

Minutes of the
Cross Party Group on Housing
Thursday 19th June 2014 at 1pm

Present:

Margaret McDougall MSP (Convenor)
Patrick Harvie MSP
Tristan Compton, National Landlords Association (Scotland)
Caroline Elgar, SAL
Jeremy Hewer, SFHA
Leanne Blunsden, TIS
Lynda Johnstone, TIS
Wayne Mackay, Electrical Safety First
Alistair Cameron, Scottish Churches Housing Action

In attendance:

Keith Stewart, St Columba's School
Craig Sanderson, Link Group
Sally Dyson, SCVO
Joe Bowden, Positive Prison
Robert Aldridge, Homeless Action Scotland
Simon Ashpool, Crisis

1. Welcome and apologies.

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

- Rebecca Johnson, SAL
- Alastair Hackland, RIAS
- Lesley Baird, TPAS
- Keith Anderson, Port of Leith Housing Association
- Moira Bayne, Housing Options Scotland

2. Minutes of previous meeting.

Tristan Compton, National Landlords Association, raised that page 2 of the previous minutes should read that a discussion about regulated rents in the PRS took place but an agreement was not reached on this topic.

Alistair Cameron, Scottish Churches Housing Action, expressed concern that the SHR were unable to attend the meeting. Lynda Johnstone, TIS, explained that the SHR were unable to attend the first

meeting as the thematic inquiry into housing options and homelessness prevention report was not complete and were unable to attend the current meeting as they did not have the personnel available.

3. Main Item: Digital Inclusion

- The challenge of getting more people online – Sally Dyson, Programme Manager, SCVO

Sally highlighted some key statistics regarding the numbers and types of people who are not digitally active. Alongside this she noted some of the key ways to help people get online. Sally highlighted the digital participation charter and the work that SCVO were doing to bring materials, learning opportunities and case studies together. The key message is that SCVO have 1.3m people in Scotland not online; Skills, Motivation and Access are the key barriers and it is all of our job to turn this situation around.

For more information go to <http://www.scvo.org.uk/news-campaigns-policy/campaigns/digital-participation/> where the team and others blog regularly. Sally encouraged everyone to sign up to their Digital Participation Team fortnightly e:bulletin

- Digital Links! (or Keep Taking the Tablets!) – Craig Sanderson, Chief Executive, Link Housing Association

Craig informed the meeting on what Link Group have been doing regarding Digital Inclusion:

- Link has been practicing digital inclusion for many years. It has been particularly active since 2002 when several 'silver surfer' tenants came into its Edinburgh office to celebrate its 40th birthday by going online for the first time.
- Link have subsequently supplied equipment and training for older tenants in four of their sheltered housing complexes which has led to a number of residents becoming permanently online. Further support for this process has been received from The Big Lottery among others. Link also facilitated digital inclusion among younger people and in some of their more disadvantaged communities.
- Link have distributed all their used IT equipment to tenants and local community groups.
- In 2013, Link published a Digital Inclusion Strategy to complement their Financial Inclusion Strategy
- With support from The Scottish Housing Regulator, Link have established a Tenant Scrutiny Panel to oversee their service provision and to help them improve it. Given that Link's tenants live over a wide area it is essential that panel members are online. This has been facilitated by preparing them for video conferencing and supplying them with 'dongles' as necessary.

This year, Link have:

- Helped the Kirkshaws Neighbourhood Centre in Coatbridge to set up an IT suite to support employability in the area.
- A new office and social enterprise 'hub' in Dalmuir containing an IT suite for use by tenants and local community groups
- Employed a Digital Inclusion Officer
- Purchased 20 new laptops for Smart Living to lend to its volunteers
- Smart Living established its 'Ask Joe' website to help unemployed young people to get jobs ('Joe' stands for jobs, opportunities and employability)
- Launched a new mobile web app
- Established an 'E-Panel' which has so far attracted hundreds of tenants to participate in consultation exercises
- Horizon HA (a Link subsidiary which specialises in housing disabled people) has hooked up to the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living's 'Hones2Fit web-based application system)

Link have found that:

- They have to do more.
- Cost of equipment and connections is a problem for many of their tenants. The price of smartphones is falling but so too is the quality of product-related. Nevertheless, the BBC with its 'First Click' and Digital Unite are two websites which help in this regard.
- Despite some 50% saying they use the internet, many don't have PCs at home, relying on mobile/smart phones and public access points, none of which is suitable for completing complex forms etc. Libraries are shutting or are not suitable for those people with mobility problems.
- Tenants require more 1-1 support (and for longer) than expected, face-to-face advice is preferred, facilities vary across different geographical areas and the 'demographic ' is variable - and it helps to get them 'interested' if there's a 'hook' e.g. it'll help them manage their finances or keep in touch with family and friends.
- PCs have been 'overtaken' by laptops which are being overtaken by smart phones which are being overtaken by tablets. The future for Link may be to supply tablets (free?) to all their tenants, as the GHA are doing.

The following discussion took place focusing on digital inclusion:

- It was highlighted that there are continual challenges with infrastructure and access to broadband. For example, Digital Links in Grangemouth had to pay to install telephone lines.
- Regarding how much Link Group expects their tenants to operate online, Craig informed the meeting that the organisation makes an effort to communicate with their tenants in any way possible and it has been proven that face to face communication is the most effective. Link do not force tenants to have a computer but are encouraging them to get online as Universal Credit is on the horizon.

- There is a lot of concern with welfare reform and the pressure to get online, however whilst there is an obvious challenge, there is also an opportunity for a comprehensive review of housing management systems, IT and the capacity for communication between landlords and tenants. For example, Dunedin Canmore Housing Association ran a successful project with communicating via text.
- The cost of communicating with people online is significantly cheaper than face to face or telephone communication. Carrying out a proportion of transactions online would free up more resources to carry out other activities face to face.
- An interesting case study was discussed where the Weatley Group offered their tenants free internet access, yet 20% of the tenant still did not connect to the internet.

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

- SCVO cover online security as part of their online skills training. They are currently considering digital rights. Craig Sanderson, thanked Patrick Harvie MSP for the question regarding digital rights and security online as it is something that he wants to inquire about with Link Group.
- In relation to the Tenant Participation and Tenant Scrutiny agenda, there has been a huge increase in tenants getting involved in traditional Tenant Participation activities because of the help of digital devices. For example, smart phones have given tenants far more communication with social media. TIS have found this very positive for the tenants that they are working with.
- Craig Sanderson, Link Group agreed that technology is useful for getting tenants together online to discuss topics such as rent increase, which is allowing the Housing Association to provide a better service. They have developed an app whereby their tenants can access the annual report on their smart phones.

Margaret McDougall MSP thanked Sally Dyson and Craig Sanderson for their presentations at the meeting and thanked the attendees for their participation in the discussion.

4. Cross Party Group Business.

The next meeting of the Cross Party Group on Housing will incorporate the AGM, and will take place in November 2014. It was agreed that the group would continue to meet at lunch times, 4 times a year.

Future meeting topics include:

- Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to update on the thematic inquiry into housing options and homelessness prevention. It was agreed that Margaret McDougall MSP would write to the SHR to fully express the group's interest in their presence at a future meeting.
- Joint meeting with SPREEE on energy efficiency programmes for the private rented sector.
- New build accessible properties, to be led by Capability Scotland.
- Housing for prisoners when they are released, to be led by Joe Bowden, Positive Prison.
- How housing is being incorporated in the Adult Health and Social Care Integration agenda.
- Housing Bill Developments.
- The outcome of the Referendum.

5. AOB.

The was no other business

6. Date of next meeting and close.

DATE	TIME	ROOM
6th November 2014	1 - 2 pm	Q1.04
22nd January 2015	1 - 2 pm	Q1.03
26th March 2015	1 - 2 pm	Q1.03
28th May 2015	1 - 2 pm	Q1.03

The meeting was closed at 1.55pm, Margaret McDougall MSP thanked all for attending.