

**Cross Party Group on Housing**  
**28<sup>th</sup> January 2016**  
**Minutes**

**Present:**

Margaret McDougall MSP  
Ken Macintosh MSP  
Patrick Harvie MSP  
Alastair Cameron, Scottish Churches Housing Action  
Ashley Campbell, CIH  
Caroline Elgar, SAL  
Fraser Gilmore, Housing Options Scotland  
Garry Burns, Homeless Action Scotland  
Jim Mather, Homes for Scotland  
Lauren Trouten, Homes for Scotland  
Leanne Thomas, TIS  
Lynda Johnstone, TIS  
Pete White, Positive Prison  
Stephen Young, Civil Engineering Contractors Association  
Susie Fitton, Capability Scotland  
Zhan McIntyre, SFHA

**In attendance:**

Bruce Budge, Aid & Abet  
Caragh Nimmo, DLA Piper Scotland LLP  
Ciaran McDonald, Age Scotland  
James Sutherland, Aid & Abet  
Jonathan Gaskell, DLA Piper Scotland LLP

**1. Welcome and Apologies.**

Margaret McDougall MSP opened the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Housing and intimated the following apologies:

Margaret McCulloch MSP  
Jackie Baillie MSP  
Alasdair Hackland, RIAS  
Debbie King, Shelter  
Hew Edgar, RICS  
Jonathan Roberts, The Salvation Army  
Lesley Baird, TPAS

**2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Minutes were approved with no matters arising.

**3. Release from prison: tackling homelessness – Presented by Alastair Cameron, Chief Executive, Scottish Churches Housing Action and Pete White, Chief Executive, Positive Prison.**

A summary of the key points made by Pete White are as follows:

- 30-40% of people released from HMP Barlinnie (as an example) do not know where they will be staying that night.
- Appropriate accommodation could and should be planned before liberation – the date of release rarely, if ever, comes as a surprise.
- Some people eligible for the Home Detention Curfew (the ‘tag’) are not able to take up this option due to lack of a suitable address.
- When people in prison lose their tenancies their personal possessions, including forms of ID etc, are thrown away – it would be good if the personal ID items, at the very least, could be saved and kept in safe keeping.
- In cases where the person imprisoned is the tenant and has a partner/spouse living in their property the tenancy could be transferred to avoid eviction and all the negative consequences and expense this can bring about.
- An innovative approach to sub-letting accommodation could include using properties vacated by people sent to prison as temporary accommodation for people being released thereby giving them time to find suitable accommodation of their own.
- Bed and breakfast accommodation and that provided by hostels are unacceptable and extremely expensive solutions.

A summary of the key points made by Alistair Cameron are as follows:

- “Aid & Abet” is a practical project which trains and supports mentors who themselves have experience of imprisonment to meet people leaving prison, and stick with them over the crucial first three days of freedom – it is within that time period that things can easily go wrong, resulting in a return to prison. The minimum aim is to make sure someone has somewhere to stay on the night after they were released. Aid & Abet currently operates as a project of Scottish Churches Housing Action, but it has applied to OSCR to become a charity in its own right. It is led by the mentors, all of whom have lived experience of prison and are in recovery from addiction.
- Alastair introduced Bruce Budge as a member of the Aid & Abet core group, and James Sutherland as a trained volunteer mentor, who hopes to become a member of the core group in due course.
- There are no specific funds available to develop peer-led initiatives, though peer mentoring is recognised as effective and needs to be spread.
- New projects do not have the track record to compete in a contract culture. Pilot funds are needed to demonstrate proof of concept.
- There is a ‘crowded marketplace’ in support for people leaving prison, yet people are repeatedly falling through the cracks.

- The housing options approach to homelessness offers choice to individuals, yet there is a lack of genuine options available in practice.

### **Discussion Regarding Release from Prison: tackling homelessness**

A safe place to live needs to be high on the agenda of the Community Justice Bill.

Jim Mather from Homes for Scotland referenced a case study where housing organisations and the police have come together to help those whose life has 'come off the rails', and suggested that a similar coalition of local community organisation could address the issue in Scotland. Creating a business case where money is saved in the long term by prevention of offending in the first instance will support funding requests.

Aid & Abet have been told by community justice authorities that funding is not available. Small new projects struggle to win tenders over large national organisations.

Homeless Action Scotland and the SFHA both expressed an interest in supporting the project.

Local Authorities have a responsibility to prisoners, which the Community Justice Bill should address. Homelessness should be addressed before an individual leaves prison as release dates are known well in advance.

A structure is needed for individuals to receive support from mentors who have been in the same situation, before they leave prison.

#### **4. Extending the Options – Presented by Fraser Gilmore, Volunteer and Development Manager, Housing Options Scotland.**

Please see appendix 1 for the presentation made by Fraser Gilmore.

### **Discussion Regarding Extending the Options**

It was highlighted that with regards to mental health issues, partnership working with the NHS is needed to support those inside prison.

Many agreed that peer support is the key, as it is a shared experience.

A proposal is currently being drafted to train prisoners as housing support workers inside prison.

#### **5. Cross Party Group Business.**

It was noted that this is the last meeting of the Cross Party Group on Housing in this session. Margaret McDougall MSP is not standing for re-election, and the group will need to be

reconstituted after the elections. Margaret thanked the members of the group for their support, and thanks was given by Patrick Harvie MSP to Margaret for the work that she has done.

## **6. Date of Next Meeting and Close**

It was noted that the meeting which was originally scheduled for 24<sup>th</sup> March 2016, will no longer take place due to Parliament being dissolved.

Future dates will be set when the new Administration reconstitutes all Cross Party Groups.

## **Appendix 1**

**The following presentation was made by Fraser Gilmore, Volunteer and Development Manager, Housing Options Scotland.**

Housing Options Scotland is a national housing charity that helps disabled people, older people and disabled veterans to find the right house in the right place. We are a pan disability organization, meaning that we work with any individual with any type of disability.

Through our unique Housing Options brokerage service we are able to offer their services to people all over Scotland, the service is free and the organisation never closes a case until requested to do so by the client.

Housing Options advice is an approach which combines assessing a person's legal rights to a home with a broader look at all the possible options open to them which could include: renting privately, support to stay where they are and home ownership, among others. Giving people clear, impartial advice, empowering to make the choice that is right for them.

The housing options model's main prevalence in Scotland has been in homelessness through the 5 national Hub's that have been set up. Incorporating all 32 local authorities and partners, supported by the Scottish Government.

Last year the Scottish Government produced its joint housing delivery plan, which included in it an action to explore broadening the use of the housing options approach for older people and disabled people.

This idea is already being explored more widely by the SG and its partners and is already receiving some positive feedback from professionals.

Disability is one of those all encompassing words which means a lot of different things to a lot of different people.

Housing Options Scotland runs by the social model of disability, meaning that we believe that it is society that is the disabling factor, not the individuals impairment. This is a view that is now shared by government and society in general.

So we believe that if a disabled person encounters something in the built environment that they are not able to access, then it is the problem of society to make sure that they can.

When people think disability, they think physical accessibility, which is indeed one of the most important issues that disabled people face. If you cannot physically enter a property, move around safely in it, use the amenities and access your community from it, then the property is not suited to your needs.

This is not the whole story when it comes to disability though, people with mental health issues, learning disabilities, autistic spectrum disorders etc have other needs when it comes to housing. This might be to do with design, layout, location, light, noise and countless other issues which I do not have time to list here, but are equally as valid and important.

We also, when it comes to housing for disabled people often think about the individual in isolation, forgetting often that there may be others in the household: children, parents, carers etc all of whom use the home as well, and who's needs need to be considered.

Disabled people span a large proportion of the economic scale, although statistically we see a larger proportion of them in the lower end of the economic scale, this is not always the case.

I want to focus briefly on Mental Health, especially as it pertains to individuals leaving prison.

We know from research that has been carried out that a very large proportion of people in prisons have some form of mental health issue, representing a much higher proportion than the population as a whole.

We know that all prisoners face a range of issues prior to release, and accessing support is very important. There is a lot of work being carried out to prepare prisoners for their release, but the nature of this varies.

This support is essential to those who are released from prison where they have continuing mental health problems. Without the right support, this risk of reoffending is higher, they are less likely to access or be able to access the services they require to transition back in to society successfully.

Housing is a key element of this, get this wrong and the persons mental health can suffer. But enabling the person with the right information, support and practical help can aid in this successful transition.

With the right home, in the right area, an individual can feel safe and secure, can access support services, education, employment and everything that society has to offer.

So looking at Housing Options as a process which starts with housing advice when someone makes an approach with a housing problem. In this context individuals with a continuing mental health issue leaving prison.

This means looking at an individuals options and choices in the widest sense. This approach features early intervention and explores all possible tenure options, including council housing, housing association housing and the private rented sector.

The advice can also cover personal circumstances which may not necessarily be housing related, such as debt advice, mediation and mental health issues. Rather than only accepting a homelessness application local authority homelessness services work together with other services such as employability, mental health, money advice and family mediation services etc to assist the individual with issues from an early stage in the hope of avoiding a housing crisis.

So Housing is one pin in a very large wheel and can't work in isolation. The wheel is made up of all of the other supports individuals need to make a successful transition, including; NHS support, tenancy support services, mental health support services, Peer Support, employability, training, education, benefits advice, debt advice and anything other support defined as needed for an individual.

This wheel, aligned correctly is the key to successful transition and a sustainable future for these individuals in society.