

**Minutes of the  
Cross Party Group on Housing  
Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015 at 1pm**

**Present:**

Margaret McDougall MSP  
Ken Macintosh MSP  
Alastair Cameron, Scottish Churches Housing Action  
Ashley Campbell, CIH  
Beth Reid, Crisis  
Caroline Elgar, SAL  
Ciaran McDonald, Age Scotland  
Emma Meldrum, TPAS  
Leanne Thomas, TIS  
Lynda Johnstone, TIS  
Neil Clapperton, Grampian Housing Association  
Rachel Goodwin, ESPC  
Stephen Young, Civil Engineering Contractors Association  
Susan Mendelovitch, Housing Options Scotland

**In attendance:**

Laura Calder, Audit Scotland  
Colin McFarlane, Indigo  
Derek Logie, Rural Housing Scotland  
Tristan Compton, NLA  
Julie Gonzalez-Bradley, TIS

**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  
Hew Edgar, RICS  
Debbie King, Shelter  
Wayne MacKay, Electrical Safety First  
Sarah-Jane Laing, Scottish Land & Estates  
Gordon Nelson, Federation of Master Builders  
Annie Mauger, CIH

**2. Minutes of the previous meeting**

Hew Edgar, RICS noted his apologies at the meeting which took place on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

**3. AGM**

The AGM was inquorate and deferred to the next meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

#### **4. Presentation on affordable housing and its impact on local economies – presented by Derek Logie, Chief Executive, Rural Housing Scotland.**

Rural Housing Scotland (RHS) is a small charity that works to deliver affordable housing opportunities in rural communities, and to highlight the extent and nature of rural housing issues. RHS has two members of staff and also operate the Our Island Home project which aims to enable young islanders to remain and return to their communities.

Rural Scotland has a housing problem:

- house prices have increased faster in rural areas
- rural Scotland has half the level of social housing found in urban areas
- rural areas receive half the level of investment their populations share merits
- lack of affordability is most acute in rural Scotland
- there are fewer first time buyers in rural Scotland
- 1 in 8 of all housing in remote rural areas is empty
- 63% of remote rural households are in fuel poverty
- building affordable rural housing is difficult and expensive

The supply of affordable rented housing is crucial to the development and sustainability of rural Scotland, and the shortage of affordable rural housing is a significant barrier to rural development and economic growth- the lack of affordable housing forces young people to leave rural Scotland, and makes it difficult for businesses to find and retain staff.

Alan Sutherland MD of Marine Harvest recently commented that “One of the things that can hold back development in remote communities is a shortage of housing”.

As well as creating the environment for existing business to thrive, the development of affordable housing also helps new businesses to thrive, by providing an affordable and secure home.

On Gigha the development of 18 new affordable houses by Fyne Homes on land made available by the community has led to a huge population increase and the development of 10 new businesses.

#### **Discussion regarding affordable housing and its impact on local economies.**

- Construction workers in rural areas have the required skills, without necessarily having qualifications, such as SVQ's. This has meant that small companies are finding it difficult to take on apprentices due to the Government's new scheme. Furthermore, rural development can be expensive as a lack of qualified builders in the local area, results in companies paying travel and subsistence for other builders.
- There is half the level of investment in social housing in rural areas compared to urban areas. There is a need to analyse housing needs in rural areas, as currently rural needs are ignored in consultation. It was noted that the Rural Housing Fund emphasizes the need for rural social housing.

- Social housing providers can access land in larger communities such as Council Land or land that has been zoned for housing, this option is not available in rural communities.
- Homelessness in rural areas is significantly hidden as it manifests itself in certain ways. For example, individuals rent holiday property in the winter and move into a caravan in the summer. Often properties in rural communities are second homes.
- Rents across Scotland in the Private Rented Sector in rural areas are very varied. For example, the rents in the Scottish Borders are much lower than what they are in Mull.
- Individuals living in rural areas do not have the option to change to cheaper fuel types, and if there is the option, many choose not to change. This needs to be addressed, for example by encouraging those in rural areas to start fuel buying clubs.
- There is a need to insulate older properties in rural areas. However, there is a lack of funding available, or if it is available, there is a lack of access to quality advice and information about the options.
- It was suggested that Local Authorities should be looking at 'exception land' - the land around villages and towns that could be used for housing if the need for it can be shown.
- Rural Housing Scotland have experience carrying out needs assessment in rural communities. Representatives from the organisation recently met with the Housing Minister about the importance of Social Housing in rural areas. Their Annual Conference is being held on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> February 2016 in Dunkeld.

It was agreed that the Cross Party Group will write to the Margaret Burgess MSP, Housing Minister about the importance of land reform and social housing.

## **5. Cross Party Group Business**

Margaret McCulloch MSP joined the meeting at this point.

Potential future meeting topics:

- Housing for prisoners when they are released, to be led by Pete White, Positive Prison. This could be tied in with The Community Justice Bill.
- Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Bill. Suggested presenter is Jim Bauld from TC Young Solicitors.
- Right to Rent – Home Office

## **6. AOCB**

- It was noted that Tristan Compton will be leaving the National Landlords Association. A new representative will attend the Cross Party Group on Housing meetings.
- National Homelessness Conference is taking place on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015 in Edinburgh

**7. Date of next meeting and close**

- Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015, 1pm-2pm

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