

Strategic Housing Policy

Summary and Recommendations

This report provides the Community Wellbeing Board with an update on the Housing Bill, as well as on the Housing SIG, Housing to 2040 Strategic Advisory Board and the recently established Housing Investment Taskforce (HIT).

This paper invites members to:

- i. Note the Housing Bill that was published last month;
- ii. Provide initial views and comments on the overall content of the Housing Bill;
- iii. Agree COSLA's proposed activities on the Housing Bill;
- iv. Note the updates on the Housing SIG, Housing Investment Taskforce and Housing to 2040 SAB; and
- v. Provide any views and comments on strategic housing policy developments.

References

Previous reports:

- 24-02-16 Strategic Housing Policy
- 23-12-08 Housing to 2040 and Housing SIG
- 23-10-20 Solace Housing Report

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Strategic Housing Policy

Purpose

1. This report provides the Community Wellbeing Board with an update on the Housing Bill, as well as on the Housing SIG, Housing to 2040 Strategic Advisory Board and on the recently established Housing Investment Taskforce (HIT).

Current COSLA Position

Housing Bill

2. On 26 March, 2024 the long awaited Housing Bill¹ was published. It covers a wide range of issues relating to housing and homelessness prevention. The Bill is intended to contribute to a well regulated rented sector, which balances the needs of tenants and landlords. Its' provisions are to deliver the Scottish Government's rented sector strategy and policy proposals for housing set out in Housing to 2040, while also seeking to deliver on the ambition to end homelessness.
3. Additionally, the Housing Bill will introduce 'Ask and Act' that is intended to create a shared public responsibility to prevent homelessness. The bodies covered by 'Ask and Act' are listed in the Bill and include local authorities. The Bill is also intended to make changes to existing homelessness legislation to allow for early intervention by local authorities. It also includes measures for social landlords, including local authorities.
4. The Housing Bill's main parts cover:
 - the rent paid by tenants under private residential tenancies;
 - duties placed on First-tier tribunals and the Courts relating to evictions,
 - new rights e.g. private housing tenants to be able to make changes to properties they rent,
 - changes to other matters affecting tenants e.g. allowing a single tenant to end a joint tenancy, and
 - homelessness prevention and other housing issues.
5. COSLA officers are currently working with ALACHO to understand the full implications of the Housing Bill that will be discussed in greater depth with members at a future meeting of the Housing Conveners Forum to be confirmed on a date next month.

¹ [Introduced | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

Housing Special Interest Group (SIG)

6. At the last meeting of the Housing SIG on 7 March several external partner agencies contributed to the meeting from the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT), Homes for Scotland and the National Association of Landlords.
7. The Housing SIG heard that the SFT have a range of experience in public sector housing and it was agreed that the SFT would return to a future meeting of the SIG to provide further updates on their work on vacant land and long lease arrangements. There was also discussion regarding the potential benefits of developing a national database of vacant land held by public bodies which may be suitable for housebuilding.
8. Jane Wood, Chief Executive of Homes for Scotland (HfS) attended the meeting along with John Blackwood, Chair of the Scottish Association of Landlords (SAL). Members noted the work being undertaken by HfS and were advised of the impact of declining numbers of SME housebuilders, the challenges posed by the Scottish Government's net zero ambitions and regulations preventing investment.
9. Additionally, John Blackwood noted that a significant proportion of the Association's members have sold at least one property over the last twelve months, with a survey highlighting a perceived hostility to the sector and the impact of the cost of living crisis. The meeting also noted that over 40% of landlords in the Association had raised rents in the past twelve months.

Housing Investment Taskforce (HIT)

10. Members may be aware that the Housing Minister over the last several months has referred to the need to bring more funding into the housing sector and to underline the opportunities for institutional investment within local authority areas.
11. Given the even greater pressures on housing in Scotland with the significant cut to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget, as well as yet another local authority namely Fife Council declaring a housing emergency, it is felt important that these potential opportunities are given serious consideration where they might provide additional housing through partnership with the private sector.
12. The Housing Investment Taskforce (HIT) chaired by the Housing Minister met for the first time on 5 April and was attended by a range of major private investors. From the local Government side was Cllr Chalmers and a senior COSLA Officer as well as 3 ALACHO representatives. The remit of the Taskforce is to build investor confidence and attract further capital investment into housing and unlock financial commitments. It aims to encourage new delivery partnerships and identify ways to shift the balance of investment in affordable housing to increase private funding.
13. The first meeting of the Taskforce set the scene over the need to attract investment to create more homes. It covered governance arrangements, conflict of interest declarations and the intended programme of meetings to March 2025, and the indicative workplan. Board Members will be kept updated on how this work progresses, as well as how it will align with work of the Housing SIG.

Housing to 2040 Strategic Advisory Board

14. The Housing to 2040 Strategic Advisory Board (SAB) held a special workshop on 8 February. The session was dominated by a discussion around the significant cut to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP). This was not what the workshop session had been intended to cover when it was planned months before.
15. It is proposed that another meeting of the Housing to 2040 SAB will take place later in May or early June and cover issues such as housing supply and the review of the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP). As well as the potential development of an action tracker and risk register for the SAB.

What is Changing?

Housing Bill

16. The Scottish Govt have stated that the Housing (Scotland) Bill fulfils their 2023-24 Programme for Government commitment to bring forward a Housing Bill to deliver their 'New Deal for Tenants'; continued reform of the rented sector, with some aspects of the 'Housing to 2040' strategy; and contributing to the ambition to end homelessness in Scotland.
17. The Bill covers a wide range of issues that include rent control areas, capping of rent increases, duties to consider delays to evictions, damages for unlawful eviction, making changes to home, keeping pets, unclaimed tenancy deposits and registration of letting agents.
18. Additionally, the Bill covers ending joint tenancies, social landlords giving notice of rent increases, converting older properties, homelessness prevention, tenants affected by domestic abuse, residential mobile homes, new homes ombudsman, fuel poverty strategy and periodic reports.
19. At this initial stage some of the key concerns of COSLA are the significant resource implications of the proposed homelessness prevention duty and rent controls that appear to be significantly underestimated in the Bill's financial memorandum. As well as the potential of proposed rent controls deterring future investment in housing in Scotland from private investors.
20. It is proposed that a meeting of the Housing Conveners Forum is held on a date to be confirmed in late May or early June to provide the opportunity for a 'deep dive' session on the Housing Bill that will involve the Minister for Housing and Minister for Tenants' Rights.

Housing Special Interest Group (SIG) and Housing Investment Taskforce

21. At the last Housing SIG on 7 March an indicative Workplan was agreed for the months ahead as well as an in person meeting be held in June. Additionally, it was agreed that a meeting to consider funding for housing and potential finance models be brought forward to it around the end of April.
22. It has also been proposed that the Housing Minister attends the next meeting of the SIG in April so we can align the its' work on funding for housing and potential finance models with the work of the Housing Investment Taskforce. It has also been

proposed that the next meeting of the Housing Investment Taskforce (HIT) will be held in person at Verity House, COSLA offices in June.

Proposed COSLA Position


23. Initial feedback from members of the CW Board on the Housing Bill informs COSLA's future parliamentary work and future engagement with Scottish Ministers on it. As well as the 'deep dive' session of the Housing Conveners Forum to be held in the weeks ahead.
24. Additionally, any comments or reflections from the Board on the Housing Investment Taskforce's work inform the next Housing Special Interest Group's considerations, as well as the next Housing Investment Taskforce to be hosted by COSLA.

Next Steps

25. We will reflect the initial views from the Board on the Housing Bill at the next Housing Conveners Forum in late May and with the Minister for Housing and Minister for Tenants' Rights. In addition, the views of the Board will inform the next Housing SIG, Housing to 2040 SAB and Housing Investment Taskforce meetings.

April 2024

Contribution to agreed COSLA Plan and Verity House Agreement:

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|---|-----------------------------|---|---|
|  | COSLA Plan 22-27 | Priority Areas | |
| | | Strengthen Local Democracy | √ |
| | | Secure Sustainable Funding | √ |
| | | Improve the Wellbeing of Individuals, Families and Communities | √ |
| | | Enhance Education and Support for our Children and Young People | |
| | | Deliver a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy | √ |
| | | Support the Most Vulnerable in our Communities | √ |
| Verity House Agreement | Shared Priorities | | |
| | Tackling Poverty | √ | |
| | Just transition to net zero | √ | |
| | Sustainable Public Services | √ | |