

**Minutes of the
Cross Party Group on Housing
Thursday 28th May 2015 at 1pm**

Present:

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| Margaret McDougall MSP | Convenor |
| Patrick Harvie MSP | Vice Convenor |
| Alan Stokes | SFHA |
| Alastair Cameron | Scottish Churches Housing Action |
| Alastair Hackland | RIAS |
| Ann Landels | Crisis |
| Ashley Campbell | CIH |
| Caroline Elgar | SAL |
| Debbie King | Shelter Scotland |
| Emma Meldrum | TPAS |
| Garry Burns | Homeless Action Scotland |
| Gordon Nelson | Federation of Master Builders |
| Iain McCreaddie | Scottish Cities Alliance |
| Ilene Campbell | TIS |
| James Battye | Shelter Scotland |
| Jonathan Roberts | The Salvation Army Scotland |
| Katie Dickson | Scottish Land and Estates |
| Leanne Blunsden | TIS |
| Moira Bayne | Housing Options Scotland |
| Neil Clapperton | Grampian Housing Association |
| Stephen Young | Civil Engineering Contractors Association |
| Susie Fitton | Capability Scotland |
| Tristan Compton | NAL |

In attendance:

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| Akiko Kobayashi | Assemble Collective Self Build |
| Angela Doran | Assemble Collective Self Build |
| Claire Birch | Veterans Scotland |
| Doreen Hollywood | Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living |
| Graham Harper | Care and Repair Edinburgh |
| Greg McCracken | Age Scotland |
| Margaret Burgess MSP | |
| Mark McCabe | Audit Scotland |

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| Pauline Brice | Scottish Government |
| Pete White | Positive Prison |
| Philip Hogg | Homes for Scotland |
| William Fleming | Scottish Government |

1. Welcome and Apologies

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

Wayne Mackay Electrical Safety Council

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were approved with no matters arising.

3. Presentation on the Housing Act 2014 with a focus on social housing and private rented sector implications – Presented by Margaret Burgess MSP, Minister for Housing and Welfare

The Minister highlighted that the Joint Housing Delivery Plan for Scotland will be published shortly. The Plan developed with stakeholders, sets out 34 actions that will help to deliver our strategic aims and achieve better outcomes for the people of Scotland.

The Minister explained that the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 contains a range of provisions intended to safeguard the interests of consumers and support improvements to the quality of housing in the social and private rented sectors.

These include in the social rented sector;

- Giving landlords more tools to tackle antisocial behaviour and;
- Strengthening the tenancy rules for areas such as succession and assignation to help landlords to make best use of social housing.

For the private rented sector;

- Enabling a regulatory framework for letting agents to be introduced;
- Bringing forward regulations to give local authorities an additional power of inspection and the ability to make applications to the private rented housing panel;
- The new “missing shares” power which allows local authorities to support majority decisions by home owners on work to common parts by stepping in to pay the missing shares and recovering them from owners who are unwilling or unable to pay or who cannot be found;

- Enhanced Enforcement Areas that will enable local authorities to target enforcement at poor landlords and to improve standards for tenants and;
- The establishment of the Private Rented Sector Tribunal.

The Minister explained that progress to implement all these measures is progressing.

Margaret McDougall MSP thanked Margaret Burgess MSP for her presentation at the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Housing.

Discussion regarding the Housing Act 2014.

- With regards to Common Registers, it was raised that there is a lengthy process of forms, especially for people with learning and support needs. Margaret Burgess MSP said she would raise support issues for tenants applying to common registers with the Regional Networks for discussion.
- Regarding Private Rented Sector Tribunals, Margaret Burgess MSP believes tenants should have legal representation, un-prohibited by cost, through solicitors, advisors or lay representatives. This is to be consulted on and has not yet been agreed.
- With relation to Homes fit for the 21st century, there is currently a pilot taking place in the Highlands for community self-build. Self-build is not mentioned in the joint delivery plan.
- With regards to the proposal for a more ambitious programme for new build housing, the Minister highlighted that increased supply of new build affordable housing over all tenures is priority. Following the next spending review, the government will set its next target. This was a major topic at the Joint Delivery Event.
- In relation to the Private Rented Sector's concerns about rent setting control, the Minister highlighted that the draft bill is going to the Parliament in October 2015. They will be consulting on hot spot areas for rent control, predictability of rents increasing and tenants receiving appropriate notice. Margaret Burgess MSP specified that she did not want to pre-empt what is on the draft bill.
- With regards to the enquiry about why there is no wheelchair standard housing to buy for tenants, Margaret Burgess MSP will look into this and report back to the Cross Party Group on Housing.
- New home builders are required to meet accessible needs standards, including level access, wider doors, circulation space, and downstairs rooms being adaptable. It was noted that houses with bigger downstairs bedrooms and bathrooms is what is needed for those who require wheelchair access properties to buy.

- Margaret Burgess MSP reassured members that Private Rented Sector consultation responses will be taken into account, and will be given the same attention that the first consultation received.
- The main differences with the Housing Act in dealing with anti-social behaviour will be landlords having access to a range of tools to give them more flexibility to address these issues. The Act makes changes to when Short Scottish Tenancies can be used to deal with anti-social behaviour issues. There will be consultation on the anti-social behaviour guidance at a later date.
- The Act provides further provisions to the Repairs Standard which requires private landlords to make improvements to the standard of the properties by providing carbon monoxide detectors, and arranging electrical safety inspections every five years. The Act also enables Local Authorities to apply to the Private Rented Housing Panel directly to ensure any private landlord meets the repairing standard. The Act allows Local Authorities to pay a missing share where the majority of owners in a block have agreed to repair or maintain their property but one or more owners have not paid their share of the cost of the work. The Local Authority can then recover the costs from the owner.
- Regarding the issue of overcrowding in the Private Rented Sector, consultation is currently being conducted regarding this.
- TIS provided a guide on the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 which has been produced to help tenants understand what is in the Act and how it affects them. Please contact Leanne Blunsden, TIS if you would like a copy of this guide.

4. Cross Party Group Business

Potential future meeting topics:

- Mental health and housing – Scottish Association for Mental Health
- Smith Commission
- Housing for prisoners when they are released, to be led by Joe Bowden, Positive Prison.

Members are encouraged to email other topic suggestions to Leanne Blunsden, TIS at lblunsden@tis.org.uk.

5. AOCB

None.

6. Date of next meeting and close

Thursday 24th September 2015, 1pm-2pm
Thursday 26th November 2015, 1pm-2pm
Thursday 28th January 2016, 1pm-2pm
Thursday 24th March 2016, 1pm-2pm

The meeting was closed at 13.40pm. Margaret McDougall MSP thanked all for attending.