

# Greens urge no evictions on bedroom tax

Green councillor Steve Burgess has put forward a motion to the Council's Policy Committee for their meeting on 26 February 2013 which commits the Council not to take any eviction action against tenants for rent arrears which arise as a result of housing benefit being reduced for "under-occupation". This, he claims, will ensure that people do not become homeless for debt over which they had no control.

The housing benefit penalties go live on 1 April this year and affect working age tenants of councils and housing associations who are judged to have more rooms in their homes than they need.

Under the Green proposals, the council will still be able to take other forms of action for arrears, and if arrears overall soar then eviction action is still among the options a council could use for the amount that is owed over and above the bedroom tax.

☒ Councillor Burgess said:-"Of all the welfare cuts coming from Westminster the bedroom tax is the most baffling, the most difficult to deal with and probably the most odious. Penalising tenants for occupying a home that is "too big" for them is absurd when there are simply not enough smaller homes to which they can move. The result will be more debt, more people struggling with bills and the real risk of more homelessness, with all the enormous costs that brings.

"But it is not enough for councils simply to wring their hands in despair. I am urging the City Council to send out a clear signal to our own tenants that we are on their side. We still need to collect the rent, yes, because that pays for the services tenants enjoy, but we will not seek to evict for that

part of any arrears that are a result of the bedroom tax.

“This is a pragmatic move that leaves it open to the council to do as it has always done for other types of rent arrears and still means that other forms of debt-recovery can be used for bedroom tax-related arrears. But it removes the shadow of eviction and homelessness from the equation.”

Green MSP Patrick Harvie also raised the proposal at Holyrood this week

Harvie said:-“The bedroom tax is a hugely unfair and unjustified proposal and I urge all housing providers to look at creative approaches to reduce the risk of evictions, such as by allocating additional funds or by redesignating rooms.”

[The papers for the meeting on 26 February can be found here.](#)

The motion from the Greens is below:

a. Notes that from 1 April 2013 new restrictions will be introduced by the UK Government affecting working-age households occupying social housing such that reductions will be applied to housing benefit payments where tenants are deemed to be under-occupying their homes. This has been called the “bedroom tax”.

b. Notes that the restrictions are estimated to affect 6,500 council and housing association tenants in Edinburgh.

c. Notes that, on 22 January 2013, Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee agreed to explore topping up Discretionary Housing Payments up to an additional £2.021 million, aimed at, among other measures, reducing the detrimental impact of the under-occupancy restrictions.

d. Notes that a range of actions to mitigate the under-occupancy restrictions are being looked at, including providing offers of reasonable alternative accommodation but that the supply and turnover of smaller accommodation comes

nowhere close to meeting the demand.

e. Therefore resolves that, in determining when and whether to initiate and pursue proceedings to recover a tenancy as a consequence of rent arrears, the council will:

- Calculate the sum by which the household's housing benefit payment has been reduced by under-occupancy restrictions
- Disregard that sum in relation to action for recovery of the tenancy (eviction).