

Minutes of the
Cross Party Group on Housing
Thursday 22nd January 2015 at 1pm

Present:

Margaret McDougall MSP (Convenor)
Gordon MacDonald MSP (Vice Convenor)
Leanne Blunsden, TIS
Lynda Johnstone, TIS
Fraser Gilmour, Housing Options Scotland
Greg McCracken, Age Scotland
Gordon Nelson, Federation of Master Builders
Jonathan Roberts, Salvation Army
Susie Fritton, Capability Scotland
Cordelia Wynche, Capability Scotland

In attendance:

Susan Napier, FRICS
Jim Mather CA, Homes for Scotland
Grant Carson, Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living
Graham Harper, Care & Repair Edinburgh

1. Welcome and Apologies

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

Patrick Harvie MSP
Keith Anderson, Port of Leith Housing Association
John Blackwood, Scottish Association of Landlords
Caroline Elgar, Scottish Association of Landlords
Tristan Compton, National Landlord Association
Maddie Halliday, Life Changes Trust
Lesley Baird, TPAS
Alastair Cameron, Scottish Churches Housing Action

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

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

3. The work of Care and Repair Scotland as an example of the Housing Movement bring solutions to, and jointly working with, Health and Social Care – Presented by Graham Harper, Care and Repair Edinburgh

Care and Repair (C&R) is a network of charities, loosely based around Local Authority areas. They provide a range of services to keep older and disabled people safe at home, from changing a lightbulb to a full-scale adaptation. Exactly what, and how much each organisation does depends on funding / charges from area to area. Many are run by housing associations, although a few, like Edinburgh, are independent organisations, and we are all very much part of the housing sector in Scotland.

In Wales, where C&R is funded directly by the Welsh Government, many hospitals have C&R working as part of the discharge teams to assist in the smooth running of the process, arranging for keysafe and adaptations well in advance of the discharge. It is very much an integrated joined up service and Graham is looking forward to seeing this for himself very soon.

Another good example is Dumfries and Galloway Care and Repair, which is a service provided by Loreburn Housing Association in partnership with Dumfries and Galloway Council. It is essentially a one-stop shop for major adaptations which provides services to all the local Registered Social Landlords and to the private sector (there is no Local Authority housing in Dumfries and Galloway) and has been developed collaboratively between the housing sector and the Occupational Therapist service. It has, over 4 years, resulted in a service delivery improvements of up to 87%. It is consistent with the Christie Commission recommendations, but most importantly, it is best for the client. A single point of contact, tell the story once, tenure blind and streamlined processes.

A stark example of the benefit of C&R is simply changing a lightbulb for an older person. For the cost of the bulb itself and perhaps half an hour of a volunteer's time, C&R can reduce the risk of a fall, a stay in hospital, and the increased likelihood of another fall. A hip fracture in an older person costs the NHS £13,000, and that was in 2011.

C&R's network is well placed to assist local and national governments and health authorities to reduce the demand for services through prevention work and expertise in discharges and adaptations.

Discussion regarding Care and Repair Scotland

- All Local Authorities have some form of C&R service. However there is no statutory service that must be provided, therefore there is a variance in the level of service.
- Attention was drawn to Kevin Dicks, from SCVO who works with the principle of 'helping people to help themselves' which in the past has resulted in cost savings.
- The C&R service is open free of charge to all people in Edinburgh who are over 60 or who have disabilities. There is no requirement for an assessment to be carried out.

- There was interest from the Federation of Master Builders to work jointly with Care and Repair in the future.
- The Edinburgh C&R has a huge number of volunteers, however they would like to do more. C&R believes in spending money in prevention in order to reap the benefit of cost savings in the long run. Currently C&R Scotland do not receive any funding from the NHS however they would like to attract funding from the NHS.
- The adaptation service which C&R offer is only for owner occupiers. Their services are open to everyone with landlord consent.

Action – The Cross Party Group on Housing will write to the relevant Minister to encourage funding to be made available to provide C&R as a core service across Scotland.

Margaret McDougall MSP thanked Graham Harper for his presentation at the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Housing.

4. Barriers faced by disabled people in accessing suitable housing across Scotland, and solutions to improve accessibility – presented by Susie Fitton, Capability Scotland and Grant Carson, Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living.

Many disabled people face significant barriers when it comes to finding a suitable place to live.

Capability Scotland and Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living provide housing advice to over 500 people a year and they find that common problems disabled people still face include:

- Difficulties getting an adaptation to the current home because of structural, funding or advice issues
- A lack of accessible housing to buy or rent that is near their networks of support and/or place of work
- Long waiting times for social rented housing that is suitable
- Problems raising finance to buy or rent
- Little or no specialist housing options advice

Funded by the Scottish Government's Housing Voluntary Grant Scheme since 2010 the partnership project aims to improve access to suitable housing. It has:

- Provided advice, advocacy and support to over 2000 disabled people concerned about their housing.
- Created a housing options guide for disabled people
- Provided a sounding board for disabled people to discuss housing issues with policy makers

- Developed 3 accessible design posters covering the public realm, barrier free housing and full wheelchair accessibility. These posters provide developers, architects and disabled people with easy-to-understand information about accessible design.

A supplementary handout is attached to the minutes.

Discussion regarding barriers faced by disabled people in accessing suitable housing across Scotland, and solutions to improve accessibility

- Different standards are required for different tenures. The majority of houses for sale are in the private sector and these have certain standards which need to be met; there are not as many standards which need to be met in the social rented sector. In mixed areas of private and social rented houses there may be a decreased standard.
- The project doesn't have a marketing budget to spend on staff resources for marketing channels such as websites and social media.
- Graham Harper, Care & Repair Edinburgh indicated that he would be interested in promoting the work of the project across Scotland, and Greg McCracken from Age Scotland said he would be interested in raising awareness and directing referrals.
- People may not realise that they are living somewhere unsuitable. Local Authorities need to be willing to raise awareness locally and encourage people to self-register. There is also a need for Local Authorities to adapt their properties in order for more suitable properties to be available.
- There is variation across the country as to which properties are available, however a common occurrence across the whole of Scotland is the lack of disabled friendly properties available. This problem appears to be more prevalent in the large cities. There is significant evidence that there is a shortfall in suitable new build properties or funding for adaptations. There is a large demographic split across the 32 Local Authorities, and where you live determines how long you wait for a property, the price and how suitable it is.
- It was highlighted that the NHS are under increasing pressure to discharge patients, and are therefore putting people in unsuitable properties.
- Grant Carson argued that the biggest housing issue is for people in wheelchairs, however Fraser Gilmore, Housing Options Scotland highlighted that there are also suitable housing availability issues for people with non-physical disability, for example autism.
- It was highlighted that there is also significant issues with provision of advice for people with disability housing issues.

- Leaflets and posters were made available for Cross Party Members. For more information visit www.home2fit.org.uk.

Action - It was agreed that the Cross Party Group would write to the Scottish Government to request an extension for the Building Standards Review consultation.*

*After the meeting, it was discovered that the action to write to the Scottish Government regarding extending the consultation was too late as the deadline had already passed on the 21st January 2015.

Margaret McDougall MSP thanked Susie Fitton and Grant Carson for their presentation at the meeting of the Cross Party Group on Housing.

5. Cross Party Group Business

- A reminder was given that the joint meeting with SPREEE focusing on fuel poverty will take place at 12:30pm-2pm on the 12th March at the Scottish parliament.

Potential future meeting topics:

- Mental health and housing – Scottish Association for Mental Health
- Shelter's Making Renting Right Campaign
- Smith Commission
- Housing Minister – Margaret Burgess MSP
- Housing for prisoners when they are released, to be led by Joe Bowden, Positive Prison.

Action - It was agreed that TIS would email absent members of the meeting to seek approval to share members contact details in order to create an active network outside of the meetings.

6. AOCB

None.

7. Date of next meeting and close

Thursday 12th March 2015, 12:30pm-2pm – Joint meeting with SPREEE to discuss Fuel Poverty

Thursday 26th March 2015, 1pm-2pm

Thursday 28th May 2015, 1pm-2pm

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