

Tenants Voice

Issue 113 - August 2021



EDINBURGH TENANTS
FEDERATION

Edinburgh Tenants Federation AGM

Here we go again - it seems no time at all since the last one, but we are busy planning our AGM for 2020/21.

The event itself will take place on the evening of **Friday 29th October 2021** so please put this date in your diary. There are a few important dates before then that might also be worth noting in your diary. For this year, we will again, be holding the event online as things are still not clear on what restrictions will be in place on the date chosen. I'm sure if you speak to anyone who attended last year's AGM you will hear that the event dealt with the required business but still contained some fun elements that everyone enjoyed.



The process for all the procedures that we must follow has a few stages and hopefully this article will explain these, and the dates attached to each of the steps.

The first mailing of papers took place on **19th July 2021** and contained an invitation for your member group to submit any resolution directing the Executive Committee to take any particular step (or directing the Executive Committee not to take any particular step) and any proposed amendments to ETF's Constitution. Any resolutions or proposed amendments to the Constitution must be received in the Federation Office by **27th August 2021** for them to be considered at the Annual General Meeting.

A second mailing will take place around 31st August 2021 and will contain the papers for the Annual General Meeting including:

- Agenda;
- Minutes of the AGM held in 2020;
- Submitted resolutions and proposals to amend the Constitution;
- Invitation to submit a membership application for your Tenants' and Residents' group to become a member of ETF or for you to become an individual member of ETF;
- And an invitation to nominate a member of your group to join the Federation's Executive Committee (EC).

Applications to become a member of ETF and nominations to become an EC member must be received in the Federation office by **Friday 15th October 2021**. If anyone in your group is interested in becoming an EC member and would like a chat about what is involved in the role, please contact us and we can explain what is involved.

So to recap – the important dates are:

- First mailing posted out by ETF **Monday 19th July 2021**;
- Deadline for proposals to amend the constitution and resolutions **Friday 27th August 2021**;
- Second mailing posted out by ETF on approx.. **Tuesday 31st August 2021**;
- Deadline for membership applications and EC applications **Friday 15th October 2021**;
- Annual General Meeting **Friday 29th October 2021**.

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As indicated at the start of this article we are busy planning the event and more details will be sent out soon. In the meantime if you would like to discuss anything mentioned here please contact us on 0131 475 2509 or email info@edinburghtenants.org.uk.

We look forward to seeing you at the AGM and helping us to celebrate another successful year of your Federation.

Update from ETF

As restrictions across the country start to ease, it's great that we are able to return to a bit of normality. However at the present, the Federation Office remains closed and staff continue to work from home. ETF is still operating Monday to Friday, during this time, and staff can be contacted via email at info@edinburghtenants.org.uk or phone 0131 475 2509.

The Albion Trust continues to have ongoing discussions with the Scottish Government, other Norton Park service users and ourselves. ETF staff and volunteers will shortly be meeting to discuss how the Federation will operate once restrictions have been lifted and we will keep you updated. In the meantime, stay safe and take care.



Working Online

As we are still unable to meet in person, all of our work is currently online, and we hold our meetings on Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Although restrictions are beginning to ease, it is likely that online work will remain in place for ETF for the foreseeable future. Therefore, one of the biggest continuing priorities for the Federation as we move forward, is digital working and training.



If you are uncertain about how to go online for meetings, don't worry as ETF will be able to offer any support you need. If you have a smartphone, tablet or computer and would like to take part or know more, please email ETF's Development Worker Mark Henry at

EC Review Day

Every year, ETF's Executive Committee (EC) holds their review day, which is usually a face to face event. However due to current circumstances, this year's review session was held via Zoom on Tuesday 18th May 2021.

The aims of the review session were:

- Identify what ETF has performed well in over the year;
- What could be improved;
- Aspects of ETF's work that have not been implemented and reasons why;
- Opportunities and challenges for the Federation;
- Workload and actions for the year ahead.

Overall it was a very positive review session with lots of ideas being generated and discussed. Some of the themes emerging from the review session included:

- EC members would like to see the Federation introduce a plan to move forward once the pandemic is over;
- As online work is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, expanding ETF's online digital work and ensuring training is available for those who need it is a massive opportunity for the Federation;
- ETF should continue with its current communication methods and also look at introducing new and innovative ways to reach more tenants within Edinburgh;
- Completing ETF's Governance review is seen as a huge priority for the Federation.

The findings from the EC Review Day report will contribute towards ETF's Work Plan for 2021/2022.

Locality Teams and Local Group Updates

Here is an update on what ETF's EC members and local groups have been up to over the past few months.

North West Locality Report – Birnies Court

It was nice to see that the area surrounding Birnies Court has been tidied up and I hope it will continue to be kept tidy. The lift programme is in progress in Birnies and Fidra Courts. Hopefully the refurbishment work will now start in Gunnet and May Courts soon. I'd like to praise the Concierge staff for all the hard work they have been carrying out since the start of the pandemic. They have been keeping the blocks clean and safe for all tenants. Well done to all the staff involved.

Betty Stone



North East Locality Reports

I met with Libby Strong and the team from the North East Locality. Whilst there are ongoing COVID-19 issues, staff have covered quite a lot of ground from repairs and voids to homelessness.



A common thread through the pandemic is the inability of tradespeople to access homes which require the coordination of what trades are available when an emergency arises. The meeting was positive and quite a few issues were addressed. I was informed that the forthcoming work at the 'Mounds' in Newcraighall is 'out to tender' and will hopefully start shortly. We're hoping that restrictions can continue to be lifted soon and the Hub at Craigmillar Library will reopen.

Sue Taylor

Within the Leith/North East area there are quite a number of housing sites being developed including Leith Walk, Bonnington and Ocean Terminal to name a few. These are a mixture of mid-market rented properties and social housing.

Despite the Hub at Leith Library remaining closed, Jennifer Lavery and the team have been busy addressing issues such as void and abandoned homes. As a result; quite a few properties are now part of the mainstream housing in Edinburgh. As restrictions continue to ease, it is hoped that the Hubs will be able to reopen.



A system which seems to be working well within the above areas is the Door Entry Systems being installed in properties. This project is to ensure all tenement properties benefit from the grants available to both tenant and owner/occupied properties. This type of work is being carried out a lot in the city, particularly in the North East Locality. The housing staff in the North East Locality are working hard to ensure that tenants are satisfied with the work being carried out and all issues are resolved.

Davie Thomson

Update from Laichfield

It's been an uncertain time for the residents of Laichfield Sheltered Housing complex and Chesser Loan. At the moment, we are uncertain as to when our community hall will be able to re-open, as it has been closed since March last year due to the pandemic. Inspectors need to look at the hall's facilities to see what work needs to be carried out to ensure it is able to re-open safely. We have been advised that rules and regulations will be in place within the hall, which includes a reduced number of people allowed in at any one time and social distancing rules in place as well.

I can only hope that the hall can reopen soon as the residents have badly missed this facility and there is no alternative venue in place at the moment for people to meet up. We held a number of classes in the hall before the pandemic, including arts, games, lunch clubs and bingo. We also held all our social evenings in the hall, which were always very well attended. The Residents Association will work with the Council to come to some sort of agreement that will allow the hall to re-open when it is safe to do so. Watch this space for further details.

Christine Hudson, Chair, Laichfield Community Association

Update from Willowbrae and Duddingston Residents Association

It certainly has been a busy time for Willowbrae and Duddingston Residents Association, which represents sheltered housing tenants on Willowbrae Road, Edinburgh.

Firstly, they had the opening of their new summer house by ETF's Convenor Betty Stone on Friday 14th May 2021. The summer house was funded by donations from the OneCity Trust and Travis Perkins Community Benefits Fund. The event was well attended by tenants living in the complex who are looking forward to using the summer house.

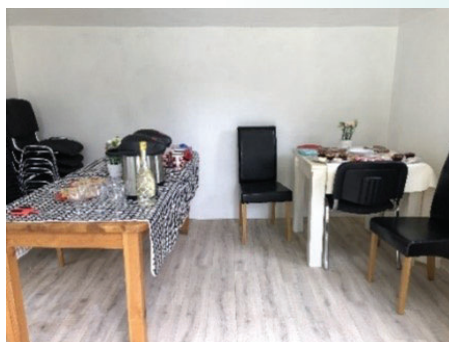


ETF's Convenor Betty Stone officially opens Willowbrae's new summer house

The Association then held their Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 19th May 2021, which was chaired by Betty Stone. Eight new members were elected to serve on the committee.

Willowbrae and Duddingston's Treasurer Sue Taylor commented "We would like to thank Travis Perkins and OneCity Trust for awarding us the grant in order that we could have our summer house built. We would also like to thank Ideal Flooring in Musselburgh who laid the flooring in our summer house free of charge. It was great to finally open our summer house after not being able to use it for over a year due to the COVID restrictions."

**Sue Taylor, Treasurer,
Willowbrae and Duddingston
Residents Association**



The new summer house



Residents relaxing in the new summer house.

Update from Drylaw/Telford

The Coronavirus Pandemic has been a very worrying time for everyone over the last 18 months, and no more so than for young people who have had nowhere to meet as local youth clubs, community centres and other venues have sadly remained closed. Of course, this means more folk tend to congregate in our local streets and although not all down to young people, the lack of places to go has meant we have seen an increase in antisocial behaviour. So far there has been limited solutions to these issues and we continue to try to answer the key questions of:

- What else can we do?
- Where else can we go?

The community and the young people themselves think it is time we at least try to understand the issues and put some other resources into the area to make it a safe and happy place for all of us to live, places we all can thrive and have things to do with our free time.

Another key issue for the community is Fly Tipping. Few people can take advantage of the Council refuse and recycling points as not everyone has a car and trying to take materials to facilities using public transport is not an option. We would love for the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) to work with us to come up with more localised solutions.

Along with many other areas, roads and pavements require improvements, with potholes and high and overgrown hedges requiring attention to make our streets safe to walk and drive along. Attention to high and overgrown hedges is also required to ensure people, particularly older people and those with mobility problems can safely get out of and into their homes.

On a brighter note, the good news is that most of the people in this area are getting on with what they can. Comradeship is at a high point with many residents in communication with others and are offering a helping hand when needed, including driving others to vaccination appointments, although it would be good if the NHS, CEC and others could come up with a plan to allow people to get the vaccine in their own homes.

We are also working with the Council to improve the stair cleaning, so fingers crossed this will happen soon.

I hope positive community spirit and caring for one another will continue long after the pandemic is over.

Jimmy Galloway, Tenant, Easter Drylaw

IT Equipment

The University of Edinburgh IT re-use project is back up and running after the first lockdown and is keen to donate more desktops, laptops, phones and tablets to local community organisations.

If you are interested or would like to find out more, please email SRS.Department@ed.ac.uk, phone 0131 651 3000 or visit <https://www.ed.ac.uk/sustainability/news/2020/it-reuse-project>.



News from CEC

CEC Empty Homes Officer

CEC now has a dedicated Empty Homes Officer responsible for reducing the number of long term empty private properties in the city. The service operates in conjunction with Shelter's Scottish Empty Homes Partnership. Focus tends to be on properties which have been unoccupied for more than 12 months. These properties attract a Council Tax surcharge of 100% and the service works with the Council Tax department to ensure this is levied as a disincentive to leaving properties idle. However, the aim is to work with owners to reduce the length of time a property remains empty.

The service seeks to assist owners in getting their property reoccupied whether by its sale or through introducing it to the rental market by providing advice and access to information and discounts.

Often ownership of an empty property is unclear when owners have been absent for a long period of time. Tracing of owners is often undertaken, and this can be the key to unlocking properties which would otherwise remain empty for further years to come, particularly where the last owner has passed away.

If you are aware of a domestic property of any type which has been empty for an extended period of time you can report it by email to emptyhomesofficer@edinburgh.gov.uk or phone 07590 21 1082 as empty homes are a wasted resource which could provide a much needed home.

More information can be found on the Council's website at <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/emptyhomes> or Shelter Scotland's Empty Homes Partnership website at emptyhomespartnership.scot/about-us/.

Housing Service Improvement Plan (HSIP)

Work is continuing across a wide range of projects to help improve the housing service. The HSIP is aiming to increase tenant satisfaction with services, improve operational performance and ensure value for money. Work underway includes:

- Improvements to the way neighbourhoods are managed;
- Work to improve the tenant experience of starting a tenancy;
- Ongoing digital improvements to allow tenants to access more services online.

Improvements within the repairs service remain a key area of focus. We want every tenant to receive a high standard of service when they book a repair and we're working hard to continually improve. We're improving how issues and complaints are managed and are developing new ways to keep in touch with you about your repair, including text message reminders. We also want to hear your experiences and are increasing the number of tenants we reach out to at the end of a repair. Look out for invites by email, text and post. Your responses and comments are being regularly reviewed and will help shape the repairs service of the future.

We have recently introduced an improved process for managing issues of dampness, mould and condensation. This focuses on an end-to-end process to make sure the immediate effects are treated, as well as tackling the root cause. You will now be given a named person who is there to keep you updated and make sure your issues are fully resolved. If you are concerned about dampness, mould or condensation in your home, please get in touch with us using the details below.

There are a number of ways to get in touch with us to arrange a repairs appointment:

- www.edinburgh.gov.uk/repairsdirect
- Email RepairsDirect@edinburgh.gov.uk
- phone 0131 200 2345.

You can read more about the improvements that are underway in the reports that were presented to the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee on 3rd June 2021. These papers can be viewed online at <https://democracy.edinburgh.gov.uk/mgchoosedocpack.aspx?id=5693>.

If you would like to be emailed a copy of the reports, or would like to find out more about how you can get involved in service improvement activities, please email HSIP@edinburgh.gov.uk. If you would like to receive paper copies of the reports, please contact Mark Henry, ETF's Development Worker on 07918 742468 and he will liaise with CEC to arrange for the reports to be sent out.

Phillip McAusland, Project Manager, Service Improvement Team, CEC

Council House Buy-back Scheme – Mixed Tenure Project

There's been some recent articles in the newspapers about CEC's Mixed Tenure buy-back project in Murrayburn, so I was pleased when ETF offered me the opportunity to write about this pilot scheme.

CEC tenants want the council to spend a large part of their rents on repairing and renovating their homes to make them safe, welcoming and easier to heat. CEC wants to do that for its tenants, so why not just get on with it?

In some blocks of flats there are CEC tenants, owner-occupiers and landlords all in the same building. This happened because of the sale of council houses under the right-to-buy scheme, which ended in 2005. For some tenants, the right-to-buy was a chance to get their foot on the property ladder at a big discount. Unfortunately, they didn't factor in the cost of paying for the repairs and renovations that would be needed to keep their properties in good condition.

Some of the properties that were sold to tenants were then sold on to landlords. Surely landlords understand that they need to have the money for repairs? It has turned out that actually many of them don't.

The cost per flat of all the work that needs to be done is high and the full surveys to determine what the final costs will be are still going on. There are grants available for the energy-saving improvements but not for the general repairs to roofs, masonry, windows and other necessary works.

This is very worrying for some owner-occupiers, but it would be even more unfair to CEC tenants if their homes couldn't be repaired or improved because a minority of non-CEC owners haven't set aside the money needed to pay their share.

CEC has a responsibility to you, as tenants, to go ahead and make these repairs and the energy-efficiency improvements that you've voted for. Some owners thought CEC should make all the repairs and not charge the owners anything. That would cost millions of pounds which, at the end of the day, would have to be paid for by the rents that you, CEC's tenants, pay.



Mandy Watt



Flats before the work is carried out



Flats after work is carried out

A fairer way forward had to be found. One solution was to offer long-term loans to owners and CEC is making that offer to owners who can't afford to pay for all the repairs right now. Some owners said that a loan wouldn't help them, and CEC decided to offer to buy-back their flats at a reasonable price and allow them to remain in their homes as council tenants. That way, they'd get what their flat was worth - in its current state with a sitting tenant - and they wouldn't have to pay for the planned repairs or any future ones either. They'd pay the same rent as CEC tenants and have the same secure tenancy agreement.

Right now, I can't think of anything else that CEC can do that would be fair to both tenants and owners because tenants want these repairs and improvements to happen, and owners must pay their share. I hope that I've managed to explain this rather complicated situation in a helpful way. If you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch through *Tenants Voice* and we'll get the answers for you.

Councillor Mandy Watt, Depute Convenor for Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Committee

National News

Review of Scottish Social Housing Charter

ETF was delighted to host a Members' Event on Wednesday 23rd June 2021 to discuss and gather your views on the Scottish Government's Consultation on the Scottish Social Housing Charter. The Charter contains the outcomes and standards that all Council and Housing Association Landlords are required to meet on behalf of tenants and other customers, such as applicants, homeless people, factored owners and Gypsy / Traveller Communities.



The Charter covers:

- 32 Local Authorities;
- Around 160 Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations and Co-ops);
- 610,000 tenants;
- 118,500 factored owners;
- 40,000 homeless people and their families;
- 2,000 Gypsy / Travellers.

All Social Housing Landlords must report to the Scottish Housing Regulator annually on how they are performing under each of the Charter Outcomes which cover things like:

THE CUSTOMER / LANDLORD RELATIONSHIP

- Equalities
- Communication
- Participation

HOUSING QUALITY AND MAINTENANCE

- Quality of housing
- Repairs, maintenance, and improvements

NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

- Estate management, antisocial behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes

ACCESS TO HOUSING AND SUPPORT

- Housing options
- Access to housing
- Tenancy sustainment
- Homeless people

GETTING GOOD VALUE FROM RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGES

- Value for money
- Rents and service charges

OTHER CUSTOMERS

- Gypsies and travellers

All of these Outcomes and Standards are very important to tenants and other customers as our landlords must show how well they are delivering these services to us all.

Members at our meeting advised they consider the Charter provides a good outline of what landlords should be doing and helps staff and tenants understand what is working well and what needs to be improved.

Our members also indicated that across Edinburgh there needs to be continuous improvement in how some services are delivered to tenants, particularly quality of housing, housing improvements, availability and access to social housing for homeless people and tenants who may need to move to larger or smaller homes, repairs and maintenance, communication to and with tenants and improved opportunities for tenants to influence landlord decisions and service standards.

All tenants, tenants' organisations and landlords are invited to give feedback to the Scottish Government on the current Charter and what changes or improvements they would like to see. ETF will be submitting a response using the comments made by attendees at the Members' Event and would like to encourage you to find out more about the current Charter and respond to the consultation.

You can find out more about the current Charter on the Scottish Government's Website:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-housing-charter-april-2017/>.

You can respond to the consultation and give your views on the Scottish Government's website:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/charter-review-consultation/>.



National News

The Fight for Home starts here!

Shelter Scotland exists to fight for everyone experiencing problems with their housing – whether that's problems with repairs, a house that doesn't meet their needs or that they are facing homelessness. More than one in three adults living in Scotland today are impacted by the housing emergency – this means an estimated 1.5 million people are currently struggling with their housing. Many people are worried about being able to afford their home over the next year while we are still battling a pandemic, when having a safe home to stay in has been the first line of defence. What is clear, is that Scotland's housing system is broken and biased. We exist to stand alongside everyone who is being failed by this broken system.



People living in Edinburgh are hit hard by the housing emergency. Only 14% of properties in Edinburgh are social homes, compared to the national average which is 23%. The average private sector rent in Edinburgh is £1,336 per month, which means renting privately is completely unaffordable for large numbers of people. High rents and the shortage of social homes places the homelessness system under immense pressure. As a result, we have seen people who are homeless turned away when trying to get temporary accommodation because there are no spaces available. We also see people put into temporary accommodation that doesn't meet their needs, and they sometimes have to stay there for years before they are able to get a permanent home.



If you are angry about how difficult it is to find a safe, affordable home in our city, we understand – we're angry too. Day in and day out, our Advisers in Edinburgh work to find temporary and permanent accommodation for people that meets all of their needs, but this can be very challenging. This is why as well as providing advice and advocacy, we campaign with the people affected to try to change the housing system and fight for more homes to be built. We want a Scotland where no one has to face impossible decisions such as whether to eat, heat their home or pay their rent.

You can be part of the fight. We are rallying the country to end the housing emergency - and this is only the start. With your help, we'll reform private renting, demand more social homes are built, and be there for anyone fighting housing injustice.

You can sign up to Fight for Home at https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/fight_for_home. We will keep you updated on our work, campaigns, fundraising activities, events, volunteering opportunities, and products and services. We will have an update in a future edition of *Tenants Voice*, so watch this space for further details. If you wish to discuss anything further, please email Nicola_Hazelton@shelter.org.uk or phone 0344 515 1368.

Nicola Hazelton, Edinburgh Community Hub Manager, Shelter Scotland

National News

Everyone Aboard

Suzi Murning, Poverty Alliance Campaigns Officer, discusses our new campaign, Everyone Aboard, calling for free bus travel to be extended to everyone receiving Universal Credit and young people under 25.



We all rely on public services – like health and education – to be there for us when we need them. But too often, they simply don't work for people living on low incomes. This is particularly true of our transport system, especially our public buses.

Buses are a vital link to education, employment, and services. They connect people to friends, family, green spaces and help them play an active role in their communities.

So, it cannot be right that those who rely on our buses the most – people on low incomes, young people, women and single mothers – are too often held back from playing a full role in society, and from accessing their rights, because they cannot afford the cost of bus fares.

And the impact of this is profound. As people living on low incomes across Scotland have told us, it can mean making heart-breaking choices between paying an essential bill or visiting a loved one in hospital, between buying food or buying a bus ticket to a job interview. That people have to make these impossible choices is an injustice.

These choices are not new. Even before the pandemic too many people in Scotland were locked out of accessing vital opportunities. Incomes for the least well-off households have fallen while the cost of living has continually increased, including bus fares which rose 18% from 2014-2019.

Since the pandemic hit, it has been those groups who were already most likely to be living in the grip of poverty who have been hardest hit. Young people have disproportionately suffered job losses, pay cuts, disrupted education and a decline in mental health. Families with children have been swept into a rising tide of poverty, and people on low incomes from rural and remote areas in Scotland risk being more cut-off from opportunities than ever before.

But our transport system was designed, so it can be re-designed to work for everyone. Extending free bus travel to those receiving Universal Credit (and other low-income benefits) and under 25s is key to helping ease financial pressures on low-income households, unlocking opportunities, and in bringing us all back together.

The Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament has the chance to build a Scotland for everyone, and to redesign our public services to help create the more just and greener Scotland that we all want to see. To do this, bold action must be taken. Widening access to bus travel by removing financial barriers is the kind of ambitious, forward-thinking policy we need to build a Scotland where no one is left behind. On the road to recovery, we can make sure everyone has a seat, by extending free bus travel to everyone receiving Universal Credit and all young people under 25.



National News

Scottish Government announces £10m grant fund for tenants in arrears due to COVID-19

ETF has welcomed the news that the Scottish Government has announced a £10 million grant fund to support tenants who have fallen into rent arrears as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Deputy First Minister John Swinney announced, *"The Scottish Government has taken action from the outset to support tenants during the pandemic and I'm delighted to announce today that we will go even further by committing to introduce a new £10 million grant fund to support tenants who have fallen into rent arrears as a direct result of the pandemic. We will work towards making this grant fund available later in the year and will work with stakeholders over the coming weeks to develop the details."*



John Swinney

Betty Stone, ETF's Convenor commented, *"It has been a particularly difficult 18 months for many people, so this fund is most welcome. I am glad that the Scottish Government has recognised the seriousness of the situation, with many people suffering in many ways. However, I would encourage the Scottish Government to try and make this fund available sooner as many people can't wait until later in the year for support and need it now."*

Moving Forward

Although I would think most tenants and residents will be pleased at the Council's decision to freeze Council Housing Rent and Council Tax for one year, 2021 - 22, the big question now is, what happens next?

Edinburgh's rents are the highest Council rents in Scotland, and although I understand the cost of materials and services will no doubt increase due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Brexit, I would be very concerned to see increases in tenants' rents. Many people were struggling before the pandemic and this pressure has increased for many over the last year or so, not just in my area of Drylaw, but across the entire city.



I have been a member of CEC's Rent Matters Working Group for a number of years and myself and other tenants on the group are working with the CEC, ETF and TIS staff to review and develop this into a new Housing Service Improvement Plan that will hopefully ensure tenants are fully informed of how key decisions are made so we can help make a difference and hold CEC to account.

Through ETF's joint work with CEC, I hope we can look at housing allocations, improvements, new build homes and finance to ensure we have the good quality homes that we need for the people of Edinburgh. Hopefully as the lockdown restrictions ease, we can get back to some sort of face-to-face contact. I, like many tenants, have struggled to adapt to online working and I feel that face-to-face contact is a better participation method.

I am proud to live in this great city, but we all need to work together to ensure Edinburgh can move forward. Let's do this!

Jimmy Galloway

Let's All Work Together to Ensure Enough Truly 'Affordable' Housing in Edinburgh. Part One - New Social Housing Supply



Craig Sanderson

In this edition of *Tenants Voice*, Craig Sanderson, former Chief Executive of Link Housing and member of the Edinburgh Poverty Commission writes about poverty in Edinburgh and what can be done to overcome this.

One of the most devastating causes of poverty in Edinburgh is the mushrooming cost of sustaining a secure, comfortable home to buy or rent. Surely this is a basic human right? We have to recognise that a house is somewhere to live not a commodity to create personal wealth and to be traded for profit. Our obsession with home ownership has led to an explosion of house prices and (because they are closely linked) private sector market rents. The best solution is to provide enough good quality social housing at rents which households on low or limited fixed incomes can afford and can enjoy satisfactory levels of health and wellbeing living in them.

This in turn requires sufficient capital subsidy from the Scottish Government.

This is not a 'grant' to the council or housing association landlord but an investment in the health and wellbeing of current and future tenants and the Scottish nation as a whole (especially now Right to Buy is scrapped).

In 2016 the Scottish Government set a laudable but challenging target of 50,000 new 'affordable' homes to be completed by 2021, 35,000 of which were to be for social rent. Since then, the combined efforts of the local authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs, aka housing associations) in Scotland had ensured that at least the social homes target would have been met – until the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, some observers/commentators argued throughout this period that this was not sufficient to clear the backlog and meet new needs arising from an ageing population, asylum seekers, refugees, increasing 'homelessness', etc.

Shelter Scotland, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA), the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland (CloHS) had stated more than six years previously that 10,000 new homes for social rent per annum were required. We never got close, the best being 7,000 in one year during the aforementioned 'drive'.

Reflecting both on the target in principle and the shortfall in practice, SFHA, Shelter and CloHS co-commissioned a research report *Affordable Housing Need in Scotland post-2021*. It was a substantial piece of work, interrogating housing need by region and concluded that 53,000 new 'affordable' homes were needed within the following five years. This was immediately welcomed by all three of the commissioning bodies, although the report was silent on the proportion of this total which needed to be for social rent. Subsequently, Shelter Scotland qualified its approval ("We know that Scotland needs another 53,000 affordable homes, including 37,100 for social rent, to meet need.") - and the SFHA and CloHS called for 66% and 70% respectively to be for social rent. These targets were repeated in a report in July 2020 to Scottish Ministers who accepted the recommendations 'in principle' but made no commitment in practice.

At the same time, the Edinburgh Poverty Commission (EPC) was preparing its final report which would include a call for the delivery of an adequate supply of new quality homes for social rent during the next ten years. (The importance of the need for SOCIAL rather than 'affordable' housing cannot be overstated. The term 'affordable' is basically meaningless and is both 'spun' and interpreted in different ways.)

To some, 'affordable' means any tenure type which is less expensive than outright purchase or private sector renting. This term includes 'low-cost home ownership' (LCHO e.g., Shared Ownership) and 'Intermediate' or 'Mid-market' Rent (MMR) and social housing to rent. Others (including the EPC) define it as LCHO and MMR only. Social housing is in our view available at a rent level which allows households on low or fixed incomes to meet their other costs of living while maintaining good health and wellbeing.



EPC spent 18 months talking (and, more importantly, listening) to many people who said that anything more than a social rent level would be way beyond their reach.

This demonstrated that, in Edinburgh at least, the proportion of new 'affordable' supply which is for social housing should be substantially higher.

In September 2020 EPC called for CEC to double its previous target of new social housing supply to 2,000 per annum for at least five years. To its credit, CEC accepted most of the EPC's 'calls' regarding the eradication of poverty in its subsequent *End Poverty in Edinburgh Delivery Plan 2020-30*. Nevertheless, CEC did not approve our call for doubling new social housing supply. I can understand why – to achieve that aim it requires total commitment, concerted effort, help and support not only from CEC itself but also the Scottish Government (particularly), other statutory authorities, the RSLs, private developers, tenants and all their representative bodies (those I've mentioned above - and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Edinburgh Affordable Housing Partnership, TPAS, TIS, Homes for Scotland, The Edinburgh & South East Scotland City Region Deal, ETF, etc.). In June the consultation draft *Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal Regional Prosperity Framework (2021-41)* was published.

It has a couple of a major flaws - social housing is not mentioned and it fails to recognise the potential contribution that housing associations, voluntary/charitable organisations and social enterprises can make to local and regional economies and communities.

And then in July the Scottish Government's research report *The Value, Incidence and Impact of Developer Contributions in Scotland* was further evidence of a lack of collaboration at a strategic planning and policy level about housing and the absence of co-ordination among local authorities, housing associations and private developers with regard to the opportunities offered by 'developer contributions'.

CEC at least agreed to negotiate with the Scottish Government to increase the amount of subsidy (I prefer to call it 'investment') to allow the delivery of a sufficient supply of new social homes - but I'm afraid it will have to do a better job than it has in the past!

For years the share of the Scotland-wide capital grant which Edinburgh has received has been in the region of 8%, compared with Glasgow's 16%.

The amount of capital subsidy (i.e. free money) has a critical effect on the amount of new social homes - the less you get, the fewer you can build.

So, to get a significant volume of new social homes:

- The Scottish Government must increase its current Scotland- wide target of '100,000 affordable homes by 2031/32' (35,000 new social homes within the next 5 years);
- CEC must get a substantial increase in capital subsidy from the Scottish Government;
- The other statutory authorities which are members of the Edinburgh Partnership Board (e.g. NHS, Lothian Health, Police Scotland, the armed forces, etc.) must co-operate regarding the transfer of large sites which could make a huge positive impact on the future availability of social housing e.g. Victoria and Astley Ainslie Hospitals, the Police HQ at Fettes, Redford Barracks, etc;
- CEC must do more to ensure that private developers comply with the Council's affordable housing policy. They are supposed to provide 25% of new homes as 'affordable', for social or mid-market rent. The '*Affordable Housing Statement*' in each planning application/approval on the CEC Planning Portal demonstrates the lengths to which applicants (and their expensive consultants) go to avoid providing social housing on specific sites or sufficient 'commuted sums' to pay for appropriate development elsewhere;
- RSLs should pay more attention to housing those in greatest need. I know of two which are happy to devote only 70-75% of their development programmes to social housing. Not only are they probably better than most but also the outturn figures suggest that in practice they're missing the target;
- Ditto, CEC offer more MMR homes through Edinburgh Living or support Build to Rent, but not at the expense of social housing;
- The Board of Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal (ESES CRD) has to recognise and support the contribution that social enterprises (which include RSLs) can make to the prosperity of the region. It has not done this to date;
- Assessment of housing need has been done too infrequently and insufficiently by the Housing Needs and Demand Analysis process. The previous one for Edinburgh (HNDA2) was in 2015. HNDA3 is currently in development, overseen by ESES CRD and with guidance from the Scottish Government which has recognised previous shortcomings. But this process will take several months to conclude;
- CEC, the Edinburgh Partnership Board and the End Poverty Edinburgh group must constantly monitor and frequently report on performance against targets, starting with confirming how many new social homes were built by CEC itself and the RSLs collectively during 2020/21;
- CEC's senior housing officials and EAHP CEOs must closely follow, scrutinise and discuss the HNDA3 production process to ensure it will deliver meaningful statistics about household incomes, rent levels, house sizes, housing costs, etc. to support collaborative efforts by all stakeholders to get a better investment deal for Edinburgh from the Scottish Government.

The Edinburgh Partnership is the body with statutory responsibility for community planning in the City. It must take these recommendations forward and have responsibility for progressing, monitoring and reporting progress in future.

The Edinburgh Partnership may well need to establish its own dedicated resource to execute this and to hold the partners in the public, private and 3rd sector bodies to account. The End Poverty Edinburgh group of active citizens should act as an oversight body supporting and encouraging the Edinburgh Partnership in progressing the actions in the spirit of continuing to listen to the lived experiences of poverty to propose new actions in future to support delivering of the targets by 2030.

Convenor's Report



I would like to start my Convenor's Report by saying I hope everyone has been keeping safe during this time. It has been a particularly difficult time for everyone, but hopefully as the restrictions begin to ease, there's a bit of light at the end of the tunnel.

I would like to thank Willowbrae and Duddingston Residents Association for inviting me to open their Summer House and chair their AGM. I would like to congratulate the group on everything they've achieved so far. I took part in a walkabout with the group as well. It was good to be able to take part in this activity as it has been badly missed during the pandemic.

I would like to encourage as many organisations as possible to respond to the review of the Scottish Social Housing Charter consultation. It's a very important consultation as it will help to shape the future of housing in Scotland. ETF will be submitting a response on the back of our Federation Meeting a couple of months ago.

We hope to see as many people as possible attending our AGM in October. We are still currently at the planning stages, but I'm sure it will be a very memorable event.

I would finally like to thank ETF's EC, staff and TIS for all their hard work over the last few months. Although we are still carrying out all our work online, we are delivering on all the objectives in our work plan. We are taking advice from the Albion Trust and the Scottish Government on when we are able to re-open our office and have face-to-face meetings again. We hope to return to some sort of normality in the not-too-distant future. In the meantime, please stay safe and take care.

Federation Meeting

The next Federation Meeting will take place on **Wednesday 22nd September 2021, 7.00pm-9.00pm**, Zoom. The topic for the meeting is '*All about the money: Tenant rents, services and investments!*' The guest speaker is Lisa Mallon, Enabling & Partnerships Operations Manager, City of Edinburgh Council (CEC).



At the meeting you will have the chance to:

- Find out what City of Edinburgh Council's (CEC's) tenants' rent money pays for;
- Find out how tenant priorities are agreed and delivered on;
- Be given details of advice and support provided to tenants about paying their rent;
- Help formulate ETF's response to CEC's rent consultation;
- Discuss ETF's quarterly Progress Report for April-June 2021.

To book a place, please email mark@edinburghtenants.org.uk or phone 07918 742468 by **Tuesday 21st September 2021** and you will be sent an email invitation with the link to join the meeting. You can also take part in the meeting by phone, just contact us as above and you will be given a number to phone in order to join at no cost to yourself.

Dates for your diary

ETF AGM important dates:

Friday 27th August 2021 - Deadline for submission of constitutional amendments and resolutions

Tuesday 31st August 2021 - Second mailing sent out by ETF

Friday 15th October 2021 - Deadline for membership and EC applications

Friday 29th October 2021 – ETF's AGM

Scottish Housing Day – Special Members Meeting

Wednesday 15th September 2021

Public Holiday – Federation Office Closed

Monday 20th September 2021

Federation Meeting

Wednesday 22nd September 2021, 7 p.m. online

Challenge Poverty Week

Monday 4th to Sunday 10th October 2021

Tenant Information Service National Housing Conference

Tuesday 5th, Wednesday 6th & Thursday 7th October 2021

About Edinburgh Tenants Federation

Edinburgh Tenants Federation is the umbrella organisation for tenants' and residents' groups in Edinburgh and a Registered Tenant Organisation. Tenants' and residents' groups can become members of ETF and individuals can become Non-Voting Associate Members. Just contact the ETF office on 0131 475 2509 or email info@edinburghtenants.org.uk for more information.

Copy deadline

Tenants Voice is usually published three times a year and is distributed to nearly 3,000 tenants, residents, decision makers and other interested individuals throughout Edinburgh. We always welcome contributions from our readers, though we stress that material included in *Tenants Voice* does not always represent the opinions of Edinburgh Tenants Federation. If you would like to contribute an article, please do so by the following deadline:

December 2021 edition - Monday 8th November 2021

Thoughtful Quotes

A wise man said: 'Don't be afraid to start over again. This time, you're not starting from scratch, you're starting from experience.'

'Being wanted feeds the ego. Being valued feeds the soul.' - Unknown

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The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of ETF.