

Minutes of the Regional Networks Chairs & Secretaries Meeting
Tuesday 3 November 2020 via Zoom

Present:

Cameron Grant	CG	North of Scotland	1
Leonora Montgomery	LM	North of Scotland	1
Tom O'Brien	T'OB	North of Scotland	1
Steve Byrne	SB	North of Scotland	1
Lillias Reid	LR	South East Scotland	2
Cath McArthur	CM	South East Scotland	2
Terry Kirby	TK	South East Scotland	2
Margaret Dymond	MD	South West Scotland	3
Bruce Cuthbertson	BC	South West Scotland	3
Hugh McClung MBE (Chair)	HMcC	Central Scotland	4
Shona Gorman	SG	Central Scotland	4
George McGuinness MBE	GMcG	Central Scotland	4
Jeanette Arneil	JA	Central Scotland	4

In Attendance:

Susan McLellan	SMcL	Scottish Government	SG
Carolynne Watson	CW	Scottish Government	SG
Annabel Hoatson	AH	Scottish Government	SG
Islay McLauchlan	IMcL	Scottish Government	SG

Apologies:

Alan Dunton	South East Scotland
Margaret Anderson	South West Scotland

Item		Action
1	<p><u>Welcome and Introductions</u></p> <p>HMcC Chair, Central Scotland, welcomed everyone to the first zoom meeting of the Chairs and Secretaries.</p> <p>Apologies were received from Alan Dunton (Region 2) and Margaret Anderson (Region 3)</p>	

<p>2</p>	<p><u>Previous Minutes of 25 February 2020 and matters arising.</u></p> <p>Minutes:</p> <p>The minutes were proposed by Shona Gorman (Central Regional Network), seconded by Cameron Grant (North of Scotland Regional Network) and agreed as an accurate record of the last meeting.</p> <p>Matters arising:</p> <p>CG noted that he is Acting Chair, this will be changed to reflect his position</p> <p>LM noted on page 7 of the minutes Alasdair Mackenzie has resigned to from the position of one of the Newsletter coordinators for North of Scotland Regional Network.</p> <p>SB would like it noted that the website is very good and accessibility is excellent.</p>	
<p>3</p>	<p><u>Rent Setting – Discussion</u></p> <p>TK, Region 2, gave a short presentation on the subject of rent setting. He stated that Edinburgh has the highest rent in country and this is increasing faster than many can afford and this is reducing the amount of money everyone has to spend on other goods and services. The Scottish Government (SG) has introduced certain things to help but these are short term in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>TK stated that rent setting is done using either RPI (Retail Price Index) or CPI (Consumer Performance Indicator) these are usually done in different months (usually August or September). He would like to see all landlords use the same method for rent setting and to be done at the same time each year.</p> <p>TK asked the following questions for discussion that he would like to take further forward with the Network members and these are:</p> <p>1) Do any of the concerns reflect you as a tenant – or is this an Edinburgh problem? 2) What are the issues and challenges going forward?</p> <p>BC (Region 3) stated that this is more likely to be a problem of larger cities than those in towns. East Ayrshire have been doing a rent increase below the rate of inflation. East Ayrshire had a rent harmonisation scheme a few years back. There used to be 240</p>	

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<p>different types of rents and now this is down to 40 different types of rents and he does not think that this could be reduced further. Bruce also made the point that there was a 50p reduction in rent one year but it cost the tenants more in the following 5 years as SHQS and EESH had to be implemented. If tenants are not putting money into the system how are landlords going to take money for services at the other end.</p> <p>CG (Region 1) explained that ACHA's rent consultation is to go out at the end of the month. CG put forward a proposal of a rent freeze to his landlord but this was not accepted and would back a Network response to the Minister for a rent freeze for one year.</p> <p>SB (Region 1) stated these questions needed a lot more thought and asked for TK's paper be circulated for discussion at their Regional meetings. GMcG (Region 4) stated Glasgow has 428 different rent settings so it is a postcode lottery and agrees that it needs a lot more thought about how the Networks approach this.</p> <p>MD (Region 3) agreed with what has been discussed so far but Renfrewshire's rents are slightly below inflation and she feels as if the council has been listening to tenants and their concerns. She commended TK's paper and presentation and stated that it was excellent. She would like to get the paper and take it back to her council so she can ask people on the tenants groups.</p> <p>HMcC (Region 4) stated that Stirling has seven different rent settings which is seven different proposals for the various properties, He agrees with TK's suggestion of a rent freeze. The SG needs to assimilate rent level charges in Scotland, a lot of landlords look at raising rents for the sake of raising it and not for the sake of affordability. This need to be more transparent and the realistic challenges that being faced which we should impress up on the SG.</p> <p>Shona Gorman (Region 4) agreed with Terry's suggestion for a rent freeze. Her landlord is always discussing the yearly rent increase but never why they need an increase as It is built into the yearly business plan. The services that tenants were expected to be provided this year are not going to go ahead due to covid-19 restrictions so why is there a discussion about rent increases. She agrees there should be further discussion with the groups. Shona also made the point that it would be more beneficial to take it back to the Network as she can only speak for one landlord in her area and is not in the position to speak about other landlords so it would be helpful to get the broader picture from each network.</p> <p>SMcL, TP team, stated that rather than circulate paper straight away, she would get the networks thoughts on this and then</p>	<p>TP</p>
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	<p>circulate paper and suggested that the Networks have a discussion on each of their agendas</p> <p>CW, TP Team, stated that if we get a broader view of the RN from all local authority areas we could use this as base line for moving forward. It would useful to have a discussion to hear all views.</p> <p>CG (Region 1) made the point that all that information is available on the ARC, which can easily be pulled from the system, and as we already have the figures from last year would it not be more prudent to use this in order to move forward quickly.</p> <p>CW explained that there might be broader issues to be discussed especially in relation to how meaningful the approaches to rent consultation are in practice and how landlords interact with tenants on the issues.</p> <p>TK stated that he had used the comparison tool with regard to rent increases from a broad range of housing associations form the ARC and the comparison was -1.1 percent.</p> <p>HMcC stated that speed is of the essence and encouraged all members to ask for information from their own particular areas so we can get a comprehensive look at this and send it to the Minister in a paper for consideration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action – Regional Networks to meet and collate information regarding rent from their own areas and feed it back to the TP team so they can get a picture of how the rent process is went through for each landlord in their area. The team will need to get this fairly quickly. Carolynne and Susan will work out the logistics for this. • Timeframe – to get this done by the end of 2020. It was agreed that Terry would circulate paper and any anecdotal evidence about rent increases to the committee members for further discussion and get back their views to the TP team. The next step would be for Terry to liaise with the TP team about submitting a paper to the Minister. <p>Hugh thanked Terry for his very informative presentation.</p>	<p>ALL</p> <p>TP TK</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p><u>Fair Rents (Scotland Bill) – call for views</u></p> <p>The Scottish Government (SG) are in the first stage of gathering of view for the Fair Rents (Scotland Bill) in relation to having a fair level of rent increases for the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Scotland. It is to be considered in line with inflation and allows for</p>	

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	<p>SB advised that he got an email yesterday about mask exemption cards and AH will circulate this round the Network members.</p> <p><u>Fire Safety Group</u></p> <p>LM stated that there were three meetings regarding the consultation on the fire wall installation but unfortunately, she could not attend. It was a very technical consultation so no one answered it. The Scottish Government response to the Grenfell Tower review was sent round the committees.</p>	TP
6	<p><u>HRA report update</u></p> <p>HMcC provided an update on the HRA and how he had been working with the tenants of West Dunbartonshire Council concerning the council using HRA money for other services. He also received a request from tenants from Fife and West Lothian regarding the same issue. Hugh wrote to COSLA and the SG to outline the concerns of tenants. He received a reply from Mary McCallum, SG, who advised him to refer to Section 10 of the guidance that offers advice to how, when and where councils can spend HRA money. He also received a very unsatisfactory response from COSLA advising it was up to the specific councils to make decisions on how they spend the HRA at a local level. It was agreed that Hugh should respond to COSLA stating HRA are ring-fenced and cannot be served by other services which should be paid for by the General Fund.</p> <p>GMcG would like some clarification on where Audit Scotland sit on this. COSLA are saying one thing and Audit Scotland say a different thing and this needs to be clarified. CW, TP Team, stated she would investigate guidance on how Audit Scotland approach the HRA the Network members and advise at the next meeting.</p> <p>BC advised that council tenants could get a scrutiny group just to go through the HRA and to provide evidence as a practical measure going forward.</p> <p>GMcG took the opportunity to thank Hugh for all his endeavours over the years with the HRA and the Network members appreciated the time and effort he has taken on this matter.</p>	TP
7	<p><u>Mandatory Fire and Smoke alarms in all Scottish Households – Discussion</u></p> <p>SB advised the committee that this now relates to all households, including homeowners. Many homeowners in his area were not aware that this was becoming law. AH advised that she has sought further clarification on SB's points from the team dealing with this</p>	

	<p>area. However, since then, it has now been pushed back into 2022 due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Most social landlords have now got this underway and it is mandatory in the PRS already.</p>	
8	<p><u>Consultations update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local connection consultation • Building Standards consultation • Fair Rents (Scotland) Bill • Community Safety – call for views <p>The consultations had been sent round the committee members and have or will be discussed at their next Regional Meeting.</p>	
9	<p><u>Regional Network website feedback</u></p> <p>There was a general discussion about the new website and it was agreed that it was much better having updated information in an easy to read format. SB once again sated it was an excellent website and thanked the TP team for listening regarding accessibility.</p>	
10	<p><u>Next virtual meeting dates</u></p> <p>The next virtual meeting will date place on Tuesday 2 February at 11am.</p>	
11.	<p><u>AOCB</u></p> <p>SB asked for a note of thanks to the chair which the committee agreed.</p> <p>The committee also thanked Islay for her all her work over the last year and wished her well in her new promoted post within the SG.</p> <p>The meeting was brought to a close.</p>	