

Cross-Party Group on Housing

31 May 2022, 18:30-20:00

Minute

Present

MSPs

Graham Simpson MSP

Ariane Burgess MSP

Invited guests

Douglas Robertson – Indigo House

Gabrielle King – MND Scotland

Susan Webster – MND Scotland

Non-MSP Group Members

Ken Gibb and Gareth James – CaCHE

Josh Hill – Scottish Parliament

Anne Gribbon – Corra Foundation

Aoife Deery – Citizens Advice Scotland

Archie Rintoul – Independent

Ashley Campbell – CIH Scotland

Colette McDiarmid – MND Scotland

Corrie Innes– Scottish Federation of Housing Associations

Craig Stirrat – Grampian Housing Association

Keith Baker – Glasgow Caledonian University

Cllr Peter Barrett – Perth & Kinross Council

Daryl Mcintosh – PropertyMark

David Cowdrey – MCS Charitable Foundation

David Petrie – Age Scotland

Jennifer Kennedy– Homes for Scotland

Jocelyne Fleming - CIOB

Moir Bayne – Housing Options Scotland

Neil Clapperton – Lochalsh & Skye Housing Association

Sherina Ness - ALACHO

Stephen Connor – Tenants Information Service

Tony Kelly – TPAS Scotland

Apologies

Kaukab Stewart MSP

Foysol Choudhury MSP
Katy Clark MSP
Mercedes Villalba MSP
Alistair Cameron – Rural Housing Scotland
Alex Clark – Sanctuary Scotland HA
Andrea Finkel-Gates– Scotland’s Housing Network
Eileen McMullan – Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
Julie Aitken – Corra Foundation
Tony Cain - ALACHO

Agenda item 1: Welcome

Graham Simpson MSP opened the meeting by welcoming members and guests.

Agenda item 2: Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes were approved by Keith Baker. There were no matters arising.

The following organisations/individuals applied to join the CPG and were approved:

- Tina Mistry – AICO/HomeLink
- Daryl McIntosh - PropertyMark

Agenda item 3: Presentations by MND Scotland

Gabrielle King and Susan Webster, on behalf of MND Scotland, presented their research on addressing the housing needs of people with MND. The presentation included lived experience evidence from one of the research participants. This research shows that:

- There are long waits for adaptations e.g. ramps, hand rails, across local authorities in Scotland. 40% of those surveyed waited 4-6 months.
- There are also long waits for accessible housing and very limited stock of wheelchair accessible homes in some local authority areas.

The report makes a series of recommendations for addressing these issues, which are directed at both local authorities and the Scottish Government. The can be summarised as follows (although the report itself includes much more detail):

- There should be a requirement to fast track adaptations and accessible housing applications for people with MND
- There should be a proactive approach to promoting the Scheme of Assistance
- Internal adaptation should be funded and carried out even where a property is deemed externally inaccessible
- The contractor and tendering process should be simplified so that work can be carried out quickly and sensitively
- There is need for a national definition of accessible housing which should be reflected consistently across building standards

- A minimum of 10% of all new build home should be built to a wheelchair accessible standard

Overall, the research highlights the need to make processes more disability friendly by e.g. direct matching properties, simplifying and streamlining adaptations processes.

It was noted that the report will be debated in the Chamber on 21 June (MND/ALS Global Awareness Day).

Agenda item 4: Presentation by RentBetter

Douglas Robertson, on behalf of Indigo House, presented the Wave 2 findings from the RentBetter project, a 5-year research programme funded by Nationwide Foundation. Wave2 of the research focused on low-income tenants. In addition to outlining recent reforms to private rented tenancies in Scotland, Douglas presented the main findings:

- The private rented sector (PRS) is seen by those who reside in it as mainly a transitional tenure, with the exception of older and low income tenants
- The Private Rented Tenancies (Scotland) Act 2016 greatly improved legal rights for tenants, but most tenants are unaware of their rights.
- Even where private tenants do know their rights, fear of reprisals, confrontation, rent rises and/or eviction, prevents them from exercising those rights.
- Enforcement of the new PRTs has been weak.
- Security of tenure is often based more on a tenants own relationship with the landlord than a commercial contract footing.
- Even where LHA levels cover the full cost of rent, many tenants are struggling against poverty. Most are paying a third to half of their income on rent.
- Some landlords are exiting the market but we are not seeing the same churn as before which has long term implications for rent levels.
- Reasons given by landlords for exiting the market include tax changes by both the UK and Scottish Governments (e.g. increase in LBTT in Scotland), better returns elsewhere, new and revised regulations, climate change and energy efficiency requirements, ongoing vilification of landlords, etc.
- Landlord exit is being experienced most intensely in the student and low income/benefit markets.

The Wave2 report makes a series of recommendations, including:

- There should be greater capacity created for early and ongoing information and advice for PRS tenants.
- There should be much greater emphasis placed on strong, and targeted enforcement of existing legislation in the lower end of the market where tenants have less market power to address failings, and less choice to move elsewhere.
- Landlords should be supported in compliance through continuous awareness raising of Letting Agent registration, landlord registration, and Government should support the landlord and letting agent trade bodies that promote compliance.

- Scottish Government should continue to fund the new supply of social and other affordable housing, including purchase of former PRS properties by housing associations, and local authorities should release generous land supplies to enable new housing supply across tenures.
- Scottish Government should support landlords by providing them with clear and accessible information and advice, as well as providing financial grants to landlords to enable them to bring properties up to climate change compliance.

Agenda item 5: AOCB

It was noted that CIH Scotland have suggested that we align the next CPG meeting with Scottish Housing Day (14 September) and issue an invitation to the Cabinet Secretary to join the meeting. The meeting will likely take place in person in the Parliament and will focus on housing sustainability. TBC.

It was noted that work on the rent controls report is ongoing and should be read for dissemination over the summer, subject to the approval of the Convenor and Deputy Convenor.

Agenda item 6: Next meeting

13 or 14 September 2022. TBC.