

Community Links Roundtable Report

Housing



NRPF

Shelter



Disability

Work



**Social
Security**

**Public
Services**



Children

Asylum



Schools

**Welfare
Reform**



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Introduction

As part of the Scottish Women's Convention's ongoing work on homelessness and housing, a roundtable was held with women who live in and around Govan on the 6th March 2018. The discussions were facilitated by the SWC and were organised by the Health and Social Care Alliance (The ALLIANCE).

Women's Experiences

Access to Housing

Women commented on the regeneration currently happening in Govan. While this was welcomed in order to bring more people and more jobs to the community, some concerns were raised. The development of Water Row, a historically important street in Govan, is promising the provision of affordable housing, however it is not clear to residents what this actually means.

"Affordable can mean different things. If it's help to buy, or even just what is classed as 'cheaper' homes by the builders, that's still going to be out of the reach of a lot of people who live in this area."

The creation of new homes, as well as the footbridge which is to be built across the River Clyde from Partick to Govan, could drive up prices overall. This, in turn, could make it even more difficult for those who have lived in the area all of their lives, to be able to obtain housing due to increased demand.

Housing allocation via Glasgow Housing Association (GHA), one of the biggest providers in the area, is done via a system of bands. Individuals and households are placed into one of eight bands (e.g. preventing homelessness or people getting older or those who need additional support). They are then able to bid for houses made available to their relevant band, in any part of Glasgow.

Bidding is done online, however if a person does not have access to a computer or the internet—which is the case for many—then they are able to bid over the phone. If more than one party puts in a bid for a house, it will be allocated to the person(s) who have been on the list longest.

"It's quite difficult to get a house, despite claims that the banding system has made things easier. I know people who have been one of 400 bidding for one house. It's not great odds."

If a woman is fortunate enough to be offered a home for her and her family, for example, but does not have a lot of money or family/support in order to be able to deep clean and decorate it, then she can end up living in unsuitable accommodation.

If you get offered the property, you are only able to view it once. A lot of these houses have been inhabited for a lot of years but they haven't had anything done to them. They can be dirty, in desperate need of redecoration, new carpets etc. Some of this will be provided, but it depends on the individual's circumstances. Unless you've got some money behind you, you're at a real disadvantage."

The difficulty in obtaining suitable accommodation means that many women and their families are forced to rely on expensive private lets. This has a serious impact on household budgets overall and can leave individuals open to exploitation by unscrupulous private landlords.

“The houses let out by private landlords are not at the same standard of Council or Housing Association accommodation. Often, they’re sparsely furnished with minimal white goods. If a tenant is unaware of their rights, they are unlikely to push a landlord to ensure that repairs and safety checks are carried out.”

Women who own their homes, but who want to leave because of an abusive relationship, can be met with significant barriers to accessing Council or Local Authority housing. They are asked a lot of invasive questions and more often than not the person who is interviewing them has no specialist domestic abuse training.

“Women have to jump through hoops at an extremely difficult time in their lives. They’re often faced with the attitude that ‘they own their own home so aren’t in dire need’. The lack of understanding can cause a woman to return to an abusive relationship because she is made to feel as if she has no other choice.”

More needs to be done to ensure that women who want to leave this type of situation are supported via housing options. This must take into account their current situation, but also future possibilities. Women can live in fear of partners returning to the home, because they have been unable to secure alternative accommodation when he was in prison, or living elsewhere.

Suitability

It can be more difficult for families in the area to secure appropriate housing if they have a disabled child or a child with additional support needs. The requirements of these children, for example to have their own bedroom, or to be able to get out into the fresh air, continue to go unmet at present. This not only has an impact on the child, but the family overall.

“I have two kids - my little girl is three and my little boy is nearly 8. We currently live in a two bedroom flat, deemed suitable under housing criteria because my children are young enough to still share a room despite being different sexes. My son has autism and after being at school all he wants is his own space to be able to clear his head, but in our house that’s not possible, as he shares a room with his sister. One of the symptoms of his autism is hand flapping, but he doesn’t have the room to do it safely. It’s a small space for all of us and my partner and I end up bickering and sniping at each other. When we ask for alternative accommodation, we’re told that it’s suitable and we fit in with the guidelines. That’s easy for someone to say who doesn’t have to live with what we do day in, day out.”

The importance of an appropriate environment for families should be taken into account more when housing is allocated. Houses with a “back and front door” are almost impossible to come by, which means that families are often unable to let their children go outside to play. This has an impact on the child’s physical and mental health, as it is more difficult for them to get exercise.

“Your environment is so important. Kids need to be able to go outside to play safely.”

Key Concerns

The key issues as noted are:

- The impact of regeneration in the area and whether this will impact positively or negatively on local residents, particularly with regards to securing homes.
- Real lack of available, appropriate homes in the area at present.
- Difficulty in successfully obtaining housing via the bidding system used by GHA.
- Reliance on expensive private lets, which are often not held to the same safety levels and overall scrutiny as Council and Housing Association properties.
- Lack of awareness of issues and reasons why women might require to be housed, for example domestic abuse. More training is required to ensure that applications as a result of leaving an abusive relationship are treated with sensitivity.
- Lack of suitable accommodation for families with disabled children and children with additional support needs.
- More awareness of the importance of families being provided with accommodation that allows their children to be able to play outdoors in a safe space.

The SWC would like to thank the women who participated in this roundtable. If you would like to find out more about our work on housing and homelessness, or anything else we are doing, please visit our website, where you can also sign up to our mailing list and be informed of our events and other work.

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The SWC is funded by the Scottish Government to communicate and consult with women in Scotland in order to influence public policy.