

Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group – 9 am to 12 noon, the Scottish Parliament

Minute of meeting – 12 September 2019

Attendees

Kevin Stewart MSP (Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning; Co-Chair)
Cllr Whitham, COSLA (Community Wellbeing Spokesperson; Co-Chair)
Jon Sparkes, Crisis
Gavin Yates, Homeless Action Scotland
David Duke, Street Soccer Scotland
Gordon MacRae, Shelter Scotland
Polly Jones, SFHA
Lorraine McGrath, Streetwork/Simon Community
Neil Hamlet, NHS Fife
Sabrina Galella, A Way Home Scotland/Rock Trust Coalition
Shea Moran, Aff the Streets
John Kerr, ALACHO
Kathy Cameron, COSLA
Margaret-Ann Brunjes, Glasgow Homelessness Network (Participation Programme discussion only)
Catriona MacKean, Scottish Government
Marion Gibbs, Scottish Government
Hazel Bartels, Scottish Government
Graham Thomson, Scottish Government
Melanie Goodfellow, Scottish Government
Megan Sutherland, Scottish Government and Who Cares Scotland

Apologies

Sally Thomas, SFHA (Polly Jones deputising)
John Mills, ALACHO (John Kerr deputising)
Peter Barry, SOLACE
Janice Stevenson, LGBT Youth Scotland

1. Minutes and actions of last meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting on 11 June were agreed. One amendment was requested to the actions from COSLA about the date for the next Housing Convenors and heads of Housing event. This will now take place on 28 October and not the 8 November.

2. Action Plan priorities

Catriona introduced two related papers. The first paper provided a summary of discussions that were held with HPSG members during July and August about the Action Plan, the work the SG and the HPSG members are taking forward and whether we have the balance of priorities right in the current work programme, recognising that this was agreed by HSPG at the start of the year and that the context continues to evolve, including evidence of continuing and increasing

pressure on homelessness services evidenced by the most recently published statistics in June.

The paper suggested that in order to prioritise Personal Housing Plans and Tenancy Sustainment work, in order to shift towards providing most immediate support to people at risk, Welfare Reform strategy and Prevention Duty work – both of which are longer term projects - would have to slow to allow resources to be re-focused.

The Minister reassured members that although Welfare Reform work would slow in this forum, it was still continuing at pace in other areas of the Scottish Government so the full impact of the cuts could be put to the UK Government.

A discussion also took place about the proposals in the paper and members welcomed the opportunity to review the Action Plan and consider priorities and agreed it was the right time to do this. Members noted that the response to the publication of the Annual Statistics by members of the Group was a well measured one and that the Action Plan would deliver changes in the longer term. There was agreement that focusing on prevention, tenancy sustainment and prevention pathways would have a positive impact in the short-term, which is the right balance to aim for. However, members also noted concerns around slowing work on Prevention Duty and Jon Sparkes asked members what work they could do to ensure this could be progressed while SG officials focussed on other priorities. SG officials will consider this offer and take discussions forward in the coming weeks.

There was also discussion about the reprioritisation of Personal Housing Plans with Gordon MacRae highlighting Shelter's expertise in this area.

Members then moved on to note the extension of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order (UAO) announced in the Programme for Government and discussed concerns about the pace of the changes and if Local Authorities had the resources to manage these. Members noted that it would be unhelpful to slow the transformational changes needed across the sector. Examples were cited of local authorities who were struggling to meet existing statutory responsibilities with Glasgow City Council's (GCC) high volumes of 'failure to accommodate' highlighted.

Marion gave an update on the progress of the current SG voluntary review that is underway within GCC as two meetings have now taken place. GCC have collated their 'failure to accommodate' data and are now investigating the information behind this to get a better understanding of it. The main focus is on responding to poor recording and poor case work as some of the cases should not have been flagged up or managed in the way they have been. They have begun to clean up their statistics and this should allow a clearer picture. The Minister also highlighted that he had met with the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) in recent weeks to discuss their role to support Local Authorities and export best practise across Scotland.

The Minister asked officials to look at the Action Plan priorities paper again, noting members' concerns.

The second paper provided a stocktake of progress on delivery of the commitments within the Ending Homelessness Together (EHT) Action Plan. Members asked for an update on the publication of the changes to the Code of Guidance. Catriona noted that this was in the final stages and is likely to be published in November.

ACTION:

- **Consider how all members could support the continuation of the Prevention Duty work as suggested by Jon Sparkes. (SG homelessness team)**
- **Officials to review the priorities paper noting concerns raised by members. (SG homelessness team)**
- **Develop policy options for a national Personal Housing Plan model (Shelter and SG homelessness team)**

3. Programme for Government funding announcements

The Minister asked members for their views and feedback on the paper. Members welcomed the introduction of further funding, particularly for Third Sector organisations. Members did raise concerns that the Housing Voluntary Grant Scheme was not being opened in 2020/21 and that the messaging around this change could have been clearer. There was a particular concern from Shelter Scotland about how this may impact on their legal advice and support service and noted that it is important to ensure this isn't lost. The Minister wanted to reassure members that the new funding application was open to any Third Sector organisation and would welcome innovative work, aligned with the Action Plan or RRTPs.

The Homelessness Prevention Fund for Registered Social Landlords was welcomed by members who commented that there is a lot of good practice amongst RSL's already. SFHA commented that it will be important to effectively target the limited pot to ensure maximum impact. SFHA agreed to produce a paper for Scottish Government officials with their thoughts on the criteria and framing of the fund. Simon Community Scotland would also welcome involvement with this and will undertake some mapping work in partnership with SFHA to identify gaps and areas of good practice.

Discussion then turned to the progress and focus that has been made by Job Centre Plus in terms of staff training on the implications of welfare reform and the impacts this can have on homelessness. The Minister noted that there are already good links between Job Centre Plus and the Scottish Social Security Agency.

ACTION:

- **SFHA and Simon Community Scotland to undertake mapping work to inform the framing of the Homelessness Prevention fund. (SFHA and Simon Community)**
- **SFHA to produce a paper for Scottish Government officials with their thoughts on framing and criteria of the fund.**

4. The Unsuitable Accommodation Order and Temporary Accommodation standards consultation updates

Agenda item 5 was taken next while officials awaited the arrival of the guest speaker for item 4.

Graham introduced the paper and outlined the work that had been undertaken so far since the closure of the consultation on improving temporary accommodation standards. The independent analysis of the consultation is expected to be published by the end of October. The next steps include working in partnership with all Local Authorities with the view to introducing the legislation at the beginning of 2020.

Members broadly welcomed these changes and supported seeing the inclusion of third sector partners in this work. Nonetheless concerns were raised over how quickly these changes were being implemented and it was noted that a small number of Local Authorities would need additional support to implement these. The Minister and officials highlighted that there is an on-going dialogue with these Local Authorities and that there was a recognition that there is a number of things to work through to achieve this ambitious change to a challenging timetable.

The discussion then turned to how this would impact on the current iteration of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans and how some RRTPs would need to be adjusted to reflect the new legislative requirement by 2021. Members agreed that any loss of momentum would be unhelpful as a lot of good work has already been done. In providing a brief update on the progress of RRTP work, Marion highlighted that the majority of RRTPs already considered the changes needed to eradicate the use of B&B accommodation, apart from in emergency situations.

Across RRTP development and refinement, officials continue to have open discussions with all Local Authorities about their plans. There is continued encouragement to work with any relevant partners to support the implementation of the plans and the RRTP sub-group is taking forward how to export best practice.

Catriona highlighted to members that the Code of Guidance refresh in November will also include advisory temporary accommodation standards. The Minister particularly recognised the work of Ruth Whatling and team on the Code of Guidance. Graham advised members that the work on advisory standards and the Unsuitable Accommodation Order was being given priority at the moment but that following the publication of advisory standards and the completion of the full consultation analysis, a working group would be set up by the end of the year to take forward work to create a legally enforceable standards framework.

5. Updates and issues arising from the second iteration of the RRTP review and subgroup and a Housing First pathfinders update

Agenda item 6 was taken next and Marion provided a verbal update on the progress of this work. Officials have been focussing on the costings outlined in the plans and were using the Housing First funding as a benchmark. The feedback on the second iteration of the plans will be issued by next week. Officials continue ongoing conversations with COSLA about funding for years 2 and 3 of the plans.

Margaret-Ann Brunjes from the Glasgow Homelessness Network joined the meeting and was invited to give an update for the Housing First Pathfinder Programme. As at the end of August, there were around 120 people housed under this Programme. Work was being done to review the current process to streamline this and increase the pace of getting people into tenancies with the right support as learning is gathered from the first phase of the programme.

The Minister wanted to highlight to members the announcement made in July about the increase of funding to £24 million for RRTPs.

Members wanted more information on whether the second iteration of the plans were going back to Councils to be reviewed and what was being done by Local Authorities to manage the risks involved in the Welfare Reforms.

Marion advised that the second iteration/response to areas for development will be feedback to Local Authorities next week. There was reflection that the iterative nature of developing the plans will likely be helping to keep this work high on the priority list in local areas. It was highlighted that whether to take further iterations to committee was a decision of the Local Authority and not something officials were being prescriptive about. Marion also advised that Welfare Reform risks were also being considered by each Local Authority and the Minister reiterated work around this concern continues across other areas of the Scottish Government.

There was further discussion around RRTPs and what issues this highlighted around the housing supply and how this could be fed in to the Housing to 2040 work. Marion informed members that officials were linking in with relevant colleagues on this. Members also suggested it would be helpful to see more involvement from Registered Social Landlords and Marion advised all Local Authorities were being encouraged to link with all relevant partners where appropriate.

COSLA asked for more information on work that was undertaken around buy back tax and what impact this was having. Officials will link with relevant colleagues and provide members with an update.

The final part of the conversation focused on the youth homelessness involvement in RRTPs. Hazel advised the group that she was linking in with Marion on this aspect and that work was on-going in this field.

ACTION:

- **Officials will get more information on the buy-back tax work and update members. (SG homelessness team)**

6. Participation Programme

Item 4 was taken next and Graham introduced the paper and highlighted the workshop that took place on 3 September to progress this work. Margaret-Ann Brunjes was invited to give an update on the workshop for members.

Around 60 people attended the workshop and the aim of the day was to promote the key messages and seek potential membership of the change team. It was agreed that the Change Team would become a sub-group of the HPSG and it was suggested that David Duke could act as the linking member of HPSG, with updates to be given at all subsequent HPSG meetings as a standing item. It was noted by members and Maggie that further work on membership was needed and the aim was to link in with existing structures and organisations.

Members requested officials shared a map of the range of groups relating to HPSG to allow everyone to keep track of on-going work and to understand who is feeding in to discussions. This will help to shape the agendas and discussions for meetings and inform next steps.

ACTION:

- **David Duke to work with officials to agree approach to linking Change Team and HPSG**
- **Officials will share a map of groups with members. (SG Homelessness team)**

7. Prevention Pathways update

Hazel introduced the papers and highlighted that the work on the care leavers prevention pathways was continuing at pace, with thanks to Megan's paper (also provided to members). The expectation is that the pathway will be published in October to coincide with World Homelessness Day. This work has also helped to galvanise the work around a youth homelessness pathway.

Hazel also provided a brief update on the progression of the other pathways, which was welcomed by members who were pleased that this work was being undertaken simultaneously to ensure it was done as quickly as possible and not on an individual basis.

Members highlighted that it would be helpful if stronger connections were made with the Independent Care Review findings and to ensure Local Authorities were ready to implement the Care Leavers pathway effectively.

8. AOB

Catriona advised that a winter plan update would be given at the next meeting, but proposed to issue information to members over the coming weeks to ensure they are kept sighted on this work as it progresses.

Members also wanted to highlight the importance of the input from relevant Health colleagues on homelessness.

Shelter Scotland invited members to sign up to their campaign for safe and secure homes for everyone.

Catriona provided a brief update to members on internal SG work regarding the implications of Brexit. There are no plans to slow the work that is underway on

homelessness, SG recognises that there may be a need to adjust depending on the outcome of discussions of the UK Government.

Catriona also wanted to highlight the progress of the work being undertaken to support women and homelessness, which is being led by the Cabinet Secretary. More information will be issued to members before the next meeting.

ACTION:

- **Officials will share winter planning and women and homelessness work updates with members shortly. (SG Homelessness team)**

Future 2019 meetings: 10 December – 09:00-12:00