



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

The Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Regeneration Committee has today, Thursday 29 March 2012, launched a call for written evidence from all interested parties as part of its Stage 1 consideration of the [Local Government Finance \(Unoccupied Properties Etc.\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#). This Bill was introduced into the Scottish Parliament, by the Scottish Government, on Monday 26 March 2012.

Organisations and individuals are invited to submit written evidence to the Committee setting out their views on the provisions of the Bill. Those submitting evidence should feel free to address any, or all, of the policy issues contained in the Bill.

A copy of the Bill, and its accompanying documents, [are available on the Bill page](#) of the Parliament's website.

Purpose of the Bill

The Policy Memorandum which accompanies the Bill states that the principal policy objectives of the Bill are:

- to encourage owners of long-term empty homes and business premises to bring the back into use; and
- to remove any possibility, or theoretical incentive, for local authorities to increase their Housing Revenue Account debt levels to unsustainable levels and to receive ongoing Scottish Government subsidy for doing so.

The Bill seeks to do this by giving:

- local authorities the power to increase council tax charges on certain long-term empty homes, and
- the Scottish ministers the power to alter the level of empty property relief for certain empty commercial properties under the non-domestic rates regime.

The Bill also seeks to abolish the Housing Support Grant.

How to submit your evidence

The closing date for receipt of submissions is **5pm on Wednesday 9th May 2012**.

Responses should be sent, **wherever possible, electronically** and in MS Word format to lgr.committee@scottish.parliament.uk

Hard copy responses may be sent to—

Local Government and Regeneration Committee
T3.60
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Responses should be no more than six to eight sides of A4 in length.

All written evidence received may be published by the Parliament and will be treated as a public document. If you wish to submit evidence in confidence or anonymously please read the policy on handling information outlined on below.

What happens next?

Following consideration of the written submissions received, the Committee will agree a programme of oral evidence sessions and may request further written evidence as required.

Should you require alternative formats of this document or further information or assistance in making a written submission to the Committee, please do not hesitate to contact the clerking team.

For Committee information, contact:

Seán Wixted: 0131 348 5223
Email: sean.wixted@scottish.parliament.uk

Or

Euan Donald: 0131 348 5219
Email: Euan.donald@scottish.parliament.uk

For further information, the media contact is:

Linda Smith: 0131 348 6245
E-mail: linda.smith@scottish.parliament.uk

For public information enquiries, contact: 0131 348 5000

For general enquiries, contact:

0845 278 1999 (local call rate)
email: sp.info@scottish.parliament.uk
Visit our website at: www.scottish.parliament.uk

Policy on handling of information received in response to calls for evidence

This information lets you know how committees of the Scottish Parliament will deal with any information sent in response to calls for evidence and any subsequent correspondence.

Most people who submit evidence want it to be put in the public domain. In addition, the committees of the Scottish Parliament are committed to being open in their dealings in accordance with the Scottish Parliament's founding principles.

Our normal practice is to publish all relevant evidence that is sent to us on our website and we may also include it in the hard copy of any committee report.

Therefore, if you wish your evidence to be treated as confidential, or for your evidence to be published anonymously, please contact the Clerk to the Committee, before you submit your evidence.

You should be aware that it is for the relevant committee to decide whether the evidence can be accepted on the basis that it will be seen in full by the committee but will not be published, or will be published in edited form or anonymously. See section on "Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002" below.

There are a few situations where we do not publish all the evidence sent to us. This may be for practical reasons: for example, where the number of submissions we receive does not make this possible or where we receive a large number of submissions in very similar terms. In that case, we would normally publish only a list of the names of people who have submitted evidence.

In addition, there may be a few situations where we may not choose to publish your evidence or have to edit it before publication for legal reasons.

Data Protection Act 1998

The Parliament must comply with the Data Protection Act 1998. This affects what information about living people (personal data and sensitive personal data) we can make public.

Your evidence may contain personal data or sensitive personal data relating to you. In line with our normal practice, we will usually publish it, if relevant to the inquiry. We will not, however, publish your signature or personal contact information arising in your private life (for example, your home telephone number or home address).

We may also have to edit information which can identify another living person who has not specifically given their consent to have information about them made public.

In these situations, committee members will have access to the full text of your evidence, even if it has not been published in full.

If you consider that evidence that you plan to submit may raise any other issues concerning the Data Protection Act, please contact the Clerk to the Committee before you submit your evidence.

Potentially defamatory material

Typically, the Parliament will not publish defamatory statements or material. If we think your submission contains potentially defamatory material, usually, we will return it to you with an invitation to substantiate the comments or remove them. In these circumstances if the evidence is returned to us and it still contains material which we consider may be defamatory, it may not be considered by the relevant committee and it may have to be destroyed.

Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

The Parliament is covered by the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. This also affects the way that we deal with your evidence.

As stated above, if you wish your evidence to be treated as confidential, or for your evidence to be published anonymously, please contact the Clerk to the Committee, before you submit your evidence.

In particular you should be aware that if we receive a request for information under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, we may be required legally to release the information to the person who has made the request – even where the relevant committee has agreed to treat all or part of the information in confidence or publish it anonymously.

So, in the circumstances outlined above, while we can assure you that your document / name will not be circulated to the general public in the context of the relevant committee's current work, we are unable to give you a guarantee that the full document will never be released.