

Minutes of Virtual South East Scotland Regional Meeting
7 December 2020

Present:

Lillias Reid, Secretary (Acting)
David Rintoul, Committee member
Jim Galloway, Committee member
Terry Kirby, Committee member
Debra McCreath, Committee member
Irina Lazarenko, Committee member.

In attendance:

Annabel Hoatson, TP team
Islay McLauchlan, TP team

Apologies:

Alan Dunton, Chair (Acting)
Alan Frank, Vice Chair
Cath McArthur, Committee member
Noeline Hughes, Committee member
Carolynne Watson, TP team

1. Welcome

Annabel Hoatson, TP team, welcomed everyone to the meeting and submitted an apology on behalf Carolynne Watson. Islay McLauchlan attended the meeting to ensure there were no technical issues with zoom. Annabel asked if an audio recording could be taken to allow the minute to be taken at a later date, this was agreed by the committee. Islay then left the meeting once the recording has been agreed and no technical issues noted.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

Lillias Reid proposed the minutes and Terry Kirby seconded the minutes.

Irina had not received the minutes and Annabel noted this and asked if she had any comments or concerns regarding the minutes then she should contact the TP team.

There were no other matters arising.

3. Update on Chairs and Secretaries meeting – 03/11/2020

The Chairs and Secretaries meeting was held on the 3 November 2020. Annabel agreed to discuss the points that was raised and Terry gave an overview on his rent setting presentation.

Rent setting - Terry had given a short presentation on the issue of rent affordability and the consideration of a rent freeze for all tenants in Scotland and the questions he asked for consideration were:

- 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?

All Network members have been sent Terry's paper and have been asked to respond to the TP team individually.

The committee asked how many responses had been received and Annabel noted 8/9 responses so far. Annabel also noted there has been no response from East Lothian (Alan and Cath) and no response from Scottish Borders (Alan Frank, Debra, Noeline).

Lillias, Midlothian, stated that she has responded and Debra, Eildon HA, stated her response would be in today.

David asked how the paper was received and Terry stated it had been well received at the Chairs and Secretaries meeting. Lillias and Debra both agreed it was an excellent paper and thanked Terry for this work on it. Terry also stated he had also passed the paper to Ian Robertson, ex chair of the committee, as Fife currently had no representation and he had submitted a response. Annabel stated that the Networks did appreciate the paper and thanked Terry.

David asked how the responses were going to be coordinated, Annabel advised that Susan and Carolynne would be in contact with Terry about coordinating a response and an update would be provided at the next meeting.

Fair rent Scotland Bill - <https://beta.parliament.scot/bills/fair-rents-scotland-bill>

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 the fair market rental of a PRS property. The Scottish Parliament are asking for views especially in terms of the cost implications.

The fair Rents Bill for the Private Rented Sector (PRS) is at the first stage:

- Prevents a landlord from increasing rent by more than a set level (related to inflation)
- Allows a tenant to apply to the rent officer to have a 'fair open market rent' set for the property (a tenant can only do this once in any 12 month period)
- Landlords must include details of the rent they charge in the public register known as the Scottish landlord register.

The questionnaire is being formed for the Finance and Constitution Committee and they asking if there is any representations to the Bill in particular about the cost implications of the organisations. This was closing today (7 December 2020).

Terry will be submitting a response to this and especially in relation to CPI plus 1%, he stated that it should be CPI only given the current low inflation rate. He will send the committee a copy of his response for information.

Mandatory Fire and Smoke alarms in all Scottish Households

This is in particular reference to homeowners and was brought up at a previous meeting by Steve Byrne from Region 1. The legislation has now been delayed until February 2022 due to the current Covid pandemic. There are concerns about how home owners are

expected to pay for this and will probably be an on-going issue as the deadline comes closer. Annabel advised that this would be on-going so there will be more information forthcoming.

SHR Liaison Group – Annabel advised that the group were now meeting in smaller groups to allow more continuity and Bruce Cuthbertson, Region 3, had explained that the minutes of the last meeting had not yet been agreed but the agenda for the next meeting had been issued to all members. Bruce advised that if anyone had any questions about the next meeting then get in touch and he will take this forward. Annabel stated that due to Bruce's ill health he has stepped back from his role at the moment and Carolynne will be in touch with the SHR liaison regarding assigning a temporary chair and will update the committee at the next meeting.

Consultation responses:

- Local connection on Homelessness – This was completed either as a committee or individually
- Community Safety call for views – This was sent round the all members for information for individual response.
- Fair rents call for views – This has been discussed as above
- Building Standards Consultation – David Rintoul attended a webinar on this on behalf of the committee and submitted a response.

Update on HRA – Hugh McClung, Region 4, wrote to COSLA and the SG to outline the concerns of tenants in some local authority areas regarding spending HRA. He received a reply from Scottish Government staff 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 response from COSLA advising it was up to the specific councils to make decisions on how they spend the HRA at a local level. Hugh was unhappy with the response from COSLA and was going to compose a further letter outlining HRA are ring-fenced and cannot be served by other services, which should be paid for by the General Fund. He would update the Chairs and Secretaries at the next meeting.

Lillias Reid stated that she had never had a problem with the HRA in Midlothian and the council included this in any discussions with tenants and David Rintoul, West Lothian.

The Regional Network website - This is now live and we are looking for volunteers and we are looking for feedback.

Annabel stated that this was a brief overview of what was discussed at the Chairs and Secretaries and hoped that was helpful.

3. Update on SES members responses to TP Email 13/11/2020 reference: Terry's Rent Freeze Lettter discussed at C & S meeting

This was discussed as per item 2 on the agenda.

4 Response to ESSH2 Consultation

The committee completed the consultation. Annabel agreed to send it round to the group for comment and Lillias would submit this to the SHR once agreed.

5. Work planning during Covid

Communications - Debra has volunteered to be part of the Regional Network communications group which would be meeting on Thursday. She stated she would be happy to work on a newsletter template if the committee members supplied articles. If anyone had any other issues they would like to be raised at the communications group then please contact Debra.

Debra stated the Carolynne has initially stated that two from the region would be beneficial going forward, one person could work on the newsletter and one person could work on the website. Debra stated it would be nice to find out how other networks are working together and it would be interesting to hear from other areas. Annabel stated if there was anyone interested in being part the Regional Network communications group then to contact her.

Debra suggested that the committee should do an article regarding scammers as they prey on the vulnerable and it would be good to get the message on the website/newsletter. Debra would really appreciate if anyone could write something down and maybe get it on the website for information Annabel suggested bringing it in the communications groups on Thursday as a suggestion for the Networks, Lillias suggested putting it on the newsletter and send to all RTOs in the region as that may be another way for recruiting and to highlight the work they are doing.

Debra also suggested that we should add something about COVID-19 and Care Homes either on the newsletter or website. Annabel stated there is guidance on the SG website re COVID-19/FACTS and it could be linked with articles going forward.

Recruitment - a promotional leaflet was going to be sent to TP officers in Fife and the other areas where they don't have full complement in order to try and raise the profile of the networks and get new people on work. The committee thought that this had already been done and Annabel assumed that it was to get the committee approval going forward. Terry asked Annabel how many RTOs were in Fife and Annabel noted approximately 22. Debra suggested asking the TP officers to put the promotional material on their website. Lillias also has another person from Midlothian that may be interested in being a committee member.

AGM - Annabel did say that if there was another lockdown situation the committee would have to consider the possibility of an online AGM but this could be discussed further at the next meeting.

6. Any other business

David Rintoul stated that the committee has received information about assignments but did not know why this was sent out. Annabel stated she will try and find out why this information was sent out and leave it for discussion at the next meeting .

Irina noted that it would have helpful to have introductions for everyone when they initially started the call (she was joining by phone) as it has been a number of months since she attended a meeting . Annabel apologised about this and advised that she should have been done this but assumed that everyone knew each but would note that for future meetings.

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7. Date of next virtual meeting

Monday 1 February 2021 via zoom.

Annabel suggested it might be a good idea to try and get meetings in the calendar for the year at the next meeting, including the AGM date, just so everything is in place.