

Cross Party Group on Housing

20 February 2019, 13:00 – 14:00

Scottish Parliament, Holyrood

Members present

Andy Wightman, MSP (convenor)

Graham Simpson, MSP

Ciaran McDonald, Office of Andy Wightman MSP

Ashley Campbell and Susanne Flynn, Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland (secretariat)

Moira Bayne, Housing Options Scotland

Tony Cain and Annette Finnan, ALACHO

Helen Charlton and Lisa Innes, Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living

Gavin Dick, National Landlords Association

Katy Dickson, Scottish Land and Estates

Camille Furtado and Lynn McMath, Crisis

Izzy Gaughan, Shelter Scotland

Lynda Johnstone, TIS

Carol Morton, The Vivarium Trust

Janice Stevenson, LGBT Youth Scotland

Steven Tolson, RICS

Heather Zajac, Scottish Churches Housing Action

In attendance

Iain Gray, MSP

Ruth Maguire, MSP

Rona Mackay, MSP

Nathan Bower-Bir, University of Edinburgh

Claire Frew, Glasgow Homelessness Network

Guest speakers**Jo Ozga**, Scottish Women's Aid**Georgie Harris**, Edinburgh University Student's Association**Emma Saunders**, Living Rent**Elena Semple**, NUS Scotland

1.	Welcome and apologies	Convenor Andy Wightman MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting and announced the following apologies which were received in advance of the meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lesley Baird, TPAS Scotland• Alastair Cameron, Rural Housing Scotland• Grant Carson, Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living• Caroline Edgar, Scottish Association of Landlords• Jennifer Kennedy, Homes for Scotland• Freya Lees, North Star Consulting and Research• Diane Marr, Cyrenians Scotland• Pete White, Positive Prisons• Gavin Yates, Homeless Action Scotland
2.	Minutes of the previous meeting	The minutes were agreed as accurate and there were no matters arising.
3.	Presentations	<u>Domestic abuse and homelessness</u> Jo Ozga from Scottish Women's Aid delivered a presentation to the group on the connection between domestic abuse and homelessness. Key points covered were as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Domestic abuse and homelessness are inherently interconnected and domestic abuse is one of the major contributors of homelessness for women in Scotland.• Housing organisations have a key role to play in preventing and responding to domestic abuse within their properties, as they are often a main point of contact for people experiencing abuse.

- While there is some limited positive practice happening in the housing sector, there are still gaps and many housing organisations lack confidence in responding to domestic abuse or don't have appropriate policies in place.
- Victims of domestic abuse are disproportionately at risk of homelessness as often it is the victim and not the perpetrator who is forced to leave their home.
- Scottish Women's Aid expressed disappointment that the Scottish Government's new High Level Action Plan on Homelessness fails to recognise the need for a gendered response to addressing homelessness, as the majority of those who experience homelessness caused by domestic abuse are women.
- Scottish Women's Aid is working with the Chartered Institute of Housing on a new campaign called 'Make a Stand' which aims to deliver meaningful change across the housing sector by improving responses to domestic abuse. Signatories to the campaign are asked to sign up to four key pledges to help improve protection for tenants and staff who may be experiencing domestic abuse.
- Further details on the 'Make a Stand' campaign will be circulated after the meeting and practice guidance is also due to be published in Spring 2019.
- Andy Wightman MSP also encouraged group members to raise issues around domestic abuse and housing policy with the Clerk of the Local Government and Communities Committee.

Questions and discussion points

The Group discussed the following points:

- Concerns were raised around the number of accessible refuge places available for disabled women – Scottish Women's Aid confirmed that refuge spaces are limited across the board, with only 1 in 6 women able to access a space when they need it, and that this is a particular issue for those who have a disability.
- Concerns were also raised around joint tenancies and how difficult it currently is to end a joint tenancy without the consent of both parties. Scottish Women's Aid is working to see how the law could be changed to allow victims, and not perpetrators, of domestic abuse to stay in their homes.
- It was acknowledged that policy and practice needs to change, including in local authorities.

Student housing and young people in the private rented sector

Emma Saunders, Living Rent:

Emma Saunders from Living Rent provided a short update on Living Rent's 'winter break from evictions' campaign. Key points covered were as follows:

- Winter breaks from evictions have been the norm in France since 1966 where landlords are banned from evicting tenants from the 1st of November to the 31st of March. During this time, there is also a ban on cutting off electricity, gas and water from peoples' homes.
- Living Rent's Winter Break from Evictions campaign would like to see a similar scheme adopted in Scotland to prevent vulnerable people from dying on Scotland's streets during the coldest months of the year.
- Living Rent are not calling for an end to evictions but would like to see greater security of housing, particularly in the private rented sector (PRS), and are calling for the introduction of a 'staying put' fund for PRS tenants who find themselves in hardship.

Elena Semple, NUS Scotland:

- Elena confirmed that NUS Scotland are backing Living Rent's winter break from evictions campaign and outlined some of the main housing challenges facing students.
- There is a severe lack of affordable housing for students, with many forced to live in the private rented sector where prices are higher and there is less security of tenure.
- Many students are also in precarious employment and the numbers of applications for student hardship funds have seen a sharp increase in recent years.
- NUS Scotland is calling for housing to be recognised as a human right and its position is 'homes for people, not profit'.

Georgie Harris, Edinburgh University Students' Association:

Georgie Harris from Edinburgh University Students' Association presented the findings of recent research into private purpose built student accommodation. Key points covered were as follows:

- Edinburgh University has seen a rapid expansion in the number of students over the last five years, with students in the city now making up around 20% of Edinburgh's population.
- Student accommodation has also been increasing to meet this new demand, leading to a perception that students are being 'ghettoised' away from other residents.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although student accommodation is increasing, there remains a lack of affordable housing options for students in the city – the average cost per month of renting a room in the capital is now £520, with many students being forced to pay around 87% of their student loan on rent. • Renting in the PRS is also a particular issue for international students, as many are often asked to provide a year’s worth of rent up front. This has led to many international students being forced to rent rooms in more expensive purpose built student accommodation. • The Student’s Association is calling for 25% of student units in the city to be affordable, based on a model that is currently operating in London and would also like to see greater regulation of private student accommodation. <p><u>Questions and discussion points:</u></p> <p>The Group discussed the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans to increase the affordability for students were welcomed, but some questioned whether plans for 25% of units to be affordable for students were ambitious enough. • A question was raised around whether or not there had been any evaluation of the winter breaks from evictions approach in France – Emma Saunders confirmed that while there has been no official evaluation of the impact, it is very difficult to evict someone in France and it is generally accepted that it is more cost-effective to prevent the most vulnerable people in society from becoming homeless. • Concerns were raised around increasing pressures on the PRS market and the implications that this is having on affordability.
4.	Applications for membership	<p>Applications for membership from the following organisations were approved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ALACHO • Scottish Land Commission • The Vivarium Trust (senior co-housing) • LGBT Youth Scotland
5.	AOCB	None.
6.	Details of next meeting	The next meeting of the Cross Party Housing Group will take place on:

		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 22 May 2019 <p>All meetings will take place at the Parliament 13:00 – 14:00</p> <p>The topic for the next meeting will be the Scottish Government's Housing Beyond 2021 consultation.</p> <p>Any ideas for future meeting topics should be sent to the CPG Secretariat. Please email susanne.flynn@cih.org</p>
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