



EDINBURGH TENANTS  
FEDERATION

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Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations

## Minutes of ETF High Flats Meeting

Monday 29<sup>th</sup> August 2022

### Birnies Court Community Room

Present: Betty Stone, Birnies Court Tenants Association  
Robyn Kane, Moredun Multis and Maisonettes Residents Association  
Harry Woodward, Maidencraig Court  
Fiona Wilson, Dunsyre House

ETF: Mark Henry

CEC: Councillor Cammy Day, Leader of City of Edinburgh Council and Jane Meagher, Convenor of Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

#### 1. Welcome and introductions

Betty welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the guest speakers, Councillor Cammy Day, Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) and Councillor Jane Meagher, Convenor of the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee.

#### 2. Apologies

John MacLean Abercrombie and Damien May.

#### 3. Guest Speakers

Councillor Day thanked the members for the invite to tonight's meeting and noted that his group formed a Minority Administration after May's Local Government elections. He is the leader of CEC and Councillor Mandy Watt is the Deputy Leader and colleagues within the group are Convenors of the respective committees. There are 13 group members out of 63 Councillors, which means they need to work with other parties within CEC as they are a Minority Administration.

Councillor Day introduced Councillor Meagher and spoke about the Administration's priorities:

- Building more affordable homes. The subsidy from the Scottish Government is sometimes not forthcoming. By building Mid-Market-Rent properties, it ensures that tenants don't need to move to private

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housing. The Administration is planning to build 25,000 homes over the next 10 years, which will be challenging as construction and labour costs are increasing by 30%;

- Building new schools and costs to do this have increased from £90 million to £130 million;
- There has been a rent freeze for the past two years and as a result of the current cost of living crisis, rent rises will be a challenge for many tenants. Rents pay for the installation of Kitchens and Bathrooms and the more rent freezes there are, the less likely CEC will be able to invest in building new homes;
- 6,000 Ukrainians have come to Edinburgh since the outbreak of war and are currently docked in a ship beside Leith Terminal. Finding accommodation for them in Edinburgh will be challenging;
- Bringing in a Rent Pressure Zone, which will ensure there is a cap on rents in the private rented sector;
- Bringing in a legislation for Short Term Lets, which will ensure that owners who want to let out their homes as Air B and B's will need planning permission and a license;
- Ensuring Climate targets are met by 2030. By retro fitting each of the properties in Edinburgh, it will cost millions of pounds;
- An additional £1 million has been given to families whose children are on free meals. Councillor Day noted that the Administration would like to spend more money on this if they were able to;
- CEC currently has £84 million of unclaimed Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) money. How does CEC ensure that tenants receive the best advice possible? Councillor Day noted that locations such as the Millennium Centre are being used for Advice Surgeries. Betty noted advice surgeries are also being held every couple of months in Birnies Court;
- Introducing a Tourist Tax. The Administration campaigned for this as part of a review of taxation and it could provide nearly £15 million of revenue;
- Look at a Work Based Levy, which is aimed at organisations such as the Royal Bank of Scotland and would ensure their workers would need to pay a charge to park their vehicles;
- George Street transformation, which would pedestrianise the area – Buses will need to be re-routed as a result;
- Retail units are lying empty as the planning policy has now changed. This is often an eye sore, so this is a priority;
- The Trams will be extended to Newhaven and there's the possibility of further extension to Granton/Southside.

Q: Are the Trams still based at the Gogarburn site?

A: Yes

Councillor Day informed the meeting that a lot of time recently has been spent dealing with the Bin Strikes across the city. An offer was made to the Trade Unions today but it was rejected and further discussions are planned in the coming days. It was noted that Edinburgh is currently the lowest funded Council in Scotland. Councillor Day and his colleagues were praised for standing shoulder to shoulder with workers.

Q: If the rent increases by 2%, how does this cover people who are not on benefit? Can it be covered by the Council Tax?

A: We will continue to liaise with the DWP and explore the options.

Councillor Meagher informed the meeting that the Council's Housing Sub Group met with their case workers to discuss buying back homes. As part of the Acquisitions and Disposals Team, if the CEC are in the minority, there is a possibility that the properties can be bought. However it is important that CEC follow the correct criteria. It was noted that there are 12 properties in Moredun that are willing to buy back.

Q: There have been ongoing issues with the windows in the six Moredun flats. We have been told to wait until the Stock Condition Survey takes place, however the heat escapes from the windows in the six properties and some tenants have suffered from pneumonia. I have been waiting for my windows to be replaced for five years. There have been security issues with regards to the front and back doors and the Police Force in the area has been diminished.

A: I will take this up with the Head of Service and liaise with Councillor Cameron.

It was noted that it will be important that non-housing projects are not funded out of the Housing Revenue Account. It was suggested that green space projects can apply to the Lord Provost's Fund.

Q: Training for all CEC staff needs to be improved. Arrears is a big issue and the necessary training needs to be provided to ensure staff are speaking properly to tenants who are struggling and that they will get the necessary support if required. Sheriff Officers letters are added to tenants' rents.

A: I will feed this back to CEC Officers. It should be noted that restrictions and lockdown has had an adverse effect on many staff members. The pandemic should have brought in more training to ensure the right support is in place for CEC Officers.

Councillor Meagher asked the meeting to give her examples of something which is not working well and she will ensure steps are taken to address this. It was suggested that Councillor Meagher speak to Officers on the Mental Health Awareness Group. When many tenants move into their homes, they are not in a habitable state. The Housing Revenue Account Sub Group had previously looked at this as a Tenant Scrutiny exercise.

Another option could be holding Housing Roadshows and ask relevant agencies to attend. It was noted that ETF already has plans in place to hold Housing Roadshows next year.

Many families, children and parents coming out of care can't afford to live in Edinburgh due to the cost of rent and other aspects, therefore more support is needed from the Scottish Government.

It was noted that in one particular area, six homes are currently lying empty, but this is being replicated all across the city. In many cases, CEC is still receiving rent for the empty properties.

Q: Is Spaces for People temporary or permanent?

A: We are changing the name and infrastructure. A number of projects were removed and some are up for further discussions. It was noted that there is

currently a hazard at Old Dalkeith Road and Councillor Day and Meagher agreed to look into it.

4. Minute of Previous Meeting, Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021

The minute of the meeting was agreed as being a true record and was proposed by Robyn Kane and seconded by Fiona Wilson.

5. Matters Arising not on the agenda

Page 2: Fiona informed the meeting that there are issues with the windows in both Dunsyre House North and South. Mark will get in touch with Michaela Smith. **Action: Mark**

Page 2: It was noted that the last meeting was scheduled to take place in June 2021. Mark informed the meeting that it was agreed to postpone future meetings as it needed to tie in with the review of the Tenant Participation and Scrutiny Framework. This piece of work is almost complete.

Page 2: Mark will ask for an updated copy of CEC's Anti-Social Behaviour figures. **Action: Mark**

Page 3: Mark will ask for an update on CEC's Lift Installation Programme. **Action: Mark**

6. Local Area Reports

**Maidencraig Court:** Harry informed the meeting that owners in the block were given a letter with regards to the heating in the block. However the three tenants living in the block were not informed. There is uncertainty about long term plans for the area, including any future Neighbourhood Programmes (NEPs). Mark stated that he will ask George Norval for an update. Furthermore, he will request a list of all current and future NEPs at the next Repairs and Performance Meeting in October. This was agreed. **Action: Mark**

**Calders:** It was noted that there are problems with the windows and Mark has already agreed to investigate. Fiona is concerned that there are no resources in the area for children to play in.

**Moredun:** Robyn informed the meeting that plans for the green space are moving forward. There have been ongoing meetings with CEC officers with regards to repairs in the area. More investment is needed in the area. The group held their Annual General Meeting (AGM) recently and Robyn in the chair of the group.

**Muirhouse:** Betty informed the meeting that Gunnet Court is now finished and there are ongoing works in May Court.

7. Any Other Competent Business

Mark informed the meeting of the forthcoming ETF events, including:

- ETF will be hosting a Scottish Housing Day Coffee Morning in Norton Park on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> September;
- A Federation Meeting '*Roundtable Discussions*' will take place in the City Chambers on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> October. (post meeting note, this

has been changed to a Federation Planning Meeting and will take place in Norton Park on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> October). The 'Roundtable Discussions' will take place later in the year;

- ETF's AGM will take place in Boroughmuir Rugby Club on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> November. It will also include a social event.

8. Items for next meeting

To be confirmed.

9. Date and venue of next meeting

Provisionally Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November, however this will be confirmed nearer the time

Betty closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

Mark Henry