

Minutes of the
Cross Party Group on Housing
Thursday 14th November 2013 at 1pm

Present:

Margaret McDougall MSP (Convenor)
Patrick Harvey MSP (Vice-Convenor)
Margaret Burgess MSP
Bob Doris MSP
Mary Fee MSP
Gordon MacDonald MSP
Hugh Henry MSP
Anne McTaggart MSP
David Scott, Margaret Burgess' Office
Lorraine Haxton, Margaret MacDougall's Office
Linda Leslie, Parliamentary Bill Team
John Blackwood, Scottish Association of Landlords
Rebecca Johnston, Scottish Association of Landlords
Lynda Johnstone, Tenants Information Service
Leanne Blunsden, Tenants Information Service
Tristan Compton, National Landlord Association
Wayne MacKay, Electrical Safety Council
Alastair Cameron, Scottish Churches Housing Action
Debbie King, Shelter Scotland
Hew Edgar, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors in Scotland
Andy Young, Scottish Federation Housing Associations

In attendance:

Claire Gibson, Streetworks
Alastair Hackland, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors in Scotland
Freya Lees, Northstar Consultancy
Ann Landels, Crisis
Neil Guy, Crisis
Katherine Sibbald, Audit Scotland
Sally Thomson, Audit Scotland
Akiko Kobayashi, KOBAYASHI Studio (self-build)
Susan Napier, Fellow Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors in Scotland
Patrick Hogan, Indigo
Angela Doran, Halo self-build
Christina Baillie, Thorntons Law
Greg McCracken, AGE Scotland

1. Welcome and Apologies

Margaret McDougall MSP (Chair) opened the meeting of the Cross Party Group and intimated the following apologies:

Lesley Baird, Tenant Participation Advisory Service Scotland
Craig Sanderson, Link Group

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

Minutes were approved as printed

3. AGM

Margaret MacDougall MPS proposed to stay in the chair for the AGM.

Mary Fee MSP nominated Margaret McDougall MSP for Chair, seconded by Anne McTaggart MSP.

SAL stepped down as secretariat. TIS and NLA were proposed as the new secretariat. Tristan Compton of NLA offered to share the role. As SAL are from the private rented sector, it was suggested that in the interests of balance it would be appropriate for TIS to take over as they represent the social housing sector. A vote was held with five in favour of TIS as new secretariat.

4. Main item: Housing Bill, Minister for Housing Welfare and Reform, Margaret Burgess MSP

Margaret McDougall MSP introduced Margaret Burgess MSP to the meeting, who provided a brief outline of the Housing Bill and responded to questions and concerns from the floor.

Linda Lesley from the Bill Team, Scottish Government was also introduced to the meeting.

The Bill, introduced to Parliament, aims to improve the quality of rented accommodation across the social and private sectors.

The Housing Bill will affect all sectors and its intent is:

- Enhance housing conditions, retain much needed social housing for the people of Scotland and safeguard social and private tenants.
- End all right to buy entitlements for social housing tenants. The government will protect the existing stock of social rented homes, preventing the sale of up to 15,500 houses over the next 10 years. helping to build more cohesive and sustainable communities.
- To protect consumers by creating a new Private Rented Housing Tribunal to ensure effective and prompt resolution of disputes in the private rented sector,

providing tenants and landlords with access to specialist justice to resolve disputes more effectively.

- See changes to mobile home site licensing which will also improve the rights of the 3,300 households, many of whom are elderly, living permanently in mobile or park homes across Scotland.
- Introduction of a regulatory framework for Letting Agents which will tackle those who do not meet industry standards of professionalism and conduct.
- Enhance local authority powers to improve the quality of houses in the private sector, giving them greater enforcement power, which aims to increase consumer satisfaction.
- Increase flexibility in the allocation and management of social housing, allowing landlords to make better use of their stock, tackle anti-social behaviour and provide further protection for tenants.

Margaret Burgess MSP advised that a series of consultations took place over 2012 and 2013 on the proposals included in the Bill, and considerable support has been shown. The government will continue to engage with a wide range of stakeholders over coming months.

Margaret Burgess MSP stated:

- This Bill will contribute to that vision by safeguarding consumer interests, supporting improved quality and delivering better outcomes for communities.
- Will help to maximise investment in housing and deliver on the Scottish Government target of at least 30,000 new, affordable homes over the lifetime of this Parliament.
- Housing is and will remain a priority for this Government and through the Housing Bill we will continue to support both the private and social sectors."

Responses from Margaret Burgess MSP to questions and concerns from the floor:

- It was recorded that the Bill will come into Parliament shortly.
- A new Letting Agent Register will be created, which will be managed and controlled by the Scottish Government. Statutory guidance will be issued to Letting Agents in order to achieve consistency and a standard of professionalism throughout. This in turn will increase consumer confidence in the private rented sector.
- It was noted that there will be an associated fee for the Letting Agent register, but the introduction of this fee is still to be formally agreed through the consultation process.

- The requirement of the Letting Agent registration will make the existing Private Landlord register more effective.
- Margaret Burgess MSP stated that professional indemnity insurance will be covered by the Bill.
- With regards to customer involvement in self-assessment and the scrutiny of landlord performance in social housing, it was recorded that it is the intention of the Bill to keep private tenants well informed, which allows involvement and in turn drives change.
- The introduction of a Private Rented Sector Tribunal System will allow for quicker redress for both landlords and tenants. The tribunal process will follow the Tribunal Reform Bill.
- It was noted that time limits for procedures will be examined in further detail as part of the ongoing Bill consultation, taking into account the views of both landlords and tenants.
- The Bill indicated the end of the Right to Buy. However in terms of the Right to Sell, there may be situations where Local Authorities and Housing Association Landlords wish to dispose of their assets at market value. Social Landlords will not be stopped from making the most of their vacant housing stock but their tenants rights will be protected
- Reference was made to the Housing Association Grant (HAG) Recycling Scheme whereby there is a claw back of cash to the Scottish Government following sales. Margaret Burgess MSP advised that this scheme is ongoing but separate to the Housing Bill in discussion.

Patrick Harvie MSP (Vice convenor) joined the meeting at this stage.

- In addressing the issue of anti-social behaviour in communities, and the allocation of properties, it was recorded that existing anti-social behaviour legislation will continue to be followed. It is understood that in future the previous anti-social behaviour of an individual will be taken into account as a property is let. Support will be available to tenants in order to maintain a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST). There are proposals to change a SSST from 6 to 12 months. Landlords will be encouraged to work with tenants to resolve anti-social behaviour issues.
- Margaret McDougall MSP questioned the aforementioned proposals on the basis that landlords do not take responsibility for anti-social tenants.
- Andy Young (SFHA) expressed that the SFHA welcomes many aspects of the Bill, but are keen to examine the finer detail of some of the inclusions including the notice period of the Right to Buy and the required multi agency approach to addressing anti-social behaviour.

- The definition of a Letting Agent will be covered in the Bill to remove any ambiguity.
- It was recorded that the Scottish Government anticipates growth in the long term trend of the private rented sector, as is determined by market forces. The Bill hopes to encourage consumer confidence in the private rented sector
- The matter of policing the Letting Agent register will be discussed further as part of the ongoing Bill consultation.
- It was advised that procedures for dealing with Letting Agents who have been previously scored off the register will be included in the statutory guidance and is not specifically noted in the Bill. This will be subject to ongoing stakeholder consultation.

Margaret McDougall MSP thanked the Minister for her presentation at the meeting of the Cross Party Group.

Margaret Burgess MSP commented that if there are any further questions or concerns, they should be raised with the Bill Department.

5. Cross Party Group Business

Margaret McDougall MSP asked the floor for items of discussion for upcoming meetings. Suggestions include:

- Energy efficiency and the Climate Change Act. A question raised was 'What Landlords need to be doing in the future?' Patrick Harvey MSP suggested a joint meeting with the Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (SPREEE)
- Housing Supply and procurement.
- Universal Credit.

Action – TIS is to contact SPREEE in order to arrange a joint meeting.

6. AOCB

There was no other business.

7. Date of next meeting and close

Thursday 20th February 2014, 1pm-2pm – Room Q1.03

Future meetings:

Thursday 24th April 2014, 1pm-2pm - Room TG20/21

Thursday 19th June 2014, 1pm-2pm – Room Q1.03 or TG. 20/21

The meeting was closed at 2pm. Margaret McDougall MSP thanked all for attending.

