

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

17th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
7 December 2022

PE1959: Tackle Scotland's affordable housing crisis

Petitioner	Amber Roberts
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to take action to improve the current housing crisis by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Merging housing associations and local council housing; and• consider introducing a new right to buy scheme for council tenants.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1959

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 11 August 2022.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 26 signatures have been received.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE1959: Tackle Scotland's affordable housing crisis

Petitioner

Amber Roberts

Date lodged

11 August 2022

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to take action to improve the current housing crisis by:

- Merging housing associations and local council housing; and
- consider introducing a new right to buy scheme for council tenants.

Previous action

I have contacted the Scottish Government and received a response outlining their commitments to delivering affordable homes that are available for social rent.

Background information

I propose that the Scottish Government should consider the following steps to improve the current housing crisis:

Housing Associations are merged with Council Housing. This could help more council homes become available and would be a major, first step in battling what is, in some areas, a significant housing crisis. In fact, I suggest this would see 76,307 Council Homes being built by 2034.

Creation of a new right to buy scheme. This could be set up in a way which allows council tenants the opportunity to make one final payment of between £10,000 - £20,000 to buy their home from the council if they have lived in the property for 10 or more years.

Using the average rent prices in Scotland from 2020-21, which is £75.76 per week, and then adding on the £10,000 - £20,000 final payment, would produce affordable house prices in the region of £46,364.80 to £56,364.80 per home (based on a tenant paying rent every 4 weeks).

Annexe B

The logo for SPICe, featuring the text 'SPICe' in a white, sans-serif font on a dark purple background.The logo for The Information Centre, featuring the text 'The Information Centre' and 'An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh' in a white, sans-serif font on a dark blue background.

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1959: Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to take action to improve the current housing crisis by merging housing associations and local council housing and consider introducing a new right to buy scheme for council tenants, lodged by Amber Roberts

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

1. The Scottish Government has an ambition to improve the supply of affordable homes in Scotland. It aims to provide funding of around £3.6 billion over the course of this parliament for its affordable housing supply programme (AHSP). Affordable housing funded through the programme includes homes for social rent, affordable rent and affordable home ownership. The aim is to deliver 110,000 affordable homes across Scotland by 2032.
2. Affordable rented homes are provided by social landlords, i.e. councils and registered social landlords (RSLs), mainly housing associations. Tenants of councils and RSLs have the same tenancy agreements and associated rights. Not all councils own their own housing stock. Six councils have transferred all their stock to housing associations. Councils and RSLs use grant funding from the AHSP in addition to their own funding to provide new social rented homes.

3. [Scottish Government statistics on the Affordable Housing Supply Programme](#) show that RSLs provide a greater proportion of new affordable rented homes. For example, over the five-year period 2016/17 to 2021/22, RSLs provided just over 63% (22,644) of total social rented homes completed, while councils provided 36% (12,673)
4. The petitioner states that merging housing associations with councils would help more homes become available and suggests that this would see 76,307 homes being built by 2034. It's not clear from the information provided why merging councils and RSLs would increase provision or how the estimated number of council homes was calculated.
5. The petitioner suggests creating a new right to buy scheme to allow tenants who have lived in their property for 10 years or more to make a final payment to buy their home.
6. The previous right to buy policy in Scotland finally ended in August 2016 after various reforms to restrict its application in the preceding years. This resulted from provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014.
7. As the [Policy Memorandum to the Bill](#) stated, "The policy objectives for ending the right to buy ('RTB') are to protect and enhance social housing for future generations and to safeguard the investment made in social housing over many generations. Ending RTB entitlements contributes to the Scottish Government's wider strategic objective of a wealthier and fairer Scotland and safer and stronger communities." The Scottish Government does not have any plans to reintroduce the right to buy.

Kate Berry
Senior Researcher
[24/08/22]

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Annexe C

Scottish Government submission of 14 September 2022

PE1959/A: Tackle Scotland's affordable housing crisis

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this petition calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to take action to improve the current housing crisis by:

- *Merging housing associations and local council housing; and*
- *consider introducing a new right to buy scheme for council tenants.*

On the first point in the petition:

Making sure everyone in Scotland has access to good quality housing is a vital part of the Scottish Government's drive to secure economic growth, promote social justice, strengthen communities and tackle inequality. [Housing to 2040](#) sets out a vision for housing in Scotland to 2040 and a route map to get there. It aims to deliver our ambition for everyone to have a safe, good quality and affordable home that meets their needs in the place they want to be.

The Scottish Government's Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) aims to deliver a mix of social housing and other affordable housing, which are defined as follows:

- Affordable housing within the context of the AHSP includes both social and mid-market rented homes, and also low cost home ownership properties.
- Social housing is rented housing let by both councils and housing associations (also known as registered social landlords), normally with a Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement.

The Scottish Government's approach to the planning and delivery of affordable housing, is focussed on providing the "right homes in the right place". This is achieved by working closely with councils in their role as strategic housing and planning authorities, and it is therefore for councils to determine the housing priorities in their area.

All councils are required to prepare a Local Housing Strategy (LHS) which sets out their strategic vision for the delivery of housing and housing related services and the outcomes that it will seek to achieve.

Priorities and outcomes identified in the LHS help inform council Strategic Housing Investment Plans (SHIPs) which are submitted annually to the Scottish Government and which set out the key strategic housing investment priorities over a five year period. SHIPs provide the basis for targeting investment through the Scottish Government's Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP).

Housing associations and councils have a long history of successfully working in partnership in the delivery of affordable homes across Scotland. Since 2007, a total of 111,750 affordable homes have been delivered, 78,174 of which were homes for social rent, including 19,339 council homes, 23,704 homes for affordable home ownership and 9,872 homes for affordable rent.

In April 2009, the Scottish Government re-introduced the Council House Build Programme to incentivise councils to begin building new homes, the first such central government support to councils in a generation. Prior to the re-introduction of the Council House Build Programme, housing associations were the main delivery vehicle for the provision of affordable homes across Scotland. Not all councils build new homes, six local authorities have previously transferred all of their housing stock to housing associations.

The Scottish Government has a current target to deliver 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, of which at least 70% will be available for social rent and 10% will be in our remote, rural and island communities. The delivery of this target would exceed the number of homes for social rent suggested within the petition, and also be within a shorter timeframe. A total of 1,119 homes have already been delivered during March 2022 towards the 110,000 target, of which 1,057 (94%) are homes for social rent – 431 housing association and 626 council homes.

Turning to the second point in the petition:

The Scottish Government has no plans to reintroduce Right to Buy.

The previous Right to Buy policy was unsustainable and removed almost half a million homes from the social rented sector into private ownership.

In the first 10 years since the policy ended, it is estimated that up to 15,500 homes have been kept in the social rented sector – homes which will continue to be available to future generations at affordable rents.

The Scottish Government also helps with affordable home ownership through the Low Cost Initiative for First-Time Buyers (LIFT) shared equity schemes. The Open Market Shared Equity (OMSE) scheme is one of the schemes available to first time buyers and priority access groups. OMSE is a demand-led scheme available for the purchase of existing properties on the open market and is administered by an agent ([Link Homes](#)) on behalf of the Scottish Government. Please see the attached link for further information <https://www.mygov.scot/open-market-shared-equity-scheme/>

The New Supply Shared Equity (NSSE) scheme is also part of LIFT and is administered by local authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSL). The scheme is only available for the purchase of new build properties being sold by a local authority or RSL. The NSSE scheme is also available to priority access groups. The attached link provides further information <https://www.mygov.scot/new-supply-shared-equity-scheme/>

Since 2007, over 19,000 households have been helped into ownership through LIFT.

The delivery of social homes remains a top priority for the Scottish Government, and in the four years to 2021, we delivered over nine times more social rented homes per head of population than England and our per capita spending on affordable housing is over three times higher than the UK Government.

I hope the above is helpful in setting out this government's position.