

In Edinburgh, it is great to see so many push-bikes around, but it is more of a challenge where we are. One really would not want to go on a push-bike on certain roads—it is just not safe, and there are no footways and so on. It is important to bring about connectivity, and it is crucial that the planning system works with people like the south west of Scotland transport partnership in our area, and with rural transport partnerships, so that we can have a joined-up approach. I do not know whether that answers your question in full. Rather than thinking, "We need a nice new road here"—roads come with their own challenges—we need to ensure that different modes of transport are taken into account at the outset.

**Ruth Maguire:** I do not think that anybody would argue with what Philip Revell said about involving communities. Craig McLaren mentioned that we want the planning system to be more front loaded. What would that look like? How would we achieve that?

**Craig McLaren:** It is important to acknowledge that community engagement has been part of the planning system since 1968, which is slightly before my time. Progress has been made, and we have moved from holding meetings in draughty church halls on a Wednesday night to much more sophisticated approaches to engaging with communities. A powerful example is the charrette, which is an all-embracing term for lots of different types of workshops. It is the concept of discussing, at an early stage, the future of a neighbourhood, town or city. As I said earlier, people can explore the opportunities and talk to each other about their ambitions for the place. They can also look at the constraints—on resources, for example—and at the things that may not be particularly pretty, and which people may not want sited next to them, but which are required. It means having an open and honest debate and coming up with a vision for what a place could look like in future.

As I said earlier, there is a key role for charrettes—this is where they need to improve a bit—in setting out the route map for delivery. A charrette can bring together communities, different parts of local government—such as transport, which Chris Wood-Gee mentioned—developers and investors, utility companies, which have a big role to play, and government agencies to try to agree things at the start of the process. That is a much more positive way of doing things, and we hope that it will be a more fruitful way of delivering better places for people.

09:45

**The Convener:** Does anyone else want to answer? If so, just put your hand up. I will take Phil Revell next.

I should say that when I ask, “Does anyone want to answer?”, you should not feel pressured into answering.

**Philip Revell:** It has to be tied in to reform of local democracy and filling the void that exists at local level with a forum for proper representative and deliberative debate about local issues. That might start with a type of citizens’ jury: a representative sample of local opinion that could come up with a picture of what a resilient community needs to look like to face up to the challenges of climate change.

To answer the transport question, there needs to be much more focus on reducing the need to travel. That is not mentioned in the climate change plan at all as far as I could see.

**The Convener:** Craig McLaren mentioned the charrette process. I started off as a huge supporter, but I became unsure whether it was a process or a workshop of a couple of days that was great at getting a snapshot in time of what the

wider community wanted. I was unclear whether, after that, the planners go off and do what they do well, because they are the professionals, and then consult in the same way that they have always consulted.

Philip Revell’s submission used the expression “co-production”. Consulting after a charrette is better than we used to do, but it is still not co-production. I have gone back to organisations that are taking forward developments and asked them to speak to community groups that are looking at X, Y and Z. Sometimes they have said, “But we have had a charrette”.

Is that a theme that others recognise or have I just been unfortunate in picking one official at a bad time? Does that ring true for anyone?

**Craig McLaren:** You are right that some of the charrettes, particularly the early ones, did not quite promise the moon but did set out ideas without a process to check the rigour of delivery. They became one-off set events.

We are improving to an extent, in that the charrette is seen as the start of a process and dialogue. That is important: once you have an idea of what you want to deliver, you have to have continuous dialogue to see where things are going and make sure that people are up to speed.

The other thing that is important as part of that process is the concept of local place plans which is being looked at in the planning consultation paper that is out now—“Places, People and Planning: A consultation on the future of the Scottish Planning System”. The idea is that communities can put together a plan for their area that can become part of the development plan. A lot of detail has to be developed on how that would work but the concept is a good one if it engages communities in thinking about how their place can work and helps them to work with different stakeholders to deliver that.

**The Convener:** That is helpful.

**Chris Wood-Gee:** The key thing is that local authorities and planners need to have the courage to believe that people have sensible things to say. Sometimes they think, “If we do that, it might get in the way and slow the process down.” There might be deadlines for making things happen because of spending or other reasons.

I have been involved with community engagement for most of my working life and it works well. You need the courage to work with people and we are much better at that than we were in the past. It is important to have a process, rather than seeing it as a bit of a hindrance.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Last week, Parliament had a debate on the Government’s planning consultation. Parliament

voted for a greater emphasis on protecting green space, which comes back to climate change. How should we do that better and how should we direct development into brownfield sites rather than into precious green space?

**Chris Wood-Gee:** My current role is in energy and sustainability, but most of my working life has been in green space. I used to work around Glasgow on things such as some of the early work on the seven lochs project, which is now in development.

Protecting green space is a challenge and we might need to resource the remediation of brown space land to a greater degree than we do at the moment. For developers, the easiest thing to do is to go on a nice alluvial soil into which the drains can be put. Everything is perfect, it is very quick and easy, and the profits are better. However, we have huge amounts of vacant land of one sort or another, including poor quality land, and it makes more sense to deal with that, although some legislative emphasis might be required to deliver it.

Green space, including urban woodlands, is crucial to the quality of people's lives. With temperatures rising because of climate change, urban woodlands are more of an adaptation than a mitigation measure, but a lot of the work that was done years ago on future urban heat problems found that putting in an urban woodland—as well as the rural woodland that is talked about in the climate change plan—can have a huge effect. However, green space also improves the quality of people's lives and, ultimately, this debate is about people's quality of life, so it is crucial that we ensure that we protect the green space. I am not quite sure how we do that, but a move towards reusing old land—recycling is another core part of the climate change plan—must be a critical part of what we deliver.

**Craig McLaren:** The green space element is important and you will find that most local development plans include policies to protect local green space. Some interesting work has been done and an example that springs to mind is the green spaces plan of the City of Edinburgh Council. Staff have done an audit of where green space is across the city, how accessible it is and what condition it is in, and used that as a basis for making policy on where new green space can be delivered and what should be protected. The audit element is incredibly important.

We can also ensure that there is green space in new developments and, in appropriate circumstances, planners try to do that as much as possible. That can be done through negotiation with developers as, although we would like to think that developers will come to the table with green space in the development to start off with, sometimes it is subject to negotiation.

As Chris Wood-Gee said, the other key part is brownfield sites. Unfortunately, most of the easiest remediation work on brownfield land has already taken place; we are getting to the harder sites now, which inevitably means that there is a resource issue for doing the work. From a climate change perspective, it is essential that we try our damndest to remediate as many brownfield sites as possible, because those sites generally lie within the envelope of existing towns and settlements, so people do not need to drive to them, there is good public transport and the locations are much more sustainable. We need to tackle that issue and to resource it as best we can.

**Philip Revell:** I hope that the aspirations of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 and the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 will open up new possibilities for community groups to find out who owns derelict brownfield sites and give them opportunities to gain access to do what they want to do. That might help in some way to relieve pressure on green space. More generally, we need to access the local knowledge of local people.

**Graham Simpson:** Craig McLaren talked about planners planning rather than waiting for developers to come in and make their pitch. If planners were able to say in advance where the green space should be—and will remain—and that they are not going to wait for the developers to come in and say that they want to build there, would that be a better way to protect what we have?

**Craig McLaren:** Yes. The development plan is supposed to be the primary consideration when we make decisions on planning applications. Therefore, having a plan that sets out those parameters is incredibly useful.

Developers, investors and communities tell me that the one thing that they want from the planning system is certainty and predictability. If a plan provides that predictability and gives them confidence to do things in a certain way, I would imagine—I would hope—that that would help.

**Graham Simpson:** Chris Wood-Gee mentioned resources, which is a huge issue. Do you have any thoughts on where those resources might come from?

**Chris Wood-Gee:** The short answer is probably no. The energy plan has a figure of £10 billion to deal with the whole climate change issue, although I suspect that that is a fairly conservative figure. In that regard, it gives me some comfort that, south of the border, we are just about to spend £40 billion on a railway that does not go that far. The sums of money to deal with climate change are not perhaps as scary as they could be.

It must be all about collaboration. Whether it be straight action to tackle climate change or development to enable a project to go ahead, people need to recognise what the benefits would be of taking out a smaller profit rather than maximising profit at the other end.

There probably is money out there, including the money that people like me have, who put eco-bling on our houses, or others who recognise the benefits of undertaking work.

We know where local government is financially. Without a doubt, the situation is challenging. The loss of resource, including the loss of staff, which Craig McLaren mentioned was happening in the planning system, is an on-going problem. I have been in local government for many years and we have had a spending cut every year as far back as I can remember. That might not be the case, but that is how it feels.

I do not know where the money will come from, but there are pots of money out there, including the sovereign investment fund, and we need to be clever about how we pull everything together in order to get things to work.

I am sorry—I have probably not answered the question well, but it is a big, difficult question that challenges us all.

**Craig McLaren:** I will point out a couple of things. We need to think more creatively about the issue. We all know that local government resourcing is very tight. However, there is a big pot of money for placemaking and infrastructure provision through the city deals. Indeed, a lot of money has been invested in city deals. I do not know the details of every single one of them, but I would be interested to see whether, through them, money is being put in to remediate sites, particularly important brownfield sites, to bring transformational change for the cities. I wonder whether the city deal money can be used a little bit more creatively. Key projects are being progressed, but they are not bringing that transformational change.

Land ownership is important. If you own land, you have much more control over what you can do. If ownership of a brownfield site lies in the public sector and we manage to remediate that land, its value increases immediately, and it would increase even further if we were allowed to build on it.

If the land is owned by a private sector developer, we need to see whether a mechanism could be put in place that would mean that the state and not just the developer would share the value uplift. There is a bit of work to be done on that, but the concept of sharing the benefits of investment should be explored.

**Graham Simpson:** I can answer your question on city deals: the answer is probably no—that is not happening. The committee might well take a look at city deals, so I will leave the issue there rather than delve into it today.

10:00

**The Convener:** I was going to put on the record that we will return to the issue of city deals at some point, as it is important to stress that, but Graham Simpson has just mentioned it.

We move to a question from Andy Wightman.

**Andy Wightman (Lothian) (Green):** The planning consultation contains some interesting points about extending permitted development rights to developments, such as microgeneration and renewable heat networks, that help to reduce emissions. It also contains a proposal to repeal section 72 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which inserted in the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 a new section that made it obligatory for a local development plan to

“include policies requiring all developments ... to ... avoid a specified and rising proportion of ... greenhouse gas emissions”.

Do you have any insight as to why on earth we would want to repeal a piece of legislation that places duties on the planning system to incorporate measures that reduce emissions?

**The Convener:** Had any of you picked up on that? Chris Wood-Gee is nodding his head.

**Chris Wood-Gee:** Work-wise, we are in the process of reading our local development plan. One of the policies is very much about getting renewables into buildings, but that takes the emphasis away from demand reduction.

It is great to have such measures—depending on where a house is orientated, solar thermal heat pumps could be used—and the climate change plan is looking for such an approach overall in the next 10 to 15 years. However, the technologies are not quite there yet. It is useful to have such policies included in local development plans, but sometimes they get in the way of other measures that would reduce the need to put in energy in the first place. The Passivhaus system is an example: it may not require renewable energy going into the house because the insulation and the heat recovery ventilation systems are so effective that a lot of external heat is not needed.

I have debated to some extent with our planners how we get the balance right between the need to put in renewables and the demand reduction side, which involves looking at where we go with technology to reduce the need for energy input in the first place.

We need a bit more flexibility in the system in that respect, which might be why the change that Andy Wightman highlighted has been proposed. However, we do not want to lose out—we need to ensure that, if we do not have a policy to incorporate renewables and so on, we take a very big demand reduction approach instead.

**Philip Revell:** I do not have any particular insights on the section that Andy Wightman mentioned, except to say that I do not understand why we do not simply move as quickly as possible towards Passivhaus standards for all new builds.

**The Convener:** Does Craig McLaren want to add anything?

**Craig McLaren:** I will comment on the situation, although I am not totally au fait with it. My understanding is that the research that was done showed that the real impact came from building standards rather than the planning side of things, so it was felt that such a requirement is not necessary and is perhaps a bit of a burden.

I still think that there is a need to ensure that development plans in particular show the role that planning can play in the location, siting, massing, density and design of housing. There is still a big role for planning in that respect, but I got the impression that the proposed change was more about the impact of internal measures, which would be a building control matter.

**Andy Wightman:** A review that was conducted in March 2016 concluded that section 72 should be kept in the 2009 act.

I move on to the wider point that Craig McLaren made. The danger is that we focus—as Chris Wood-Gee indicated—on individual buildings and bits of technology, and all the rest of it. To what extent is there an argument for including climate change mitigation as a principal purpose of the proposed new planning bill? In other words, it would be an overriding consideration that local authorities could more easily use to say that certain developments would not even get through the door because of their carbon impact.

**Craig McLaren:** That is a good question. At present, planning is based on the principle of sustainable development, which incorporates environmental sustainability. As ever, planning involves a balance in trying to pull together—if possible—something that maximises the environmental, social and economic circumstances.

It is a difficult question to answer just now, but I would say that planning and planners have environmental sustainability and climate change at their heart. As a profession, we see environmental sustainability as something that we are there to promote and push, and we see the tools that we

have—such as development plans—as a means of doing that.

**Andy Wightman:** I have a supplementary to the previous question about transport. One of the issues with the climate change plan is that there are carbon targets for each sector but it is not clear how they have been arrived at. We are not told why agriculture is taking virtually no strain and heat is taking a lot of strain. A question that has come up is that the TIMES model, which has been used to generate the plan, contains exogenous demand drivers, so criteria have been agreed outside the plan and put into it. For example, on transport, my understanding—it is important to stress that we do not have this information firmly from Government—is that a 25 per cent growth in road travel was used as a criterion and put into the plan. In other words, there is no capacity for the plan to be a dynamic model that says that we should reduce certain sectors. Is that your understanding?

**Craig McLaren:** I do not know the science and the calculations behind the plan, but one thing that struck me when I read it was that much of the section on transport tended to deal with technological innovation as a means of trying to drive down emissions. As far as I could see, the plan did not mention the need to try to restrict the growth of car use. I think that planning has a key role to play in doing that, but that is missing from the plan.

**Philip Revell:** I am very disappointed that the plan relies on the very speculative technology of carbon capture and storage to meet the targets. As I said, the emphasis must be on designing our communities so that we reduce the need to travel. We should aim to drive down transport emissions.

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

**Chris Wood-Gee:** We need to reduce the travel that we do—I am probably very bad for the number of miles that I do—but we need to do that in a way that does not necessarily affect rural communities too adversely, because we do not have village shops any more. It is about trying to get the infrastructure right. Again, that comes back to the planning system so that we ensure that we get the right facilities in the right place closer to people's homes. It is a huge challenge. The plan is focused on techie fixes, whether it is electrolysis for driving cars in the future or electric vehicles, all of which have incredible challenges in the longer term.

The motor industry has done relatively well on fuel consumption and reducing some emissions, but a whole issue about diesel particulates is coming up. We were probably less concerned about it 10 years ago when the drive towards

diesel came in, because that was purely about fuel efficiency based on miles per gallon. We now need to look at ways of not having to drive. The train service up from Lockerbie is great. Otherwise, it is a two-hour drive up here and parking is a problem. It is about having the right facilities so that people do not have to jump in the car every time.

**The Convener:** Okay. Thank you.

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

**(Con):** Gentlemen, how can we best equip the professional planner and the councillor with the skills base that is required for them to deal with the policies, plans and procedures around climate impact?

**The Convener:** When you answer that question, can you talk about skills for councillors and members of the Scottish Parliament? When Mr Wightman—who has expertise in this area—mentioned exogenous demand drivers, I thought that I could do with a skill set. I think that that gives a good context to the question.

**Chris Wood-Gee:** SSN has been looking at the carbon management assessment tool, which is a mechanism for members of our councils—senior officers—to assess where they are, in terms of climate, and to identify gaps in knowledge. That would allow us to get people on board and understand what we know and do not know.

Those of us who are up to our eyeballs in climate change all the time might assume that people know what they are talking about and understand what we are talking about—which is probably a bigger challenge. I have the word “exogenous” written in my notebook; I heard it yesterday at a seminar at Victoria Quay and thought that I would look it up and find out what it means. We all have the same problem with some of these words. That is statisticians for you, I guess.

We need to have a dialogue. We need to work together and talk together, and we need to ensure that there is understanding, particularly when we are thinking about developing leadership. I work up through the middle of an organisation, trying to ensure that climate change measures are a bigger priority where we are delivering. They save us money, save us emissions and help us to hit our targets. There needs to be that kind of dialogue so that we can get leadership. Unless MSPs and councillors understand what is happening, we will not get the level of leadership that we need to ensure that this issue, which is probably the most important thing that humanity faces, is right up there, where it needs to be. There needs to be education.

**Philip Revell:** The future skills that anybody working in public service in any way will need are

really around facilitative leadership and how we bring together conflicting opinions and ideas and use them creatively to design a sustainable future.

**Craig McLaren:** We have a role as the professional body that accredits planning schools. We are making sure that climate change is one of the key things that future planners must learn about. However, it is a lifelong learning issue and it is a constantly changing field. Technology is changing, as is the context.

We have been working with the Improvement Service and the Scottish Government, and we are tasked with pulling together an audit of skills needs across local authorities. Some initial work has been done on that. It is looking at the technical needs, which include some of the climate change things. We keep getting asked what will happen when driverless cars come in. Some people tell me that they will change the future of the built environment totally and some people say that they will make no difference whatsoever. There is a need for some rigour so that we have a clear understanding of where we are going.

We are looking at technical skills, including skills on climate change and its measurement, and at generic skills such as leadership and collaboration. If you talk to heads of planning, you hear that they tend to think that their staff need more generic skills, whereas the members of staff think that they need more technical skills. I am sure that it is somewhere in between, but that is the way it is.

As part of the planning review process, we want to look at how we can put in place a programme, a process or something that allows people to work out what skills they have and what skills they do not have, and allows them to fill their skills gaps. My feeling is that that will require some sort of co-ordinating role nationally, to identify and share good practice, and to look at where there are expertise gaps and perhaps get local authorities to share expertise. We are looking at different models for that and we will report back by the end of the financial year.

The other question was about councillors, and the issue is mentioned in the planning review. As you know, local government elections are coming up in May. We are trying to see how, after the new councillors come in, we can work with the Improvement Service and local authorities to put in place training for councillors. Most local authorities have that already.

We are interested in not just telling them—and scaring them—about what the planning system is and what responsibilities they have. We also need to raise their sights and make them realise what the opportunities and potentials of the planning system are, and how the planning system can help

them not just in the planning department, but corporately. We are exploring ways in which we can put something in place to support that, and we are talking to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities about that, as well.

10:15

**Alexander Stewart:** You are right: a balance needs to be struck. Some local authorities are leading on that with their professional employees and the councillors that they have but, as you rightly identify, a new intake of councillors will mean that a large number of individuals will require a lot of basic training initially. People will become more expert in the field, sit on committees and be more involved than others. They will become much more technically involved, and the issue is the opportunities that they will face as they move forward.

All of that comes at a cost. It has been identified that that has a part to play when people consider where they will put training funding for officials and councillors. The issue is how we can develop that. It will be interesting to see where we are in three or four years' time with the new intake and how it progresses. However, that is still a challenge for all authorities.

**Craig McLaren:** That is an interesting point. We should not tell just councillors who sit on planning committees about planning, but that is where the focus goes. We can understand why that is the case, but we need to try to broaden that. Often, the issue is that many councillors are told to keep away from planning. They are told that it is quasi-judicial and really tough, they would have to make tough decisions, they would make some people happy, and they might make some people unhappy. There is a job to be done to try to show the value, benefit and potential of planning.

**Alexander Stewart:** I have spent 18 years as a councillor and am well aware of the challenges that people face in planning.

**The Convener:** But he is still smiling.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** My first question is really to Philip Revell. In your submission, you talk about communities having

"a sense of disempowerment and lack of control over decisions which have a local impact",

and you talk throughout about the need to take decisions from the bottom up. How does that work when one faces the situation, which is faced in many communities, in which the community is in favour of new housing and new schools, wants a flood prevention plan, and supports wind turbines and biomass, but wants things to be built somewhere else? The community might be in

favour of a new harbour, but might want it to be built somewhere else.

How do you ensure that strategic decisions are made and that we do not just pander to people who are well housed, but do not particularly want other people to be well housed in their community? That is a real issue in many communities in my constituency. People are in favour of those things, but they simply do not want them near them. How do we square that circle of having community democracy and needing to provide on a more strategic level?

**Philip Revell:** I totally acknowledge that that is a potential issue, but if we can start with plans that have been created from the bottom up and which local communities have a real sense of ownership of, people being brought together and a forum being created in which conflicts can be deliberated on in a creative way, I do not see why that is any more difficult than the current situation, in which, for example, the strategic plan decrees that East Lothian needs 10,000 new houses and local communities are left totally powerless. In fact, the local authority is pretty powerless; it is obliged to find sites for those houses. Basically, everybody is disempowered. I am not suggesting that things will be easy, but we need to find ways to create properly facilitated forums in which conflicts can be deliberated on.

**Kenneth Gibson:** There are proposals to involve communities at an earlier stage in all planning proposals, and that is certainly welcome. Are you suggesting that communities should ultimately take the final decision on those developments, or should local authorities or, where appropriate, the Scottish Government or even the United Kingdom Government do so?

**Philip Revell:** I honestly do not have an opinion on who should have the final decision. I have not thought that through. The crucial thing is that everybody should feel that their voice has been heard.

**Kenneth Gibson:** Okay. Thank you.

Mr McLaren, you have talked about "a vision", "a route map" and a focus on delivery. Who should ultimately decide on such things? Mr Revell talked about an issue with local democracy.

How do you square the circle on the difference between what a specific community might want and what is required at local authority or Scottish strategic level? I ask that with particular reference to climate change. As you know, there will be lots of issues regarding turbines, biomass and so on, whatever happens.

**Craig McLaren:** Absolutely. Just now, there is a planning hierarchy in place in which we have the national planning framework, which has targets

attached to it that provide the context for what has to be delivered. We then move down to strategic level, local level and community level.

For me, the decision making has to take place at the proper democratic level. The Scottish Government is trying to keep pushing that to local authorities and down to communities, where it possibly can. Earlier, I mentioned local place plans. Those are interesting, because what they can do is allow communities to come up with a vision for their area—but within the context of the national targets that have to be achieved and also those in their own local authority area or their own neighbourhood. That contextualises it for them, but it still means that they are looking at the constraints as well as the opportunities.

The one thing that I would highlight is that there is a need for some professional judgment on that as well. It is very easy to make a bad planning decision; it is much more difficult to make a good one. People forget that.

A lot of work goes into deciding what can, or what should or should not, be built. Planners must think about not only the specific settlement place or planning application, but about what happens beyond that—in broader geographies. They must think not just about what happens in the short term, but about what should happen in the medium term and the long term as well.

We need to think about how we take that into consideration. There is a need for planners to make sure, when they make those decisions and have discussions about what should be happening in the area, that those criteria are taken into consideration. In essence, a decision should not be taken on a whim.

**Kenneth Gibson:** That is an important point. The national planning framework is very important, and we need to see how locality planning, local authority planning and the national planning framework can tie in. There are issues about who thinks what should happen and where. How do we try to deal with that issue? That remains a bugbear in many parts of Scotland, at community level.

**Craig McLaren:** I understand that. There are two points in what you have said, one of which is about trying to ensure that the national planning framework is not a totally top-down document. To give the Scottish Government credit, in “Scotland’s Third National Planning Framework”, which was published in 2014, it tried to do a lot of work beyond the planning profession and what we might call the usual suspects. It went out to shopping centres the length and breadth of the country and asked people what they wanted Scotland to look like and what it might look like spatially. That is quite a difficult question to ask someone, and there is work to be done on refining

it, but credit should go to the Government for attempting that.

You also asked about locality planning and local authority planning. For some time, we have been saying that there has to be a stronger link between spatial planning and community planning. We are concerned that, in some circumstances, they tend to be done in parallel streams. Land use planning, spatial planning, developing—or what the place should look like, physically—community planning, local outcome improvement plans and so on are looking at the service provision for that area. We should be matching those together more. We have been advocating more joined-up engagement exercises, because we are asking the same questions of communities there, to be honest with you—the difference is just in how we articulate them.

We need to join those up. There are different ways in which we could link local improvement partnership plans with development plans. We could think about what is being delivered and see whether we could match resources. Community planning tends to focus on public sector and third sector resources. As I said earlier, delivery of the local development plan tends to come from the private sector. If we could marry some of those approaches, we might achieve some complementarity, which could make things work a lot more effectively and efficiently.

**Kenneth Gibson:** Excellent. Convener, I have just one more question for Mr McLaren. I know that Mr Wood-Gee has not had a chance to address any of those points, and I would be happy if he would.

Mr McLaren, you said that, from 2010 to 2015, there was a 20 per cent reduction in the number of planners. What has been the impact if we compare that with the number of planning applications? For example, I know that, in the private housing sector, the number of houses being built is about half of what it was a decade ago, which must have had an impact on applications. How does the reduction in the number of planners compare with the number of applications that are coming in?

**Craig McLaren:** There was a drop, but the number is rising again. Usually, over a year, there are about 30,000 planning applications to be assessed, and the demand is still there. There might have been a reduction in the number of major planning applications in that period, but the demand is starting to kick in again as there is probably a bit more confidence in the market to build new housing estates and the like.

**Kenneth Gibson:** You do not have the figures, though.

**Craig McLaren:** I do not have the exact figures with me, but I can get them for you if you wish.

**Kenneth Gibson:** That would be helpful. A 20 per cent reduction in the number of planners is a problem if there is a 20 per cent increase in the number of applications but not if there is a 40 per cent decrease in the number of applications. It would be good to have the figures in order to be able to make a judgment on that.

Mr Wood-Gee, do you have any comments?

**Chris Wood-Gee:** I think that the issue is about communication and letting people know. We had a local issue with a 400 kilovolt power line that was going to be sited about half a mile from my home. As somebody who is involved in tackling climate change, I thought that that was a great idea—we really need the network upgrade. However, as somebody who lived a quarter of a mile or so from where it was going to be sited, I was a nimby. It is really difficult to balance those factors.

The problem with that particular project was that it looked as though it had been completely thought through, including by the landscape architects who turned up one day hiding plans under the seats, without anybody bothering to ask for opinions. It is about getting the communication right. We took Scottish Power to task about that, because it needs to talk to people. If the case can be made for doing the work—whether it is a harbour, a power line or whatever—however difficult it is, people understand.

Imposing things on people does not work particularly well; there needs to be engagement right from the outset, with the case being made for why these things need to happen. Locally, we do not want new housing, power lines or whatever right next to us, but we need to recognise that such things are crucial for how Scotland works. We need that engagement right from the outset.

**Kenneth Gibson:** Thank you. That is very helpful.

**The Convener:** Time is almost up, but, after listening to the exchange with Kenneth Gibson, I want to add something. I know that we are here to talk about RPP3 and speak a bit more generally about planning—the connection being that, if we get the planning process right for the type of developments that we want to see, we will meet our obligations in relation to climate change and carbon emissions reduction. However, in terms of plans and the planning bill that is going to come before us, I might be one of those nimby characters.

In Summerston, north of Maryhill in my constituency, the city council has decided to release all the greenbelt land for housing. My issue is that, as someone who lives a stone's

throw away, I was not notified. The local community council was not notified, either. Two years earlier, the main issues report said that a cornerstone of council policy was the prioritisation of brownfield sites—a point that Mr Simpson made earlier. It said that releasing greenfield land would undermine that policy and that there was no need to release it. The main issues report therefore did not inform the final city plan or the development plan. The nimby in me, as well as the MSP in me, was infuriated partly because of the seeming secrecy of it all and the lack of transparency in the process.

A lot of such developments can be mitigated. Why should there not be houses across the road from where I live? As Mr Gibson said, I do not have the right to prevent other folk from getting a decent house. I have one and they deserve one as well. It is about balance and proportion, but it is also about community buy-in. What if the local authority does not get it right? Perhaps, when the development close to where I live starts, it will get the balance and proportion right. There might be segregated cycle lanes and community heating systems. Who knows what the council will do to mitigate it and make a positive of it all? However, if it does not get that buy-in, it loses the community.

In relation to RPP3 and how we look at planning, how can we do that better? The plan in my area was going to be a five-year plan but it is now changing to a 10-year plan under Scottish Government plans, and the Government does not want a main issues report. I have issues with those two aspects of Scottish Government policy. How can we get community buy-in?

**Craig McLaren:** We support getting rid of the main issues report because we are seeing that it is a bit of a false stage in the process. There is a more honest, constructive and fruitful debate before all that happens. We talked earlier about charrettes and about engaging communities early in the process and front-loading it.

**The Convener:** How would I, as a local MSP, have known that the council's officials believed that releasing greenbelt land would undermine the policy of prioritising brownfield sites? That would have been thought but not published, and I would never have known about it. There was no charrette to decide what was happening in my area. Can you say a bit more about why less information is good for communities?

10:30

**Craig McLaren:** I would not say that it is about providing less information. The charrette would inform the local development plan, on which there would then be consultation of all stakeholders including communities. There would therefore be a

process of engagement. As I said, I would like the profession to have that initial debate and discussion with communities earlier and maintain a dialogue with them throughout, so that the process is transparent.

**The Convener:** That could be really helpful. Let us be clear: you are saying that the main issues report should go only if there is a charrette process to replace it.

**Craig McLaren:** We want much more front-loaded engagement. Many local authorities are undertaking a charrette-type engagement at the start of the process to inform their main issues report. However, the main issues report adds a stage that is not required, because we can go straight from the charrette to thinking about the plan, which can then be consulted on. There is still a process of engagement.

**The Convener:** That is helpful. Does Chris Wood-Gee or Philip Revell want to add anything?

**Chris Wood-Gee:** As a council, we are going through the process at the moment and are not directly involved other than in throwing the odd bit of climate change stuff into the plan. However, I know that we have that process of going round communities and having open meetings to ensure, as far as we can, that people can feed into the process right from the outset. I do not know how effectively that process works, but it is about getting people engaged. Having open and transparent engagement is probably the most crucial aspect of it.

**The Convener:** Okay. Philip Revell can add to that if he wants to, but he does not have to.

**Philip Revell:** I reiterate my earlier point that the process must start at the bottom, with community-led plans for creating resilient communities that can then cascade up. The main issues report can perhaps try to juggle the different priorities coming from the different neighbourhoods.

**The Convener:** I wanted to ask my question and explore the matter a bit further because, after Mr Gibson's question, I felt like one of those nimbys.

In the little time that we have left, I will give the final word to all three witnesses. We have had our lines of questioning, but there will be something else that you want to put on the record before you leave here today. I would therefore like your final comments and reflections on RPP3. There might be something that you think shines as a really good example, which you should draw to our attention, or you might want to talk about where you think the Government could have done a bit better. This is your opportunity to put that on the

record before we move to our next evidence session.

**Craig McLaren:** We welcome the climate change plan. I like how it is structured and how it tries to give an evidential basis for what is being taken forward. The one thing that I find disappointing about it is that, again, only three or four paragraphs talk directly about the role that the planning system has to play. That has been an issue for us with previous RPP documents, and I would like to see more about the role that planning can play. A key part of that, which we have touched on, is assumptions about travel growth. There is a key role for planning in designing settlements and creating active travel arrangements that minimise travel growth, and I think that that could be strengthened in the document.

**The Convener:** That is helpful.

**Philip Revell:** Although there is much in the plan that I welcome, it misses a trick with regard to recognising the contribution that the community sector can make from the bottom up in addressing climate change. The top-down and bottom-up approaches need to be joined together. The top-down role should put in place supportive policy and physical infrastructure to enable bottom-up action, but that does not come across as being properly understood in the plan. The community sector is desperate to contribute, and we would like to be enabled to do so.

**Chris Wood-Gee:** The key point is that it is great to see such a document. We recognise that there will be a huge challenge in terms of finance and resources, but it is great to see a plan with real ambition.

I do not know whether the balance is absolutely perfect. Somebody who plays at farming could probably do with a bigger kick, and the plan will be a really serious challenge for those in the public sector. However, it is good that we have a document that tries to do what we need to do. I am keen that we do that, and the SSN is keen for the wider public sector to engage in the process and make it work. There is a huge skills base in the public sector. Historic Environment Scotland has done a huge amount of work on how we deal with emissions reduction in older buildings, and Scottish Natural Heritage has done green-space work. A massive amount of work is going on, and we have a resource that needs to come into the plan to help to deliver it.

It is great that we have the ambition to tackle climate change, because it is the most important issue that humanity will face. We are struggling with a million people coming across the Mediterranean at the moment but, if climate change kicks in, that problem could increase

tenfold. We need to tackle climate change now, and the wider implications around the globe will have a massive effect on what we do locally.

**The Convener:** I thank all three witnesses very much for coming along and giving their time to inform the committee.

10:36

*Meeting suspended.*

10:39

*On resuming—*

## Draft Scottish Social Housing Charter

**The Convener:** Item 2 is evidence on the draft Scottish social housing charter from a number of stakeholders and then from the Minister for Local Government and Housing.

The first evidence-taking session is with housing stakeholders. I welcome Hugh McClung from the regional networks of registered tenants organisations; Christine MacLeod, director of regulation at the Scottish Housing Regulator; Alan Stokes, policy lead at the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations; Gordon Campbell, a board member of the Tenant Participation Advisory Service Scotland; and Tony Cain, policy manager at the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers. I thank them all for coming. We will move straight to questions.

**Andy Wightman:** I thank the witnesses for coming this morning. I am a new member of the Scottish Parliament, so the Scottish housing charter is new to me. It does not seem that there will be a great deal of change, and we can reflect on that, but first could you tell us what impact you think the charter has had in general on the way in which social landlords carry out their business?

**The Convener:** Before we take answers—this will give you a chance to think about your answers, in fact—I point out that, as there are five of you, if there is an area on which you do not feel that you need to comment as we move through the questions, you should not feel obliged or compelled to do so. Given that Andy Wightman's question is so fundamental, however, it would be good if you all answered it. We will go from right to left, and Tony Cain can start.

**Tony Cain (Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers):** The charter has provided a framework to enable all social landlords to focus on improvement, and a consistent baseline for statistics so that we can compare performance across the sector and between the local authority sector and housing associations. It has helped to focus landlords on the improvement process. Overall, the view—certainly in the local authority sector—is that the charter has had a positive impact.

**Gordon Campbell (Tenant Participation Advisory Service Scotland):** Based on the involvement of TPASS and the Tenants Information Service in reviewing the charter, we think that it has led to better communication and partnership working between tenants and

landlords; improvements in the information that tenants receive from their landlords; the employment of more staff in the engagement services; improvements in repair services; and an increase in the number of tenants who take part in the decision-making process of the housing service.

**Alan Stokes (Scottish Federation of Housing Associations):** I think that the charter has been a success. There have always been reporting requirements on the regulator and things like that, but the charter has provided a focus, and tenants now know to expect the charter report every year. They also have the ability to interrogate the regulator's website, as there are now search facilities in place. I would highlight the provision of that focus as an important part of the charter's success.

**Christine MacLeod (Scottish Housing Regulator):** I echo the earlier comments. The charter has provided a clear set of standards that tenants and landlords know must be achieved. We have a really good framework for landlords to report to us and for us to report back to tenants and landlords on performance. We have seen strong performance from the start, and it has improved over the three years during which we have been collecting data and reporting back on it. Tenants are now able to look at and scrutinise their landlord's performance and to compare it with that of other landlords, which has been empowering for them. The scrutiny function has been shared between tenants and us as the regulator.

**Hugh McClung (Regional Networks of Registered Tenants Organisations):** Good morning—thank you for inviting me. As the only tenant among the elite stakeholders here today—

**The Convener:** That makes you the most elite stakeholder of them all, Mr McClung. [*Laughter.*]

**Hugh McClung:** Well, whatever. I represent the regional networks of registered tenants organisations, and I am proud of the fact that tenants have had an input to this strategy and to the legislation behind it. We can look and see how the charter has developed since the legislation was passed in 2010 and came into force in 2012. If we look at some of the statistics that have been gleaned over the past five or six years, we can see that the charter has made gradual progress in gaining input and participation from tenants and in enabling discussion with landlords to improve services. It has been a tremendous success, and I am pleased to be here today to tell you that. A decade ago, the news would perhaps not have been so joyous, but now I can say that, yes, it has been a success.

**The Convener:** That is a helpful start to the proceedings. Andy Wightman will follow up on some of those points.

**Andy Wightman:** That is very useful. It is typically quite difficult to get a group such as tenants to engage with something like the charter. There is often cynicism about power and hierarchies, landlords and so on. Gordon Campbell has already mentioned a number of examples, but I wonder whether one or two of you can tell me what the secret of the success has been. Secondly—and I realise that this is not really within your remit—if the charter has been so successful, is there an argument for rolling it out to the private sector?

10:45

**The Convener:** Do you want to take that, Mr Campbell? I do not know whether it was a good thing or not, but I believe that you were namechecked.

**Gordon Campbell:** I think that the charter has been really good. Although I am representing TIS and TPASS this morning, I am actually a tenant participation officer for South Ayrshire Council. With the introduction of the charter, I have seen tenant participation embedded in the organisation. It was there before, but now it is really embedded.

Going back to what Christine MacLeod from the Scottish Housing Regulator has said, I think that, with the ability to look at performance information across all landlords and to see how your peer groups are performing, there is an emphasis on each local authority or landlord looking at its performance and seeing how it is performing against others. It gives a good benchmark in that respect.

**The Convener:** I call Hugh McClung.

**Hugh McClung:** Please call me Hugh, convener.

In years past, it was extremely difficult to get a group of tenants together to assimilate what their landlord was providing. Often communities said, "What's the difference? They'll just make up their own mind and do what they like." However, that is no longer the case. The emphasis has been on communication from local government and other RSLs, which now have to provide a measure of information. The comparison tool on the SHR website has not only broadened tenants' minds—if I can put it that way—in that they now look at their landlord's performance but increased their activity in that they now come to the fore and say, "We want to be part of this and discuss the matter." You are right, in a sense, but in another sense, I think that the charter has developed the minds of

both tenants and landlords to ensure that more and more are becoming involved.

**Christine MacLeod:** There is not only the charter but the indicators that we developed to assess and report on it, and we made it very clear that we wanted to involve tenants and service users as well as landlords in putting those indicators together. Moreover, the way in which we report that back to tenants and service users has been developed jointly with tenants. In other words, the landlord report that we issue every year for every landlord, which is based on the charter data that we get, reflects what tenants have told us are the most important things that they want to know about. Similarly, the comparison tool that has been mentioned was developed with tenants to ensure that it was accessible and easy to use and that it highlighted the things that were important to them. It is therefore not just a matter of having the charter and collecting the data; this is also about making everything easy to access and use for tenants, who can make good use of it with their own landlords.

**Alan Stokes:** Tenants feel a sense of ownership with regard to the charter. The activity and performance standards that we had before did not capture the imagination in the same way that a tenants charter does, and that, in itself, has been really helpful.

**Gordon Campbell:** I would mirror Alan Stokes's comments, but I also point out that the charter gives tenants more opportunity to get involved in tenant scrutiny through the likes of tenant-led inspections, where tenants check on how a repair is being done and then report back to the local authority. It also allows us to look at positive performance, not always negative performance.

**Tony Cain:** I have two comments. First, a risk with the charter is that what is measured is what is measured, and if you focus on the charter, you might be unsighted on other, more important things. Probably the best example of that is the risks that I think are emerging in the current quite substantial heating and insulation programmes across the public sector. There is a risk of damage to internal air quality and some suggestion of the emergence—or, I should say, re-emergence—of dampness and condensation issues.

The charter will not answer those questions, so landlords have to be more sophisticated in the way they talk to their tenants and the way they understand the impact of that investment and those services. The charter is not the answer to everything and it needs to be alive to the nuances and details that go on underneath. Even if only 10 per cent of a landlord's stock is affected by dampness and condensation—that is probably about right—10 per cent of its tenants have a significant problem that it needs to have sight of

and to be addressing. Hugh McClung may have a view on that, because his tenants group has done some work on that issue.

The charter is not the answer to everything. It gives us a platform and a consistent framework, but it is not a substitute for a properly worked-through local framework for understanding the impact of investment and service delivery on the private rented sector. As much as it would be appropriate to say, "Here is everything," we still have a long way to go to bring the private sector up to the standards, quality of service and focus on tenants and value for money that are expected in most other areas of service provision. Whether the charter is a mechanism that could help to achieve that is another question.

**The Convener:** That all sounds like a wonderful success. However, being like any other organisations, some housing associations and local authorities will do better than others. Does the process flag up those that are weaker, need to improve and have to become better at engaging with tenants? I am delighted to hear all the good-news stories, but how do we flag up where we are not getting it quite right? How does the charter or regulator help that to happen?

**Christine MacLeod:** Overall, the picture is very positive and there is strong performance, but it is true that there are areas of dissatisfaction and variations in performance—where there is an average good performance of 90 per cent, that will include some at 100 per cent and others at, say, 50 per cent.

Through our risk assessment process we are able to identify those landlords that are performing poorly or less well than others and the areas where they have to improve. We can target those landlords to ensure that they improve their performance. Part of our work every year is to assess the risk, identify where there is poor performance and then focus and engage with landlords about how they are going to improve.

**The Convener:** Do you make a judgment call or assessment of the quality of each individual social housing charter? Do you look at some charters and think that one does not seem to engage very much with tenants and the charter looks like a cut-and-paste job, whereas another landlord is having meaningful engagement—as Hugh McClung would say—and has a charter that is a co-production and is published, so that it is, if not quite warts and all, very realistic about the challenges and what it wants to improve in the housing stock? Do you see such differences in quality in the charters that you receive?

**Christine MacLeod:** In the risk assessment process we look at data—the statistics that are reported to us. We would have to do another

exercise to engage with landlords about the quality of the work that they are doing. The first part of our risk assessment process, which we carry out every year, based on the annual charter information that is reported to us, is a review of all of the indicators for every landlord, looking at them collectively. Engaging about the quality of work that sits underneath the statistics would be another stage.

**Hugh McClung:** I was going to save this point for the end, but I will address it now as you have brought it up, convener. As we are telling you, not all is rosy in the garden—it is not major, but it does need a bit of tweaking. By that I mean that there needs to be more development on the ground, so that the SHR can consider registered tenants organisations in a local sense, to see how well—or not—the charter is working.

For the landlords, the situation differs from area to area. As local tenants, we recognise that it is best to sit down and if you do not agree, you can ask for more information, and if you do agree, you can set an agenda. The targets are sometimes unachievable, depending on how your landlord is performing and the comparisons on the comparison site are not always like for like. For example, in Stirling, where I live, there are almost 6,000 houses in local authority ownership and in Clackmannanshire there are 4,500. However, in Falkirk there are almost 18,000 houses, and in Cumbernauld and North Lanarkshire there are 30,000 to 40,000. There is no basis for comparisons to be made. You are left looking at how the data on the comparison site develops. If you compare year to year, you can better see how well a landlord is performing.

**The Convener:** That is very interesting. Christine MacLeod, am I right that the comparison site sits on the Scottish Housing Regulator's website? Is the issue that Mr McClung raises something that you are aware of or want to take away and think about?

**Christine MacLeod:** We are always looking to improve the site year on year, and we have made improvements to the comparison tool. What we have been able to deliver for the tenants who are looking at it is the trend and performance data over the last years. It allows them to compare selected landlords as well. There is a limit to how many landlords can be selected and reviewed, but they can keep going back into the comparison site and selecting different landlords, depending on what they are interested in looking at. We are always looking at refining the site to make it more useful for tenants.

**The Convener:** You have heard Hugh McClung's comments. We as a committee are not trying to find problems that are not there, but when things seem to be working pretty well initially—and

they do seem to be working pretty well—we want to identify areas where things can be improved further. That is why I am glad that Hugh McClung did not wait until the end to make that point.

We will move on now.

**Kenneth Gibson:** I am glad that everyone is very positive about the charter, but I notice, Mr McClung, that you were talking about the need to tweak it. How do you envisage the charter evolving in the years ahead, and is there anything else that you would like to see added to it as we progress?

**Hugh McClung:** I think that, as we progress over the years, we will see a lot of changes in the way in which those with landlord status—both RSLs and local authorities—manage their housing stock, for example. New outcomes might well be introduced in the charter to cover that. The other stakeholders aspect of the charter is not always so successful, although there has been measured success in terms of contact with Travelling people. There is a long way to go; in Stirling, it is not so successful from the local point of view. We need to work on that and on how we can best communicate with those stakeholders.

The vast majority of stakeholders are happy with the current outcomes and achievements of the charter. It would be wrong for me to say that not everybody is happy. They could be utilised in certain ways so that the best service could be achieved.

For example, to offer a small snapshot, look at outcome 5, which deals with repairs and maintenance. A lot of us said in response to the survey and the consultation that we were quite happy that the outcome was working. Some said, "Well, we need more involvement in maintenance strategies and programmes and repair programmes." That is down to local people who are dealing with localised issues. It is not for the charter to solve everything, as Mr Cain said.

If you get the basis of it right—which I think we have done—it will work better.

**Kenneth Gibson:** The outcomes that I hear about as an MSP—no doubt councils hear about them too—are 5, 6 and 10. Outcome 5 is on repair and maintenance, which you just talked about, and 10 is on access. Outcome 6 is on anti-social behaviour; I have had four cases on that this week alone. How can we beef it up a wee bit for those residents—particularly older people and long-term tenants—who suffer when people move in and cause havoc? It appears that many months can elapse before a situation can be positively resolved. How can we take the issue forward so that those cases—which, as you are aware, cause considerable distress—are addressed more

expeditiously, regardless of how the outcome is reached?

**The Convener:** How can the charter support that process?

**Hugh McClung:** Me?

**Kenneth Gibson:** It is for anybody who wants to answer, but you are a tenant, Mr McClung.

**Hugh McClung:** I do not want to hog the session.

11:00

**The Convener:** I will be delighted to bring you back in again, but I will allow others to come in. I am trying to buy them some time by filibustering. [*Laughter.*]

I know that it is not what the witnesses are here to answer on, but do you have any reflections on how some of the difficult issues, such as antisocial behaviour, can be tackled more effectively? That is what Mr Gibson is asking. How can the social housing charter be a conduit in making that happen?

**Kenneth Gibson:** It is one of the outcomes of the charter.

**Christine MacLeod:** It is the most difficult outcome for landlords and tenants to identify. What is the best indicator of success in handling antisocial behaviour, when an incident has been reported? It does not lend itself to the sort of reporting that we have for some of the other outcomes. It is easy enough to count 120 emergency repairs that have been done within three hours, but antisocial behaviour is often quite complex and difficult to deal with. It involves much more than just the landlord; it often requires the landlord to involve other agencies. It can take some time to deal with, so for tenants even a timescale for action is not necessarily the best measure of a landlord's success in tackling antisocial behaviour.

For some of the charter outcomes, we have found that looking at performance is best done not on a quantitative basis—the figures and the statistics—but on the basis of what is happening in practice. We have done that through thematic inquiries; for example, we have looked at the services that are provided to Gypsy Travellers. We look at practice, at people's experience of particular services—in this case, in relation to antisocial behaviour—and at how services are delivered. We look at the ways in which landlords are successful—what they do in practice that is successful and working—rather than looking at particular timescales being met and ticked off. Assessing and reporting on the antisocial behaviour aspect of the charter lends itself more to

a thematic approach than to a quantitative reporting approach.

**Alan Stokes:** To add to what Christine MacLeod said, I know that, once the charter is in place, you will review the indicators that sit beneath it, and I know that antisocial behaviour will be prioritised as part of that. We will be keen to feed into that process.

**The Convener:** Are there any other comments? I will definitely bring in Hugh McClung on this issue, but I want to double-check that I have not missed anyone else.

**Hugh McClung:** It is quite unfair to say that the charter has an answer to the antisocial behaviour problem. It differs from area to area, as Kenneth Gibson well knows, and his area might suffer more than mine.

In terms of numbers, how we deal with antisocial behaviour and all the finding of evidence, I am going to stick my neck out—I am not going to get into a dialogue about it—and say that the legal system fails badly. As often as not, when I speak to tenants around the country—not just in my area—they feel the same way. The legal system has a lot to answer for in that regard. Once we get that right, we might see a difference in the handling of antisocial behaviour.

**Kenneth Gibson:** That is an important point. I was a councillor for seven years and antisocial behaviour was a concern for tenants then. It is not just about tenants; owner-occupiers are also culprits and victims. The idea used to be that only tenants could be antisocial and that people who live in their own houses were not, but that is not the case.

On Christine MacLeod's point, it is not about timescales being ticked off; it is about people having such issues resolved as expeditiously as possible so that they can live in peace. Antisocial behaviour causes many people severe upset. The situation is better—there has been an improvement on previous years—but the problem is very distressing for those who are affected by it.

The analysis of the consultation responses says:

“the outcome does not acknowledge the inter-reliance on different partners and the influence this has on landlords achieving the outcome.”

That issue has been touched on; maybe it is something that we can work on.

**Tony Cain:** The charter is, necessarily, high level. Antisocial behaviour is a good example of an area where there are tensions in the charter. For example, the sixth charter outcome and standard on neighbourhood and community could be expressed in a number of different ways, but that

would not necessarily help you to deal with the practical issues better.

There is only one sanction for a breach of tenancy conditions: the removal of the tenant. However, the objective is to sustain tenancies, and we certainly do not want to be creating homelessness. Take the example of a vociferous neighbour who complains aggressively about the state of the next-door neighbour's garden—yet one person's unkempt garden is another person's wildlife wilderness. That might not be the best example, but it is an example from my time in local government of people's views and how they see things differently and of the need to balance out any tensions. How would you deploy the sanction that you have in those circumstances? Should you always deploy a repossession action, bearing in mind that repossession is always at the discretion of the court? Taking that action is not always desirable, nor will the court always allow it. You need to acknowledge that there will always be tensions in managing the objective that you are trying to achieve. Rigidly enforcing tenancy conditions is not consistent with sustaining tenancies, because there is only one way to enforce tenancy conditions.

The charter is not a stand-alone document. You have to see it in the context of the indicators that the Scottish Housing Regulator has developed, which have been worked on and refined over the past two or three years in a positive way, and recognise that it gives a shape and a picture. Furthermore, as Christine MacLeod said, if you want the nuances and the detail, you need to get in and inspect and examine in detail the activities behind the performance.

**The Convener:** Members have no more bids for questions. They are not usually this quiet—they usually get their teeth into something and then we hear about significant problems, but that appears not to be the case here.

We will hear from the minister shortly. First, as we have a tiny bit of time left, we can allow the panellists to put on the record any final comments on the charter. There are five of you, so please be brief.

**Alan Stokes:** Our submission's key point was that the charter is young—it is only three years into its existence—so it would probably be counterproductive to make any sweeping changes at this point. It is also probably too soon for you to see any meaningful performance changes. We support the suggested approach to make only minor changes at this point.

**Hugh McClung:** I want to plug the SHR. The SHR's work is to ensure that the charter outcomes are being met and that landlord services and various other matters are reported on. As I have

said, there needs to be more work on the ground dealing with local RTOs. Unfortunately, the SHR's budget does not allow it to do that work, so I make a plea to the Scottish Government to increase the SHR's budget. If that were to happen, more development might be done on the ground with local RTOs, and we could see how well the charter has—or has not—developed.

**The Convener:** There you go—and the minister is coming here in about 10 minutes' time, too. Does Christine MacLeod want to add anything?

**Christine MacLeod:** What can I say to Mr McClung other than thank you? No gifts were exchanged in advance of the meeting.

I echo Alan Stokes's comments. We were pleased to see expressed in the consultation responses the positive views on the charter and the value of the information on performance that we report. In addition, we welcome the fact that the proposed changes are minor and will therefore have minimal impact on the charter indicators. It is important that we have consistency over a number of years, so that all of us—tenants, landlords and the SHR—can see the performance information and any trends.

**Gordon Campbell:** Our review has shown overall support for the Scottish social housing charter remaining as it is, with only small tweaks. As Alan Stokes has said, making drastic changes at this stage could affect things.

The charter encompasses the diversity of tenants, landlords and geographies without being prescriptive. Some groups identified amendments that could be made and gaps, and additional outcomes have been suggested. Those have been included in the report.

**Tony Cain:** Although I echo Hugh McClung's concerns about the SHR's resources, I would go a bit further and express concern about resourcing in the policy divisions more generally. However, the consultation process has been engaged, proportionate, well managed and effective, and the changes are well judged and appropriate, without disappearing down any rabbit holes or going into too much detail. On balance, we also argue that changes at this point would be inappropriate. What we have at this stage is the minimum necessary to keep the charter relevant, and we are pleased with the outcome.

**The Convener:** I know that it has been a brief evidence session, but it has been helpful. Do not take our lack of questions as a lack of interest. Sometimes, it becomes self-evident that things are going as well as they can—and you have made the point that the charter is relatively new. Hugh McClung has said where he thinks things could be improved. Thank you, everyone, for coming along this morning.

11:11

*Meeting suspended.*

11:15

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** Continuing with agenda item 2, I welcome Kevin Stewart, who is the Minister for Local Government and Housing. He is accompanied by Michael Boal, who is social housing charter and regulation manager, and William Fleming, who is head of housing services policy, at the Scottish Government.

I invite the minister to make some opening remarks.

**The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Kevin Stewart):** The first social housing charter was an important departure for social housing policy in Scotland. By stating in clear and plain language the outcomes and standards that all social landlords should aim to achieve in providing housing services, it described what tenants and other customers could expect from their landlords and, in doing so, helped them to hold their landlords to account.

Last year, in order to help us prepare this revised version of the charter, we asked tenants, social landlords, the regulator and other stakeholders for their views on it and its impact on services for tenants and other customers. We did this through face-to-face events, at which we met about 1,000 tenants and landlords, and through a formal consultation.

The strong message from across the sector is that the charter is working well and is encouraging landlords to deliver improved services for their tenants and other customers. That is confirmed by the regulator's reports on charter performance, which show year-on-year improvement across most of the charter outcomes and standards. Meanwhile, independent analysis of responses to the formal consultation reinforced a strong message from both tenants and landlords that we should not make any fundamental changes to the charter at this early stage of its existence, as doing so would put at risk the positive impact that it has had so far.

In light of those strong and widely held views, we have confined any changes to those few that stakeholders suggested to us would help improve the quality of services delivered by social landlords. Principal among those were the new requirement that landlords meet the energy efficiency standard for social housing by December 2020, the strengthening of the Gypsy Traveller outcome and an update of the brief narratives describing the scope of the standard or outcome to reflect developments in best practice.

Those modest revisions to the charter will encourage landlords to continue to build on the improvements they have made so far in delivering the high-quality services that tenants and other customers want and expect.

I was very pleased to hear that the witnesses who gave evidence to you earlier today were broadly supportive of what the charter has achieved so far and are largely satisfied with our revisions. I look forward to hearing the committee's views and answering any questions that members might have. Subject to that, I hope that the committee is content with the revised charter and that it will recommend to Parliament that it be approved.

**Ruth Maguire:** In light of the positive feedback, I want to probe a bit deeper and hear the Government's views on the charter's impact on the way in which social landlords do business and a bit more about the evidence that the charter is improving services for tenants and other customers.

**Kevin Stewart:** The evidence that the committee has heard this morning shows the improvements that have been made to the service. For example, through the Scottish Housing Regulator, tenants can check how well their landlord is performing.

For me, the key issue is that the charter has been recognised not only here but in other countries as representing good practice and improving standards. In October, I attended the International Union of Tenants congress in Glasgow and was amazed by the amount of folks from overseas who commented on how well they thought that the charter was working here and who hoped that something similar could be introduced in their own airts and pairts. That in itself shows how advanced Scotland is in what it is doing. I am not in any way complacent, but the feedback that we have had and the suggestion that we should not radically change the charter show that it is working well.

There is always room for improvement, though, and we will continue to get the views of tenants organisations and other stakeholders on what is working well and what is not working so well. The committee heard this morning from Mr McClung, whose organisation will never let me off the hook. If it wants to see change, it will not be backward in coming forward to tell me that that change is required.

**The Convener:** Absolutely. I suspect that if more things were not working, Mr McClung would have told us as much fairly straightforwardly. However, he was very positive this morning. Do you want to follow up on any of that, Ruth?

**Ruth Maguire:** I suppose that as a quick follow-up we could hear more about how the evidence on landlords' progress towards meeting the charter is feeding into the development of future housing policy.

**Kevin Stewart:** It is important that we continue to analyse all that is going on. Obviously, the Scottish Housing Regulator has a duty to monitor, assess and report on whether social landlords are meeting their responsibilities. We will continue to work in partnership with the regulator in that regard, and we will continue to monitor its findings. Indeed, that is part and parcel of the job that my officials do daily.

Although we propose some small changes to the charter, I think that the committee has heard quite clearly this morning that the charter seems to be working very well. We will continue to monitor the charter, listen to partners and look at the data that is provided to the Scottish Housing Regulator to ensure that we keep on top of all of this.

**Alexander Stewart:** We have heard about how successful the charter has been; indeed, minister, you said as much in your opening statement. That success and the fact that the charter has been on the go for only three years show the commitment and support across the piece from the organisations and individuals who have been consulted. That news is welcome today, because it shows that when we get consultation right, it can be quite rewarding.

Some small tweaks have been suggested for the charter's development, but there is also the issue of the next stage. Ms Maguire asked how we can develop housing policy. We have aspirations in housing; you have them as a minister, and as a Government, and we have them as a Parliament. However, the question is how we manage those aspirations to ensure that we get to where we see ourselves going. The charter has been a good start in moving that forward, but there must be a next phase to it.

**Kevin Stewart:** Mr Stewart seems to have given me the opportunity to talk about the Government's housing programme rather than the charter. I could wax lyrically for hours about our ambition to deliver over the course of the Parliament 50,000 affordable homes, 35,000 of them for social rent, but I will try not to do so to any huge degree. Perhaps Mr Stewart wants me to say where we are going in terms of housing delivery and whether all social housing will be covered by the charter, and my response to that is: yes, that will continue.

I am glad that at the beginning of his question, Mr Stewart highlighted the co-operation and collaboration to develop the charter that has gone on between organisations such as ALACHO, TIS,

TPASS and the Scottish Housing Regulator. For me, however, the key thing in all of this is to listen to what tenants have to say. Mr McClung and his high-level national group obviously keep us on our toes with regard to where we go with the policy but I should say that, beyond that, the input from tenants right across the country who are involved in the numerous tenants' groups has been extremely helpful in formulating the charter. I am quite sure that they will continue to scrutinise what is going on and that, if they are not happy, they will let us know.

As for where we are with the constant consultation that I mentioned, there were 12 meetings across the country to ensure that we had the views of tenants, and that process will continue. I know that Mr Boal and his team talk to tenants' groups daily to ensure that we get things right. If you get the opportunity to meet some of the other folk in Mr Boal's team, you will realise that the job is being particularly well done. I do not want to mention folk by name, because undoubtedly I will miss somebody out, but I have been highly impressed by the level of engagement and co-operation between Scottish Government officials and groups right across the country to ensure that they get the charter and other matters that they are dealing with absolutely right.

**The Convener:** Given that you have just been namechecked, Mr Boal, do you, with the minister's permission, want to add anything?

**Michael Boal (Scottish Government):** Yes. Part of the reason why the charter has been so successful is that when it was first developed, we spent a lot of time—quite a lengthy period—going out to consult with tenants and stakeholders, and I think that that work built up effective relations with tenants and landlords. We have continued to do that, and in the current consultation on the charter's review, we found that tenants and landlords were keen to participate in it. The minister mentioned the various events that we had around the country, and the fact that landlords were keen to host those for us showed their interest in and commitment to the charter.

The range of consultation activities in the review helped us to get a broad range of views. As Gordon Campbell from TPASS mentioned, TIS and TPASS did an involve-all piece of work after we realised that we needed to reach as many people as possible. They engaged specifically with particular groups that might not normally get so involved in consultations, such as younger people, homeless people, black and minority ethnic communities, sheltered housing tenants and tenants with disabilities, and we were able to use that engagement to get a good sense of how tenants of social landlords and landlords generally viewed the charter. All those activities helped us to

find out the charter's impact and to see that most stakeholders were fairly satisfied with it.

**Alexander Stewart:** Tenants and customers also have the opportunity to use the charter to hold landlords to account in some respects. That is probably what it was produced to deliver initially, and it has delivered at this stage. As I have said, I look forward to seeing how it continues and the challenges and opportunities that it raises.

11:30

**Graham Simpson:** Good morning, minister. Given the charter's success, do you see any merit in rolling it out to the private sector?

**Kevin Stewart:** We are on a journey in respect of the private rented sector, and work is in progress. I pay tribute to the efforts of my predecessor, Margaret Burgess, in introducing regulations and legislation that will do more to protect tenants and landlords in the private rented sector. Of course, some regulations stemming from that legislation have yet to come into force; for example, a year from yesterday, various regulations on letting agents will come into play.

There is work to be done to ensure that we get data on the private rented sector right. I am sure that Mr Simpson is aware that one of the works in progress is a new database to ensure that all landlords are registered in one place, which will make life a lot easier. As I have said, we are on a journey in respect of the private rented sector.

Would it be easy to put in place such a charter at this time and monitor what happens as is done with social landlords? That would be extremely difficult, but I assure the committee that I am determined to improve the law of tenants in the private rented sector and to work in co-operation and collaboration with the good landlords out there to ensure that we get that absolutely right. I have to say, though, that Mr Fleming's team is probably a little bit sick fed up of my trying to push forward with some of the things that we need to do.

In answer to Mr Simpson, I think that we have a way to go before we can even consider such a charter for the private rented sector. Something could be put in place, but we would not be able to monitor it in the way that we currently monitor such things, and I do not believe in putting something in place if we are not able to see whether it is working. That is the beauty of the Scottish social housing charter as is and the monitoring work of the Scottish Housing Regulator. Such monitoring would not be possible at this time with the data that we have on the private rented sector or the number of folk who are involved in it, but I certainly would not rule that out in the future if we could get all of that right.

**Graham Simpson:** That is fair enough. I think that you are right that it would be difficult at the moment.

You have mentioned that one of the changes that you have made relates to energy efficiency. The energy efficiency standard has to be met by 2020. Are any extra resources going into the sector to help people meet that target? What happens if they do not meet it?

**Kevin Stewart:** As the committee is aware, the Government has a commitment to spend half a billion pounds on energy efficiency over the next four years. Much of the energy efficiency programme will be delivered at local level, and there is no reason why local authorities should not use the ability to bid in to that funding to ensure that they reach the standards in all of their houses. However, I also expect local authorities and housing associations to ensure that, when they put together their capital programmes for improvement, energy efficiency is at the forefront. To be fair, many local authorities and housing associations are ahead of the game in that regard. The wise ones have already made major efforts to improve energy efficiency in the homes that they manage, and long may that continue.

We will look at what comes out of the home energy efficiency programmes for Scotland in terms of what local authorities are delivering and where they propose to deliver. We recognise that, for some local authorities—and some housing associations, for that matter—some stock is much more difficult to deal with than other stock. However, many local authorities, including in Aberdeen, are getting beyond that and are dealing with the more difficult stock, including multistorey blocks in my own city. We will keep an eye on the situation and see what can be done.

**Andy Wightman:** Minister, the last time you were in front of the committee you said that you were looking forward to reading all the strategic housing investment plans. No doubt we will talk about those at a later meeting.

The legislation requires you to review the Scottish social housing charter "from time to time". Can you say something about the criteria that you use to judge when the time is right?

**Kevin Stewart:** I do not have a definitive answer to that question. As I stated earlier, tenants organisations, including the group to which Mr McClung belongs, are able to speak to me at any time. If they think that something is not right, I will ask officials to look at it.

We could lay down a timescale in which to look at the charter again, as was done previously, only to find ourselves putting in a lot of work for not a huge amount of change. However, if something crops up—if changes take place—I will not ignore

the tenants if they think that it needs to be looked at.

**Andy Wightman:** Okay.

**The Convener:** Minister, Alexander Stewart gave you the opportunity to mention the 50,000 affordable homes and 35,000 homes for social rent that the Government aims to deliver, and I will give you the same opportunity. Given the investment that is being made, does the housing charter encourage local authorities and housing associations to have discussions with tenants about whether they should get back in the business of building houses again?

I would link that to the likes of allocation policies. The fact that a housing association builds another 200 units does not mean that they will go to existing tenants, because there are obligations to meet in respect of homelessness and a variety of other criteria such as medical need and allocation policies. I sincerely wonder whether the housing charter has a role to play in relation to the ambitions of registered social landlords to get back into the business of new-build properties.

**Kevin Stewart:** The communication that the charter has instigated means that tenants are able to talk to their landlords about a huge number of issues including the delivery of new homes by those organisations. It is difficult for me to say what is happening in every place right across the country, but a good landlord will have discussions with its tenants about how it intends to expand and deliver new housing, and those discussions will also deal with things such as how it is going to spend capital moneys on improvements. That is happening in a lot of places.

I have a huge number of quotes from various organisations about how well they think all of this works, and the key aspect is the communication that the housing charter has opened up. I will give you an example from Mr Gibson's constituency. Ardrossan Tenants Association has said:

"It has given tenants better awareness of what opportunities there are to influence their landlords decisions and it has given landlords new impetus to do more for improved services across all areas of their business."

That is not much different from a number of other quotes that I have. For tenants to be able to continue to say that that is the case, landlords need to meet their duty of listening to them on every issue, including the delivery of new housing.

**The Convener:** Thank you, minister. I see that there are no bids for further questions even from Mr Gibson, despite the fact that his constituency has been mentioned.

**Kenneth Gibson:** I am absolutely happy with the mention, and I see no point in asking a question for the sake of it. I am very satisfied with

the responses that I have received from the minister and, indeed, from the previous panel.

**The Convener:** I thank the minister and his team for joining us. We will hear from you again very shortly, but is there anything that you want to add before we close this evidence session?

**Kevin Stewart:** No, convener. I am quite satisfied. I expect to be back at the committee very soon—within the next couple of weeks, I think—to talk about climate change.

**The Convener:** I think that you will be back in the next couple of seconds, minister—I am just following protocol.

Agenda item 3 is further consideration of the Scottish social housing charter. Because the charter is subject to the affirmative procedure, it must be approved by the Parliament before it can come into operation. The committee will now formally consider motion S5M-03695, which is that the committee recommends that the Parliament approve the revised Scottish social housing charter. Only the minister and committee members may speak in the debate, and I invite the minister to speak to and move the motion.

*Motion moved,*

That the Local Government and Communities Committee recommends that the revised Scottish Social Housing Charter be approved.—[Kevin Stewart]

**The Convener:** Although there is provision for members to debate the motion, if they so wish, it appears that no one wishes to do so. We are just following protocol. This must all seem a bit artificial for folk who are watching on the outside, but we have to do it.

I invite the minister to sum up and respond to the lengthy debate that we have just had.

**Kevin Stewart:** I do not need to sum up, convener. Thank you.

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Convener:** Thank you very much, minister.

**Kevin Stewart:** Thank you very much, convener.

**The Convener:** We now move into private session.

11:42

*Meeting continued in private until 12:48.*



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