

Scottish Women's Convention response to:
The Scottish Government:
"Housing to 2040: Consultation on Outline Policy Options"
February 2020

Introduction

The Scottish Government's (SG) ambition is that everyone in Scotland should live in high quality, energy efficient homes that are affordable and that meet their needs. In last year's Programme for Government, the SG committed to work with stakeholders on a vision for how our homes and communities should look and feel by 2040 and the options and choices to get there. This year they reaffirmed that commitment.

The Scottish Government believe that now is the time to reimagine the housing system and want to work with the whole of Scotland to create a shared vision for 2040. This includes hearing people's views on the draft vision and principles and their innovative, bold and imaginative ideas for how to make them a reality.

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of Parliamentary, Governmental and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The Scottish Women's Convention engages with women using numerous communication channels including Roadshow events, Thematic Conferences and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women and reflects their opinions and experiences in a number of key areas relevant to women's equality.

Safe and sustainable homes for all within Scotland is a democratic principal. Women consulted have often voiced that the whole of the UK is struggling through a housing crisis within which the impact will only be seen to get worse. The issue of complex and vulnerable needs should be accounted for within the Scottish context of housing and span multiple Government Portfolios in order to provide women across the country with safe and secure homes.

Earlier this year we published our draft vision and principles. Do you have any comments on the draft vision and principles? Please be specific and identify what you would change and why.

It is commendable that long term sustainability is recognised within the draft vision as a key issue facing Scotland in reference to housing over the next number of years. One of the key indicators that is lacking within the proposal, however, is the failure to take account of women's unique issues in relation to housing.

Recognition of the growing challenge Scotland has started to face in terms of an aging population and a slowing birth rate is fundamental to any housing strategy both in vision and principles. The premise of individuals being able to live independently for longer within their own homes in connection with other Government Portfolios is to be commended. This is a key priority that the SWC and women across Scotland have advocated for.

The task of taking a full systems approach which encompasses all manners of housing within the system, including an assurance that no groups are excluded, is to be welcomed. This, however, fails to take into account women as a distinct category that often face unequal challenges when it comes to housing due to inequalities at both a societal and individual level. It is imperative to note the complex and additional support needs that women have when policymakers are developing visions and principles. Failure to see the severe forms this inequality takes and the unique barriers women face is not conducive to the overarching vision of Housing 2040.

Women suffer disproportionately at the hands of rising poverty, inequality and austerity. This, coupled with issues such as violence against women and caring responsibilities coalesce to impact on women's accessibility to housing. Given the scale of this inequality, all women across Scotland should not have to face further barriers in order to have safe and sustainable homes.

Do you have any comments on the scenarios and resilience of the route map or constraints?

Housing and a lack thereof is a major indicator of growing socioeconomic inequalities within our society. Both the route map and constraints must fundamentally recognise that a lack of quality housing for women can act as a major catalyst for a myriad of other issues that can be extremely damaging for themselves and their families. This must take account the needs of women to create and implement new models in the future that act on these issues.

In order to make an impact on women's equality in terms of housing, problems that must be addressed include the following:

- The effect of continued austerity, welfare reform and Universal Credit roll out on rent arrears and poverty. Given the disproportionate reliance of women on social security, this places additional burdens on themselves and their families.
- Overcrowding, particularly where older relatives have moved in and private caring is unavailable. In many instances, women cut back or give up employment in order to fulfil their domestic caring role, leading to – again – a reliance on social security and further economic burdens. This often results in many families being forced into expensive private lets in order to accommodate their needs.
- The impact of violence against women on housing accessibility, particularly where such difficulties leave women at the mercy of returning to abusive relationships. It must be recognised the severe limitations that domestic abuse places on women and their situations. Not only does this often mean fleeing from such violence at short notice, but can leave them fearing for their safety.
- The toll that housing issues can play on women's mental and physical health must be recognised. Not only does this contribute to a widening of health inequalities within the context of the housing crisis, but can exacerbate underlying issues.
- The increasing prices of homes in rural areas augmented by rising second home ownership within these localities pricing local women out. This not only leads to unaffordability in housing but places extra burdens on communities where young people move further away just to be able to afford accommodation.
- Key issues within the private rented sector in terms of quality of standards and rising rental prices. This is a particular issue where many young women have been forced into “sex for rent”, for instance, in order to keep a roof over their heads.
- The rigidity of current allocation systems for social housing. This, coupled with lengthy waiting lists mean many women can wait years for a home and fails to prioritise the unique situations that they may face.

[Do you have any proposals that would increase the affordability of housing in the future?](#)

In order to deliver on affordability, supporting proposals that should be actively considered for inclusion should be:

- Ensuring new/refreshed guidance and policy accounts for welfare reforms which may impact on women's ability to afford housing in both a UK and Scottish social security context.
- Due regard where arrears have occurred due to women suffering financial abuse at the hands of a partner.
- Clear cut commitments to using Housing 2040 as an approach to lift women out of poverty.

- Structuring housing to take account of the cost of living as well as inflationary and employment issues with appropriate safeguards and social security in place for periods of economic downturn.
- Recognition of the acutely different challenges faced by younger women in accessing housing for themselves and their families.
- Greater discretion for local authorities to impose rent pressure zones in designated areas. This should be coupled with easier and more accessible processes for tenants to appeal rent rises within the private rented sector as well as support to navigate the system.

Do you have any proposals that would increase the accessibility and/or functionality of existing and new housing (for example, for older and disabled people)?

In order to deliver on accessibility and functionality, supporting proposals that should be actively considered for inclusion should be:

- Ensuring new housing developments have planning in place from the outset for frequent public transport links before the builds are completed.
- Committing to a wholesale approach which takes account of all Government Portfolios to recognise the correlation between poor housing and health inequalities.
- Ensuring adequate allocation of resources to help rectify any imbalances within particular local authority areas which may be under pressure from increased demand.
- Rigorous Equality Impact Assessment procedures to take account of all properties and individual's needs, including further follow ups for those with complex and multiple vulnerabilities.
- Having due regard within statutory legislation for modifications needed for carer's homes where needed.
- Ensuring the expansion of women focused services with an emphasis on housing support as well as a continuous analysis of Housing First outcomes on a bi-annual basis.

Do you have any proposals that would improve the quality, standards and state of repair of existing and new housing?

In order to deliver on quality standards, supporting proposals that should be actively considered for inclusion should be:

- Implementation of effective strategies that make use of existing stock and empty homes and buildings.

- Recruitment of Housing Officers for specific complex needs and for older people to ensure personal housing planning approaches.
- Charters in place for both the social and private rented sectors which set out minimum standards and which continue to be refreshed annually. This should also include easy to read and accessible guidance on such standards for tenants.

Do you have any proposals that would improve the space around our homes and promote connected places and vibrant communities?

In order to deliver on promotion of connected places and vibrant communities, supporting proposals that should be actively considered for inclusion should be:

- Proximity to key locations for employment, job centres and access to supermarkets.
- Ensuring policies include clear and precise channels and support for women within communities with an in depth knowledge of the local area and relevant housing legislation.
- Investment in skills and development for women to ensure high quality employment in tandem with sustainable housing and communities. This is particularly fundamental in industries where men continue to dominate and which contribute heavily to the gender pay gap.
- Continue to invest in the National Digital Strategy to ensure broadband targets are achieved on time including refreshed research and guidance as needed.
- Encouragement of the use of housing cooperatives and house sharing equality schemes to cope with growing demand.

Conclusion

The SWC commends the Scottish Government for taking a long term strategic approach to planning of housing. Ensuring support for the most vulnerable women within society who are most at risk of inequality is crucial. This must take into account individualised needs. A national strategy which highlights women's issues and takes this into account when designing a fair and inclusive system is key.

For further information, please contact
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