

Scottish Housing Day 2021 – addressing the challenge of providing sustainable homes in the capital

It is Scottish Housing Day on 15 September 2021, the sixth annual day highlighting challenges and achievements in the housing sector. In the year of COP26 in Glasgow the emphasis is firmly on the climate emergency and emissions from housing.

The City of Edinburgh Council is the main “social landlord” in the city, with housing associations and private sector landlords also fulfilling the demand for rental homes. Cllr Kate Campbell is Housing and Homelessness Convener and has been for most of this administration’s term. She says that the council faces a big challenge in providing sustainable homes for everyone who wants one.

The City of Edinburgh Council has a policy ambition of becoming [net zero](#) by 2030, and while the conversation about emissions usually centres on traffic and transport in this context, it is also important when discussing housing. Net zero means that the same amount of carbon and other greenhouse gases is removed from the air as are put in from a certain source.

Around 15% of emissions in Scotland relate to heating homes, and by 2024 The Scottish Government has agreed that gas boilers will no longer be installed in new homes in an effort to reduce the emissions.

Save the date.



15 September 2021

The Housing Convener explained that there is a huge demand for homes – ranging from people who are homeless and from those who just want to move into more suitable accommodation.

She said: “There are some huge challenges and have been for some time. There are a number of reasons why – Edinburgh has a growing population which puts a natural pressure on housing. We have a third of all of the short-term lets in Scotland in Edinburgh, which means fewer houses are available to occupy as homes.

“Through Right to Buy we lost about 40,000 homes from the council estate. This has left us with only 13% available for social housing when the Scottish average is around 30%. This

means that people have to rent from the private sector where rents are around £200 a month more than other local authority areas.”

But Cllr Campbell said that by the end of 2022 the council will have 10,000 homes across Edinburgh approved for building.

High demand

There are currently around 22,000 households registered on [Edindex](#) which is the waiting list for tenants looking for a home in the capital. Whenever a property – either council or housing association owned – is listed on Edindex there are regularly about 200 bids made in response. There is a priority system used with people ranked according to their needs, and not all of the 22,000 applicants has the highest priority. But, Cllr Campbell said that there are just not enough social homes available, and the council has to look at different ways of solving the problem. This includes providing mid market homes which can be rented from the council or housing associations where the rent is slightly higher than council homes, but less than those in the private rented sector.

Both the council and housing associations [are building new homes in Edinburgh](#), and there are different kinds of tenure provided in each development. The Scottish Government subsidises the house building programme, and Edinburgh has built around 4,400 homes of all tenures during this council term. Around 500 of those are council homes, which at first glance may not seem many. Cllr Campbell explained that the council is a little slower in building new homes mainly due to its consultation processes, and the need to look at a development scheme in the round.

Cllr Campbell said: “There is a lot involved. We are not just putting up homes for a quick sale like a house builder. We are also looking at regenerating communities and building strong communities.

“It is important that communities have their say about our developments. We look at the type of homes to build and we also look at other things like transport solutions. In Meadowbank, for example, people said they were worried about the introduction of lots of cars to the neighbourhood. In response that development will effectively be car-free with City Car Club spaces provided, and active travel links. So that and the fact that we have to acquire the land in the first place makes the process slower. We also design for the site rather than just using six different house types like a commercial house builder can.”



Cllr Kate Campbell Housing and Economy Convener Photo © The Edinburgh Reporter

New Developments

The council has bought some large areas of land such as the 120 acre site in [Granton](#) where more than 4,000 homes will be built, and the council also acquires places where affordable homes will be built through the planning process.

New home developers must commit to building 25% of affordable homes either on the same site as their own development or elsewhere with the council's agreement. It is often easier for housing associations, for example, to own a whole block where the maintenance of the roof and other common areas becomes simpler, so the affordable homes might be provided in one place and not spread out.

The net zero goal is uppermost in Cllr Campbell's mind and not just because of Scottish Housing Day. She said: “There are high energy efficiency standards for any new social housing anyway, but we are now thinking of the heat source and what is called a fabric first approach. If we just considered heat source it would actually cost tenants a lot more to heat their homes. Currently carbon free heat sources are more expensive,

so we have to consider affordability at the same time. One option we are looking at is different types of district heating solutions.”

District heating is where there is one source which provides heating for a small community. There are different sizes, and it may heat more than just homes, but also business premises.

The City of Edinburgh Council is also a partner in the [Edinburgh Home Demonstrator](#) (EHD) Programme which is a business model designed to produce affordable homes built to net zero standards. The hope is that a new business model might then be rolled out elsewhere in the city and eventually all over Scotland. The EHD pilot project will be in Granton where 80 affordable homes will be developed with zero emissions heating, and a community carbon strategy.

Housing Revenue Account consultation

The Housing Revenue Account records expenditure and income relating to council houses and the provision of services to tenants. This includes management and the repair and maintenance of stock and the rent and income from other sources.

The council manages the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and will launch an HRA consultation on its website on Wednesday 15 September 2021. The HRA is a standalone ring-fenced account which comes from tenants rent, and Scottish Government funding also adds to the fund to pay for new social homes. In Scotland the total HRA housing income was £1.25bn in 2019-20, of which £680m was spent on the day-to-day supervision, management, repair and maintenance of housing and £273 million on loan charges.

This left a surplus of £237 million which was transferred to

Scottish councils' housing capital expenditure accounts to invest in new council houses and building improvements.

Cllr Campbell explained what this means in Edinburgh. She said: "When we build a house we want to keep rents low and affordable. We want to also be able to invest long term in the building to keep it up to a good standard by repairing it and managing it for tenants. The council are custodians of the HRA for tenants. Now all tenants will never agree how it should be spent, but we do hope to get general guidance from the annual consultation.

"Increasingly tenants say they want new kitchens and bathrooms, they also want improvements in the communal areas to make homes and areas feel safer, and more secure. The government has strict guidelines on investing in social housing which we have to follow – including carbon neutral standards. Tenants say they want us to build new homes – not necessarily for themselves – but for their children and grandchildren."

Pilot common repairs project in Wester Hailes

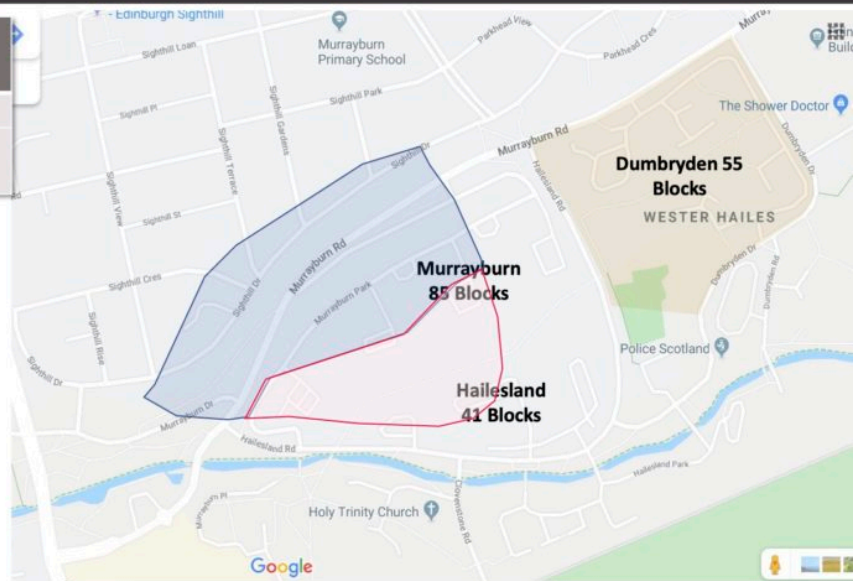
Mixed Tenure Area in Wester Hailes – 3 year Pilot

Dumbryden, Murrayburn & Hailesland:	Total Homes	Council Homes	Private Homes
	1,400	997	403
	100%	71%	29%

Of the Private homes:
67% owner Occupiers
33% Private tenants

Household income levels are 37%
lower than the Edinburgh Average

2 bed flat price is 50% lower than the
Edinburgh Average



The council is also conducting a pilot project in [Murrayburn](#) on investing in the common repairs of blocks of flats where there are some flats in private ownership and some occupied by tenants.

The roofs on some of these blocks have not been repaired or renewed for sixty years, and the council wants to ensure the blocks are now repaired and that the mixed ownership does not stop that happening.

The council will work with the owners to ensure that the investment can be made and that everyone can pay for it in some way. There are some properties owned by people who have bought under Right to Buy and who perhaps cannot afford the capital investment, and the council is keen to offer alternatives to anyone who finds it financially difficult.

The council will pay for and manage the repairs scheme and will later seek repayment from owners. There are options for owners to remortgage, or if that is not possible then owners can borrow at low interest rates. While the ultimate option is for an owner to sell their property back to the council, they will do so at a higher price than they actually paid for the

home (which may have been bought at a 50% discount on the market price) and will have the security of remaining in their home and becoming a council tenant.

Scottish Housing Day event

On 15 September there will be an online event with special guest speaker, Shona Robison MSP Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government at 2.00pm. The event will hear about new research commissioned for SHD and how organisations in Scotland are approaching the climate emergency. Details [here](#).

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