

Opinion – Social housing should be at the heart of public health emergency

By Cllr Ashley Graczyk. Cllr Graczyk is an Independent Councillor for the Sighthill-Gorgie ward.

Social housing is a matter close to my heart because I personally have experienced homelessness at one time in my life due to personal circumstances beyond my control, I also could not afford private rent, never mind a mortgage.

I know what it is like to have housing insecurity and to genuinely struggle to make ends meet during an immensely challenging time. Yet, I cannot imagine what it must be like to go through this during a public health emergency.



Cllr Ashley Graczyk

Housing is also at the very heart of this public health emergency as Covid glaringly highlighted quality housing is

literally a matter of life and death. Even the current Scottish Government message is to stay at home. A home is not just a building, but a place of security, safety and stability, which all aid mental health. The need to prioritise the physical and mental health of our communities has never been more clearer.

The Scottish Finance Minister recently said Covid has 'underlined the value of a safe, secure and affordable home', yet she chosen to cut investment in social and affordable homes by £268 million, as highlighted by Shelter Scotland, how can a decision not to invest in making sure everyone has a home be justified?

Social housing is desperately needed in Scotland. There have been too many unaffordable homes built in the past decade and given the pandemic crisis we are going through people need affordable housing more than ever.

I genuinely struggle to understand why MSPs, especially those on a ministerial wage and who claim to be a centre left party, deliberately choose to disinvest in social housebuilding, after all, not one MSP is priced out of a mortgage. How can they be comfortable with denying renters, including young professionals, who are priced out of mortgages because of funding landlords' mortgages and lifestyles?

Renters are being robbed of the ability to pay for their own lifestyles and saving deposits for their own mortgages.

The Scottish Government should know better, especially when it's very hard to miss the remarkable grassroots campaign from Living Rent (including the fabulous local Gorgie Dalry branch), and Shelter Scotland, plus many others, are doing to highlight this serious issue.

I expect this kind of political behaviour from the Tories due to a central part of their ideology is to prioritise landowners, landlords, AirBnB lobby over struggling tenants.

Renters being forced to pay a large share of their income to landlords is literally a wealth transfer from the poor to rich and has led to a cycle of spiralling inequality – the very essence of capitalism.

As a progressive centre left party, what is the Scottish Government's excuse for cutting £268 million investments in social and affordable homes? Are all SNP MSPs comfortable voting for this huge backward step? And what is the Scottish Government's excuse for not making any effort to address the unworkable rent control bill which none of the local authorities in Scotland are able to implement?

Cutting the Scottish budget in areas most needed is definitely not in the best interest of the people of Scotland or for creating an equal and inclusive country.