



Items in this issue include:

- *Eviction of Tenants in the Social Rented Sector*
- *What's on the Horizon?*
- *Amber – mediation and support for young people*

We Can End Homelessness

'We Can End Homelessness' is the theme of a new campaign launched across Europe to link with the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. The campaign launch coincides with the UK General Election and a time when action to combat homelessness is more necessary than ever.

The campaign, launched by FEANTSA, the European network of homelessness organisations, has 5 main themes:

- No-one sleeping rough.
- No-one staying in emergency accommodation longer than an emergency.
- No-one staying in transitional accommodation longer than is necessary for successful 'move on'.
- No-one leaving an institution without housing options.
- No young people becoming homeless as a result of the transition to independent living.

The campaign was launched at the European Parliament on 14th April, with representatives from all the major political groupings in the European Parliament, and was addressed by the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Laszlo Andor.

We wholeheartedly endorse this European-wide campaign. Scotland already has a progressive framework for tackling homelessness, but we still have a long way to go before we meet the aims of the campaign in full. We need to take stock of how far the Scottish commitment that "no-one needs to sleep rough" is being met, ensure that young people's needs are fully met, that people leaving prison and other institutions do not fetch up as homeless, and that people can move on from temporary accommodation when they are ready.

As far as Westminster is concerned, the new Government should ensure that the Single Room Rent is

abolished to assist young people into accommodation; reduce the 'taper' on housing and council tax benefits to avoid the benefits trap; remove public housing investment from the definition of public sector borrowing (as in other European countries); increase the 'absence from home' elements of benefits entitlement so that those on short prison sentences do not lose their tenancies.

The list of demands is unfortunately identical to those we produced for the 2001 General Election. Whilst there has been progress in Scotland on homelessness, we are let down by Westminster. The General Election is a great opportunity for Westminster to play its role in meeting the aims of the campaign to end homelessness.

Further details from Robert Aldridge, UK Representative on FEANTSA
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On Wednesday 28th April SCSH is moving to a new office. See the back page for full details.

Scottish Government/COSLA 2012 Steering Group Update

The aim of the Homelessness, etc (Scotland) Act 2003 was that all unintentionally homeless households would be entitled to settled accommodation by 2012. At the present time, only homeless people who are found by councils to be in 'priority need' and who are unintentionally homeless, with a local connection, have the right to settled accommodation.

Local authority progress towards the 2012 target is going well, with the majority of local authorities now assessing over 80% of homeless households as having a priority need.

The joint Scottish Government/COSLA Steering Group (which first met in October 2009), has been set up to assess, inform and influence progress towards the 2012 homelessness target, to promote a shared understanding of homelessness and to ensure ways of promoting best practice across Scotland.

The Group has already looked specifically at the progress and challenges related to the 2012 target and, in 2010, will focus on improving access to housing and progress with homelessness prevention. The next meeting, on 28 April 2010, will look at Registered Social Landlords' contribution towards the 2012

target, with presentations from the Scottish Housing Regulator and the SFHA.

The Group is also considering a joint event on homelessness prevention later in 2010 which will develop and explore the approach of linking homelessness prevention and housing options; which is strongly featured in the recent Scottish Government published Prevention of Homelessness Guidance.

Papers from the Group can be accessed at
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/BuiltEnvironment/Housing/access/homeless/2012Target>



Eviction of Tenants in the Social Rented Sector

The Scottish Government held an event in November 2009 on Eviction of Tenants in Social Housing and confirmed that responsibility for avoiding eviction through rent arrears rests with the tenant. It also confirmed that widespread variations in practice around rent arrears and evictions exist across Scotland.



The Scottish Government is currently consulting with stakeholders on the options to improve the consistency and rigour of pre-eviction processes and procedures. The options aim to balance the needs of landlords, who have a duty to protect public finances and prevent homelessness, along with the needs of tenants.

According to their figures, the level of evictions in the Social Rented Sector across Scotland is currently 0.6% of all social landlords housing stock. Evictions are mostly due to rent arrears and indeed figures from the Social Housing Regulator show that in 2008-2009

93% of evictions by Registered Social Landlords were due to rent arrears.

There is a lot of variation between social landlords in the level of rent arrears, in the rate of evictions in relation to each landlord's homes for let, the balance between eviction of tenants and abandonment of tenancies. The Scottish Government believes that variation in housing management practice must be a significant factor, as these variations in performance cannot be fully explained by background economic and social factors alone.

However, SCSH is aware that more and more social landlords are focusing on preventing evictions through rent arrears by following good practice. Examples include allowing tenants to pay rent in a variety of ways, discussing rent arrangements with every new tenant, and identifying those who may be at risk of rent arrears and providing them with the necessary support. The consultation ends on 28 May 2010.

For further information please contact
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Since 2006 the Edinburgh Cyrenians and Sacro's Community Mediation Service have been working in partnership to deliver amber, the mediation and support service for young people aged between 14 and 24. Amber has worked with over 170 families experiencing conflict and the potential risk of homelessness for young people.

Offering a range of support around the mediation process, families are provided with the opportunity to talk through issues, discuss how to manage arguments and decide how they want to change things for the better. Young people are supported to either

- Remain at home through the resolution of conflict
- Move out in a planned and supported way
- Return home through relationship building
- Regain a meaningful relationship with their family, whilst remaining out of the family home.

Amber is delighted to have been awarded three years' funding through the Big Lottery Fund and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation to build on their work and will be seeking to provide a more comprehensive and sophisticated service to young people and their families. This will include:

- Conducting research into methods of delivery of conflict resolution and anger management programmes with marginalised young people

- Piloting and delivering conflict resolution and anger management approaches
- Identifying and promoting models of youth homelessness mediation best practice across the country and stepping up the model for delivery as widely as possible.

Here's what some users have said about Amber:

"Thanks so much for all your help and support in helping Ellie and I recover our relationship and supporting when necessary to keep it moving forward. We would not be back in touch, I'm sure, without your input. You all do a brilliant job. Thanks again."

"Recently he has been cooperating and sees that has made things a bit better. He said that 10 minutes of helping was better than 5 days of grief. And she's got off his back a bit as well."



"Mediation? Well, it was better than going on the Jeremy Kyle show!"

For more information contact Viki Phillipps on 0131 475 2493 or see our website

www.cyrenians.org.uk/Edinburghcyreniansourservices/familymediation.html

What's on the Horizon?

Housing Supply - The fund to encourage local authorities to build new social housing has already allocated 22 local authorities with a share of £50m. The monies have allowed councils to start building almost 2300 affordable homes, which are expected to be completed in 2010. All councils have now been invited to submit applications by 30 April 2010 for a third round of £25m, for which a grant of up to £30,000 per unit will be made available. The assessment of round three applications will remain primarily housing needs driven, with prioritisation of the 2012 homelessness target. However, applications will also be welcomed from councils that have made progress in addressing their homelessness target and can justify further investment.

Health and Homelessness - The Homelessness & Substance Misuse Advisory Group launched their findings on 8 February by Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon MSP. In the wake of this, Consultant Sue Irving and SCSH Chief Executive, Robert Aldridge, wrote to Nicola Sturgeon MSP detailing the Group's concerns about the stagnation of the Health and Homelessness Standards.

Homeless Children - The Scottish Government Housing Access and Support Division will be launching Best Interests of Homeless Children guidance by the middle of 2010, following further meetings with colleagues leading on the Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) programme.

Housing Reform Paper - A Scottish Government Housing Reform Paper to be published in May will consider housing in Scotland post Firm Foundations. It will launch a wide-ranging debate on how different sectors will meet the challenges facing housing over the next five years and beyond. The proposals, once launched, will be consulted upon over the summer.

Further information from daniel@scsh.org.uk



Here are some dates for your diary



**All Mixed Up?
Managing Mixed Tenure**
12 May 2010
Apex City Quay, Dundee
www.cihscotland.org



**Iceberg Ahead?
How will Scotland House an
Ageing Population?**
13 May 2010
Thistle Hotel, Glasgow
www.sfha.co.uk



**Healthy Minds:
The Key to Realising Potential**
20 May 2010
London
[www.homeless.org.uk/
healthy-minds](http://www.homeless.org.uk/healthy-minds)



**SCSH National Homelessness
Conference**
4 and 5 November 2010
Edinburgh
www.scsch.org.uk

SCOTTISH COUNCIL FOR SINGLE HOMELESS

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Chris Campbell
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**SCSH is the membership
body for organisations and
individuals working to tackle
homelessness in Scotland.**

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Housing Bill Consultation

While the current Housing Bill is passing through Parliament, the Scottish Government has issued a consultation on a further Bill which will address a number of issues relating to HMOs and the private rented sector. SCSH was represented on the short life Working Group which helped develop the recommendations.

In its response to the consultation, SCSH stressed the need in the medium term to look again at the standard tenancy in the private rented sector. The Short Assured Tenancy has become the norm, though it was originally intended to be used only as an exception. The SAT provides tenants with very limited tenancy rights, which SCSH believes need to be strengthened if the private rented sector is to play a more significant role in housing people who are vulnerable.

Amongst the proposals in the new Bill are: adding sexual and firearms offences to the list of offences which must be declared by prospective landlords giving the Private Rented Housing Panel greater powers (for example) to issue warrants to allow landlords to enter premises in order to bring them up to the Repairing Standard, but for the tenant to have a right to insist on the landlord being accompanied by an approved person.

There are proposals to allow local authorities to issue Overcrowding Abatement Orders, to tackle serious issues of overcrowding. SCSH has some concerns that the tenants affected may not have a safety net, and we are therefore asking for more investigation of the implications.

Further information from robert@scsch.org.uk