

Cross Party Group on Co-operatives

Minutes from Wednesday 26 September 2018

18:00 to 19:30

James Clerk Maxwell Room (CR4), The Scottish Parliament

- 1. Annual General Meeting**
- 2. Evidence session: How can Scotland encourage more co-operative housing?**

Attendance

<u>CPG Members:</u>	James Kelly MSP (Convener), Johann Lamont MSP, Claudia Beamish MSP, Co-operatives UK
<u>Other Guests:</u>	Co-operatives UK Limited, Glasgow City Council - Co-operative Development Unit, The Midcounties Co-operative Limited, Energy4All Limited, Edinburgh Student Housing Co-operative Limited, Greencity Wholefoods, Ploughshare Housing Co-op, SFHA and Social Enterprise Scotland
<u>Secretariat:</u>	Provided by Neil Cuthbert (Public Affairs Co-operative) in place of James Wright (Co-operatives UK).

1. Welcome and Introductions

James Kelly MSP opened with meeting and welcomed all CPG Members and Guests to the Scottish Parliament.

2. AGM business

James Kelly MSP, nominated by Johann Lamont MSP and seconded by Claudia Beamish MSP, was reappointed Convenor, Willie Coffey was reappointed as Deputy Convenor and Co-operatives UK (James Wright) was reappointed to its secretarial role.

James Kelly MSP moved that the minutes of the previous CPG meeting held on Wednesday 27 June 2018 be approved as a correct record. This was seconded by Johann Lamont MSP. On behalf of the group James Kelly MSP thanked Co-operatives U.K. for their continued support.

3. Introduction to the Co-operative housing research project

James Kelly MSP advised that following the presentation from West Whitlawburn Housing Co-operative at the previous meeting of the group in June it had been agreed and proposed to take evidence from a number of Scottish housing co-operative on their experience providing services to members. This was with the aim of producing a report with policy recommendations early in 2019.

With 150,000 people in Scotland on waiting lists he considered much more needs to be done to meet the demand on housing. Greater use of the housing co-operative model would be one way to achieve this but no new housing Coops been created in Scotland during the previous 15 years.

4. Experience of Scottish housing co-operatives

a. Scottish Federations of Housing Associations (SFHA)

James Kelly MSP welcomed Sarah Boyack (Head of Public Affairs) who gave evidence on behalf of SFHA. She highlighted the success of housing co-ops and their greater role in other countries such as Sweden and Norway. There has been periods of co-operative housing being established in Scotland but currently there was no great political impetus for housing co-ops to be established despite clear benefits. While there are governance and investment challenges for co-ops there are some clear areas for growth such as in student accommodation. SFHA did consider the government could do more to encourage and support the growth of co-operative housing in Scotland.

b. Ploughshare Housing Co-op, Edinburgh

James Kelly MSP welcomed Laura David and Oliver Dickson from Ploughshare Housing Co-op in Edinburgh which is a small scale shared home in Edinburgh. They described the issues for many trying to find affordable accommodation in Edinburgh and how a shared house was attractive for people seeking somewhere to live at relatively low cost. They said autonomy of decision making is a real benefit for the Ploughshare housing co operative. Laura and Oliver said the biggest obstacle for them for further expansion is cost of property in Edinburgh. They said that when disposing of public buildings (eg Boroughmuir High School) the government should not just accept the highest offer but should investigate other options such as housing

Co-operatives. They thought local authorities around Scotland could have a more proactive initiative around Housing Co-ops.

c. Edinburgh Student Housing Co-op

James Kelly MSP welcomed Nathan Bower-Bir from Edinburgh Student Housing Co-op (ESHCO) who are located not far from Ploughshare in Bruntsfield overlooking the Links. The ESHCO building is rented from Castlerock Housing Association and offer quality accommodation to students at a cost much below that charged by many private accommodation providers in Edinburgh. There is a real community feel and the students have taken forward a number of different projects aimed at improving where they live such as converting former garage space to a shared living area. The success of ESHCO has led to the students looking for other additional accommodation in the city and also helping students in other Scottish cities to form their own housing co-ops. Access to funding is a huge issue and ESHCO thought the Scottish Government could make changes to legislation for example to exempt housing Coops from section 75 contributions and stop selling off public property to private developers.

5. Questions to the Housing co-operatives

Members asked about the difficulties of establishing housing co-operatives and the support they receive from Co-operatives Development Scotland (CDS) and other agencies. They asked about the potential benefits of a CDS style development agency for the housing co-operatives sector specifically.

6. Summing up and next steps

James Kelly MSP thanked all those attending for their contributions and updated them with progress on producing the report on co-operative housing and when it was likely to be published.

7. Plans for the next evidence session and end of meeting

The next meeting of the CPG would take place in February 2019 with time and place to be advised in advance.

The meeting was adjourned.