

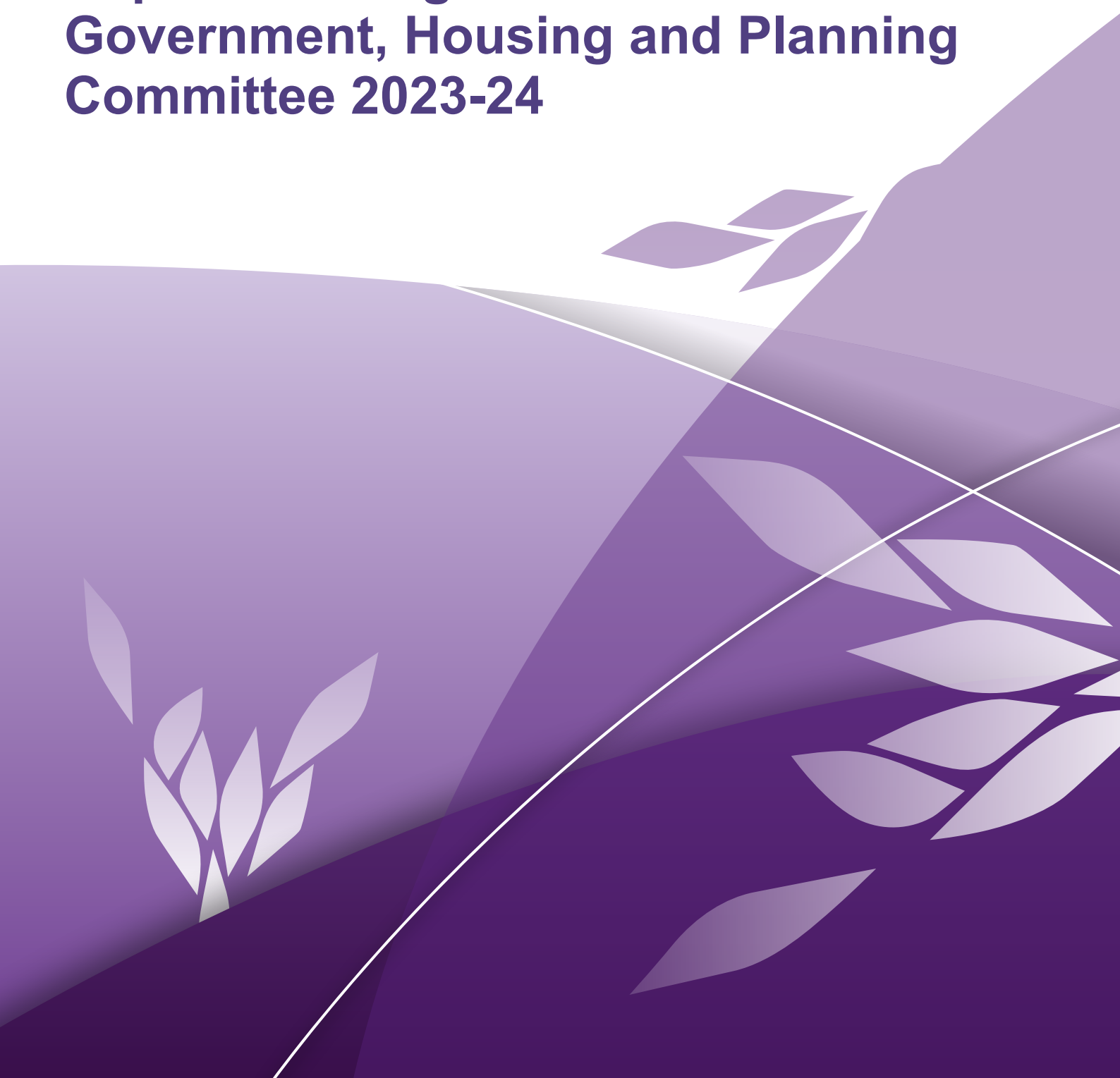


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Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Report tracking the work of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee 2023-24



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Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

To consider and report on matters relating to local government and planning falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, matters relating to housing and tenants' rights within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, and matters relating to local government boundaries, local governance review and democratic renewal.



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Member changes during reporting period

On 9 October 2024, Meghan Gallacher replaced Miles Briggs as a member of the Committee

On 6 March 2024, Gordon MacDonald replaced Marie McNair as a member of the Committee

On 11 September 2024, Fulton MacGregor replaced Gordon MacDonald as a member of the Committee

On 18 June 2024, Emma Roddick replaced Stephanie Callaghan as a member of the Committee

On 9 October 2024, Alexander Stewart replaced Pam Gosal as a member of the Committee

Introduction

1. At its meeting on 14 June 2022, the Committee agreed that it would produce a report annually reflecting on its work in the preceding year, tracking ongoing work, the Scottish Government's response to that work and looking ahead to work in the coming year.
2. The Committee believes that a critical feature of an effective committee is a commitment to follow-up on inquiries and ensure that recommendations have been acted upon and progress made. This report is a key element of this follow-up work, allowing the Committee to track its work and in turn hold the Scottish Government to account.
3. This report reflects on the work of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee in the third year of session 6 and looks ahead to the Committee's work in its fourth year. In particular, the report considers the extent to which the committee work explored in last year's report, and the previous year's report, has been progressed.

Committee's guiding principles and objectives

4. The Committee believes that it can be most effective by focusing on a select number of issues and pursuing them throughout the session. The Committee considers that this is a more effective approach than the Committee moving from one issue to another without having the opportunity to re-visit work and assess progress. It gives the Committee the opportunity to ensure that the Scottish Government is responding to its recommendations in a meaningful way.
5. The Committee is keen to ensure that the issues it does pursue are reflective of the concerns of its stakeholders and the wider community and works with stakeholders and communities to:
 - identify priorities;
 - develop and undertake inquiries; and
 - track recommendations arising from those inquiries.
6. The Committee is also keen to improve public understanding of local government, housing and planning and to demystify them, in order to enable people to better engage with those services and in turn improve people's experience of them.

Reflections on the third year of the session and progress since year two

7. The first part of this report reflects on the third year of this session and the progress that has been made on recommendations since the Committee's last tracking report. The following infographic, provides a brief summary of the work the Committee has done this year.

Work in 2023-24

Committee meetings

32



All meetings contained private elements

Legislation

25



SSIs considered

3



Bills

Reports

9



Published

8. This report is not intended to be a definitive account of everything done by the Committee, but rather a summary of the key issues explored by the Committee over the course of this session and the progress made in relation to these issues over the last year. The Committee's first report, reflecting on 2021-22, formed the baseline against which this and all other reports are measured.
9. The report is split into three sections, focussing in turn on the Committee's work in relation to local government, then housing and finally planning. In the case of each item under these headings there is an indication of whether no progress has been made, some progress has been made or good progress has been made.

Local Government issues

10. This section of the report reflects on the local government issues considered by the Committee this year and, where appropriate, progress made in relation to recommendations from the Committee's work last year and in previous years. Specifically it considers the Committee's work on:
- The New Deal for local government
 - Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill
 - The local governance review

- Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 - post-legislative scrutiny
- Community Councils
- Community Wealth Building
- Understanding barriers to participation in local politics
- Non-Domestic Rates

New Deal

11. A key focus of the Committee's work in the early years of the session was the drive toward a new relationship between local and national government. In its report last year the Committee was therefore very pleased to welcome the publication of the Verity House Agreement (VHA) on 30 June 2023.
12. The Committee subsequently heard from the then Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning and COSLA at its meeting on [5 September 2023](#). Both the Minister and COSLA spoke optimistically about the positive tone that had been set by the VHA and its potential to re-set the relationship between local and national spheres of government in the context of further conversations.
13. It was recognised that this was just a first step and the Committee noted that it would be closely monitoring progress toward a new fiscal framework and an outcomes and accountability framework in the coming year.
14. Nonetheless, the Committee was looking ahead with optimism in last year's report to the development of a new relationship between local and national government with the potential to improve outcomes for communities.
15. While the Committee recognises that it is appropriate that time is taken to ensure that matters such as a fiscal framework and outcomes and accountability framework are carefully thought through, it is still disappointing a year on to find that more progress has not been made.
16. Shortly after the publication of the Committee's last report (on 17 October 2023) the then First Minister announced a council tax freeze. In responding to the announcement COSLA expressed considerable concern, noting that local government had not been consulted prior to the announcement and that the decision "flew in the face of the Verity House Agreement".ⁱ
17. At its meeting on [14 November 2023](#) the Committee took evidence from the then Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance on the impact of the decision to freeze the council tax. He noted the concerns expressed by local government, but emphasised the importance of moving forward.
18. The Committee recognises that both COSLA and the Scottish Government have subsequently reiterated their commitment to the VHA and that conversations between the two spheres of government are continuing. However, the Committee

ⁱ <https://www.cosla.gov.uk/news/2023/statement-from-the-cosla-presidential-team-following-an-emergency-meeting-of-political-group-leaders>

would welcome more public evidence of this progress.

19. As noted earlier, the expected progress on the fiscal framework has not been made. The Committee recognises that it is appropriate that time is taken to get this right and it was pleasing to hear in the course of the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny for 2025-26 about the positive strides being made towards it, but nonetheless it is disappointing that the 2025-26 budget process will again be entered into without a fiscal framework.
20. The Committee had held off on the publication of this report, awaiting the publication of the annual stocktake report on the VHA that COSLA and the Scottish Government committed to produce. Unfortunately this is still to appear and the Committee has felt unable to wait any longer.
21. The Committee remains committed to closely scrutinising progress toward a new relationship between local and national government. This year the Committee heard from academics on the VHA at its meeting on [19 December 2023](#). It also formed the focus of the Committee's budget scrutiny for 2025-26 with the Committee hearing from local government Directors of Finance at its meeting on [9 January 2024](#) and from COSLA and the then Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning at its meeting on [16 January 2024](#).
22. The Committee also wrote to both the Scottish Government and COSLA in June 2024 seeking an update on progress. Responses to those letters can be accessed below.
 - [Correspondence from COSLA](#)
 - [Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government](#)

Again, both letters emphasise a commitment to the VHA and point to ongoing dialogue as well as an upcoming stocktake report on the first year of the VHA.

23. This commitment to the VHA was also apparent in the Committee's pre-budget evidence sessions with COSLA and the Scottish Government in October 2024. Moreover, the tone of the contributions from COSLA and the Scottish Government to these sessions offered the Committee a more positive prognosis for the VHA.

24. It is difficult for the Committee to identify tangible progress in relation to the New deal for local government, and more specifically the VHA, that has taken place over the last year. Given the optimism the Committee expressed about this last year in its tracker report this is disappointing. Nonetheless, both spheres of government remain committed to the VHA and the evidence during the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny this year pointed to significant progress behind the scenes. The Committee hopes that next year's report will reflect on significant progress. In the meantime the Committee looks forward to considering the stocktake report in the very near future.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill

25. The Visitor Levy (Scotland) Billⁱⁱ was introduced in May 2023 and formed a significant part of the Committee's workload during the reporting year. The overall policy objective of the Bill is to give a discretionary power to local authorities to introduce a levy on stays in overnight accommodation in all, or part, of their area if they choose to do so.
 26. In-keeping with the VHA, Scottish Government officials told the Committee that the overriding drive behind the Bill is to fiscally empower local authorities, giving them a new tool to use, if they wish to do so, in their areas.
 27. In its Stage 1 report, a majority of members of the Committee expressed support for the Bill, noting the benefits it could bring to visitors, the tourism sector and local residents. A majority of members felt that that the impact of this legislation on the visitor economy and tourist numbers was unlikely to be significant.
 28. At the same time, the Committee recognised that the impact of this legislation will need to be closely monitored, not only in terms of its impact on the visitor economy, tourist numbers and local communities, but also as the first example of a measure to increase fiscal empowerment for local authorities in the context of the VHA.
29. The Bill received Royal Assent on 5 July 2024. Given the Act's consultation requirements no visitor levy scheme will be in place before 2026. There therefore will be no opportunity for this Committee to measure the impact of this legislation, but it would encourage its successor committee to closely monitor the impact of the legislation and any lessons it might offer for future similar measures.
 30. More generally, the Committee will continue to examine the issue of a general power of competence, as sought by COSLA, which would allow local authorities to introduce

ⁱⁱ <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/s6/visitor-levy-scotland-bill>

similar measures in their authority without the need for further primary legislation. This issue is explored in more detail in the Committee's [pre-budget scrutiny letter this year](#).

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Local Governance Review

31. The Local Governance Reviewⁱⁱⁱ was jointly launched by the Scottish Government and COSLA in December 2017 to consider how powers and resources should be shared between national and local government, and with Scotland's communities.
32. The Review was optimistic about "a new relationship with public services where communities have greater control over decisions". This was to involve some initial projects with "new autonomous and democratically accountable decision-making bodies". However, shortly after the Government and COSLA updated council leaders on plans for the Local Governance Review in late 2019, all progress was paused, firstly due to the COVID-19 pandemic and secondly because of the Scottish Parliament elections.
33. In its reports in 2022 and 2023 the Committee reflected on the lack of progress on the Local Governance Review and urged the Scottish Government to make more progress and to do so promptly. The Committee therefore welcomed in its report last year the re-institution of the democracy matters conversations. The then Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning told the Committee at its meeting on 5 September 2023 that the output from the Democracy Matters conversation was expected in the early part of next year (2024).^{iv}
34. Unfortunately this output did not emerge at the beginning of the year. The Committee [wrote to the Minister for Public Finance in June](#) asking for an update.
35. In his response^v the Minister noted that analysis of the responses to the Democracy

ⁱⁱⁱ [Local Governance Review](#)

^{iv} [Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee meeting, 5 September 2023](#)

Matters conversation would be published after recess along with a joint statement from COSLA and the Scottish Government on the next steps.

36. As promised, the [analysis and joint statement](#) were published shortly after summer recess in the course of the COSLA conference. Amongst other things, the report notes that a cross-sector Democracy Matters steering group will be established and the Committee would be keen to hear from this group to understand what it is seeking to achieve and how it will use the ideas emerging out of the Democracy Matters conversations to drive measurable change in a way that will transform civic engagement in Scotland. The joint statement also noted the intention to progress work on a single authority model. Progress toward a single authority model has been promised before and the Committee is hopeful that on this occasion it can be delivered. The Committee will be following this closely.

37. It is disappointing to the Committee that timescales for the local governance review have slipped again this year. It seems highly improbable now that any legislation will be brought forward this session to give effect to the outcomes of this work. The Committee does, however, hope that before the end of session meaningful recommendations can emerge out of the review and the Committee would be keen to engage in the near future with the steering group to understand how this can be achieved as well as exploring with COSLA and the Scottish Government what the next steps will be in realising a single authority model.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 – post-legislative scrutiny

38. The [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#) was passed during Session 4 of the Parliament. It seeks to encourage and promote community participation and engagement in local decision-making, by enshrining it as a right in law in a variety of different situations.

v [Correspondence from the Minister for Public Finance to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 30 July 2024](#)

39. Last session this Committee's predecessor committee began post-legislative scrutiny of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 by looking at:
- Part 3 on participation requests
 - Part 5 on asset transfers
40. Given the significance of this legislation, this Committee agreed to continue the work of its predecessor committee, focussing on:
- Part 2 on community planning
 - Part 9 on allotments
41. The Committee undertook work looking at Part 9 in 2022. We found that there are large and increasing waiting lists for allotments, despite the requirements of the Act. The Committee's recommendations included increased leadership from the Scottish Government, the creation of a national partnership forum bringing together local authorities and other partners, and some specific measures local authorities could take to improve access to allotments and food growing spaces.
42. The Committee returned to this issue last year, inviting both stakeholders and the Scottish Government to set-out what progress has been made in response to the Committee's recommendations.
43. Last year stakeholders expressed frustration that there had not been progress in allowing access to allotments and food growing spaces. The then Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning stressed to the Committee the importance the Scottish Government places on allotments and community growing more generally. He recognised, however, that there had been a focus on the Good Food Nation recently and that because of this the work on allotments had slowed down.
44. The Committee sought the views of stakeholders and the Minister again this year to see if any further progress had been made.
45. In its response the Glasgow Allotment Forum (GAF)^{vi} expressed concern about the approach taken in Glasgow, which they suggested placed an emphasis on delivering the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the legislation. GAF at the same time highlighted the work it is doing on "Growing a good allotment community" emerging out of the Democracy Matters conversations.
46. The Scottish Government made no specific comment on progress in relation to Part 9 of the Act in its response^{vii}, but did highlight the upcoming review of the Act to be published later in the year.
47. The Committee notes the upcoming publication of the review of the Act and hopes that this will drive an improvement in the experience of community

vi [Correspondence to the Committee from the Glasgow Allotment Forum](#)

vii [Correspondence from the Minister for Public Finance to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 30 July 2024](#)

empowerment for those seeking to access allotments and food growing spaces.

48. Last year the Committee focussed its attention on Part 2 of the Act (community planning). The Committee found that there are significant regional variations when it comes to how effective Community Planning Partnerships are in providing meaningful support to their communities through partners collaborating and joined up working.
49. The Committee explored the its conclusions with the then Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning and COSLA at its meeting on 5 September 2023.
50. The Minister accepted that there is variation in how CPPs operate across Scotland. He stressed that improving the effectiveness of CPPs is not something that can be done in a top down way. Rather he stressed the importance of working collaboratively to share best practice.
51. The Committee sought updates this year from the Scottish Government and key stakeholders on progress made in the intervening year.
52. The Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) highlighted in its response the need for new refreshed principles for participation across the Act in the wake of the Act's review. It suggests a need for a more explicit expectation on duty bearers to connect other engagement related aspects of public policy and public services to have meaningful contact in communities.^{viii}
53. In particular SCDC stressed the importance of increased influence for communities through "Community Led Action Planning". Community Led Action Planning involves community groups and organisations having community conversations leading to clear and often detailed plans for how to improve services, the local environment or the local economy.^{ix}
54. In its response the Scottish Government again highlighted the ongoing review of the Act, but also stressed the significant role to be played by CPPs in the context of the VHA, highlighting their role in the alignment of resources locally, prevention and early intervention, and delivering on shared priorities. Moreover, the response highlighted tangible measures being progressed in response to the Committee's report:

viii [Correspondence from SCDC to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee](#)

ix [Correspondence from SCDC to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee](#)

” My officials are continuing to work collaboratively with partners to develop a programme of work to strengthen community planning in response to the Committee’s helpful findings. This includes, for example, working closely with the Community Planning Improvement Board on the four national priorities they identified in response to the Committee report (the fragmentation of the climate funding landscape, sustainable funding for the third sector, flexible and multi-year funding and reducing reporting requirements). In addition, we have funded the Improvement Service to work with the Community Planning Network to support its use as a forum to develop and embed a shared vision for partnership working and to share best practice. ^x

55. The Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's recognition of the important role to be played by CPPs. It is pleasing to see the Scottish Government working with the Community Planning Improvement Board to give effect to the Committee's recommendations. The Committee also hopes that SCDC's call for a refresh of engagement principles is realised too. The Committee recognises that this will not be an overnight exercise and hopes that over the coming years the fruits of this work will be seen.

56. As noted earlier, the Committee also continues to track the work of its predecessor Committee on Parts 3 and 5 of the Act.

57. Part 3 of the Act introduced the right for a community to make a ‘participation request’ – a request to participate in a process to improve the outcome of a public service. The public body must agree to the request for dialogue unless there are reasonable grounds for refusal.

58. The Local Government and Communities Committee explored in 2021 if this aspect of the Act had been successful in making public bodies more responsive to the communities they serve. Its report^{xi} provides more detail but the key findings were:

- Low numbers of participation requests at that point made it difficult to determine how successful the process has been, but the committee doubted that the low number of requests indicated high satisfaction with local services and recommended that the Scottish Government and COSLA together needed to ensure there is improved awareness of the right to make a participation request
- The Committee recommended that the Scottish Government introduce an appeals mechanism for community bodies in order to improve public bodies’ handling of participation requests. Appeals should be considered independently of local government and the relevant public body.

59. Part 5 of the Act aimed to enable communities to have more control of a local building or plot of land and put it to good use, through an ‘asset transfer’. The Act

^x [Correspondence from the Minister for Public Finance to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 30 July 2024](#)

^{xi} [Report of the Local Government and Communities Committee: Community Empowerment: Taking stock of participation requests and asset transfers four years on](#)

sets out how a 'community transfer body' can request to buy, lease, manage, occupy or use land or buildings belonging to a 'relevant authority'. It also set out how the authority should deal with asset transfer requests. Public bodies must be transparent in how they assess requests and agree to them unless there are reasonable grounds for refusal.

60. This Committee's predecessor committee found in 2021 that there had been many more asset transfer requests than participation requests, and there was a much better awareness of the right. It heard though that the process seemed to be becoming more onerous and that communities were not always well supported.
61. The Committee heard from the then Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance last year who recognised that in the context of the review of the Act there was an opportunity to consider how both asset transfers and participation requests could be more effective tools for communities. In particular, the Minister agreed to consider the issue of an appeals mechanism for communities in relation to participation requests.
62. The Committee again sought views from the Scottish Government and key stakeholders on what progress had been made since last year.
63. In relation to Part 3 of the Act , as well as the Act more generally, SCDC emphasised the importance of refreshing the underlying principles of community empowerment. Its response highlights the 5 high level principles of Community Empowerment described in the Principles for Community Empowerment in work led by the Accounts Commission, Strategic Scrutiny Group published in July 2019. It notes that these principles were not in place n 2016 at the time of the Act and need to be explicitly referenced in the context of the review of the Act.
64. The Scottish Government's response does not specifically comment on these Parts of the Act, but notes the forthcoming review, which will consider them.

65. It is disappointing that the delay in the publication of the review of the Act means that progress in relation to Parts 3 and 5 has stalled. The Committee hopes that the Review will, however, give careful consideration to the reflections from SCDC and will take the opportunity to refresh the principles underpinning community planning.

66. This Act is a vital piece of legislation to empower communities. As the Committee reflects on the Act in its totality, it is disappointing that the Review has not emerged over this year. It is clear from the work this Committee and its predecessor committee did that the Act could be a more effective tool for delivering community empowerment. The Committee hopes that the additional time afforded for the view is used productively and the outcome of the review sets an ambitious and deliverable programme for how the Act can be improved and in turn genuine community empowerment realised.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Source:

Community Councils

67. During the last reporting year the Committee marked the 50th anniversary of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 which established Community Councils ('CCs'). with a roundtable session and evidence panels looking the role of community councils.^{xii}
68. Following that session the Committee wrote to the Scottish Government suggesting that community councils could play a more effective role.^{xiii}
69. Since its report last year the Scottish Government has responded to the Committee noting that the role of community councils would be explored in the context of the Democracy Matters Conversations.
70. In considering the analysis of the Democracy Matters conversations, it is pleasing to note the extent to which community councils were involved and moreover the support for a greater role for community councils including providing them with enhanced budgets and powers to enable them to play a more impactful role in local democracy.^{xiv}

71. The Committee welcomes the consideration given to the role of community councils in the course of the Democracy Matters conversations. Conversations in of themselves are not an end point though and there must be a tangible outcome to the work. As mentioned before, the Committee is keen to hear from the steering group established to

^{xii} [Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee meeting, 23 May 2023](#)

^{xiii} [Letter from the Convener to the Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance, 8 September 2023](#)

^{xiv} [Democracy Matters Phase 2 - analysis of responses](#)

progress this work on how it will ensure this happens.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Community Wealth building

72. The Scottish Government previously committed to bringing forward Community Wealth Building (CWB) legislation during this Parliamentary session. In preparation for a bill being brought forward, the Committee began work on CWB, undertaking a visit to Cumbrae island in North Ayrshire to see examples of local businesses and community action, and subsequently holding a round-table evidence session on 26 March^{xv} with a range of stakeholders engaged in CWB.
73. The Committee wrote to the Scottish Government in May^{xvi} seeking its views on some of the issues raised during those discussions, with a view to supporting its work in developing legislation. In particular, the Committee asked about the potential for climate change to be added as an additional pillar of community planning, the prospects of new investment in community organising and how it will be ensured that CWB will take a primary cross-cutting role. Also, and perhaps more fundamentally, the Committee questioned what the Scottish Government would be seeking to achieve with the legislation.
74. In its response^{xvii} the Scottish Government welcomed the Committee's contribution to this work. It indicated that the pillars of CWB are internationally recognised and it had no intention to add to these pillars on that basis, but noted that climate change will be a key focus across the existing pillars. In terms of community engagement, the Scottish Government highlighted a range of measures to increase the voice of communities including the ongoing work of the Local Governance Review. The response also highlights the key role to be played by anchor organisations in advancing CWB.

^{xv} [Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 26 March 2024](#)

^{xvi} [Correspondence from the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee to the Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance, 7 May 2024](#)

^{xvii} [Correspondence from the Minister for Employment and Investment to the Local](#)

75. The Scottish Government announced in the Programme for Government its intention to bring forward primary legislation on CWB. It continues to be unclear, however, precisely what the legislation will be doing and the Minister's letter to the Committee provides no more clarity on this.

76. Nonetheless, the Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's confirmation that legislation will be introduced. The Committee hopes that the legislation can be a vehicle to effectively implement the CWB model across Scotland.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Understanding barriers to participation in local politics

77. Throughout this session the Committee has focussed on the barriers deterring younger people, women, disabled people and people of colour becoming councillors or remaining as councillors.
78. This is a very significant issue and the Committee has an ambition to contribute to a genuine improvement in the diversity of representation.
79. The Committee recognises that one of the key barriers to participation in local elected politics is the relatively low rate of pay to councillors. In 2022, the Scottish Government and COSLA agreed that a review of councillor pay was necessary “to ensure that terms and conditions truly reflect the responsibilities of a modern-day Councillor, and that remuneration does not act as a barrier to encouraging a diverse range of people to stand for elected office”. The Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC) was reconvened in April 2023 to undertake a one-off independent review of councillor remuneration, having last reported in 2011, and published its [recommendations on Councillors' remuneration and expenses](#) in February 2024.
80. SLARC's recommendations cover a range of issues including the establishment of a national dataset showing the demographic composition of the country's councillors, improved support for and induction programmes for councillors, training and resources for councillors relating to their safety, and the introduction of

resettlement payments for councillors losing office. The report also recommends that salaries of “ordinary” councillors be set at 80% of the median salary for all public sector employees in Scotland or £24,581, an increase of £4,482 or 22.23% on their current salary of £20,099.

81. SLARC also recommended that the leaders of Edinburgh and Glasgow city councils be paid the same as MSPs. Under the new three band structure recommended by SLARC, council leaders in other local authorities would see their pay set as a percentage of MSP pay.
82. Since the publication of SLARC's recommendations, the Committee has heard from SLARC and COSLA on two occasions and from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government once. The principle focus of the sessions, particularly the latter ones, has been around who will pay for an increase in councillor pay with the Cabinet Secretary suggesting that it would be for local authorities to pay.
83. The Committee reflects on its consideration of this issue in more detail in its pre-budget letter to the Cabinet Secretary this year.

84. Fundamentally, however, the Committee believes that the recommendations of SLARC on remuneration should be given effect to in recognition of the importance of the role of councillors to Scotland’s democracy, and the widely acknowledged need for greater diversity of representation. The Committee hopes that progress can be made in conversations between COSLA and the Scottish Government and SLARC's recommendations on remuneration can be given effect to in time for the beginning of the next financial year.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Boundaries Scotland

85. Under the Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020, this Committee has responsibility for considering regulations giving effect to Boundaries Scotland recommendations for changes to local government areas or electoral arrangements.
86. In September 2021 the Committee considered proposals relating to the six local authority areas in Scotland containing inhabited islands. The Committee did not

recommend the approval of the proposals relating to the Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council areas. Subsequently Boundaries Scotland expressed concern about the process the Committee applied to this scrutiny.

87. Boundaries Scotland confirmed in August 2023 that it had “no current plans to conduct any reviews” in relation to local authority boundary areas and that its “principal work focus at the moment is the review of Scottish Parliament constituencies and regions which will report by May 2025.”
88. Further to that the former Minister for Parliamentary Business wrote to the Committee in March 2024^{xviii} noting the intention expressed in the policy memorandum to the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) (Scotland) Bill for the process for the approval of boundary changes to be revised to remove parliamentary control.
89. The Committee wrote to the Minister in June 2024^{xix} seeking an update on the Minister's letter of March 2024. In his response the Minister intimated that he remained sympathetic to the idea of the removal of parliamentary control from this process and would confirm the Scottish Government's approach after summer recess.^{xx}

90. The Committee will be closely following the Scottish Government's next steps on this issue and remains to be convinced of the appropriateness of removing parliamentary control from this process.

91. Moreover, the Committee is concerned that no boundary reviews of local authority areas have been undertaken since the Committee considered the six proposals at the beginning of the session. We have seen significant population changes in some parts of Scotland and reviews of local authority boundary areas are needed as a matter of urgency. Whatever process is ultimately adopted, reviews must happen as soon as possible.

^{xviii} [Correspondence from the Minister for Parliamentary Business to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 15 March 2024](#)

^{xix} [Correspondence from the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee to the Minister for Parliamentary Business, 28 June 2024](#)

^{xx} [Correspondence from the Minister for Parliamentary Business to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 16 July 2024](#)

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Non-Domestic Rates

92. In 2022 the Committee considered the [Non-Domestic Rates \(Coronavirus\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#).
 93. The Committee expressed concern about the impact of a high volumes of appeals on assessors. The Committee welcomed the Scottish Government's decision to extend the deadline for revaluations, but requested six-monthly updates from the Scottish Government on the volume of material change of circumstances appeals assessors have to dispose of. On 31 March 2024, there were 31,581 outstanding non-revaluation appeals and 1,430 outstanding non-revaluation proposals, the vast majority of which relate to valuations in the 2017 cycle. The number of outstanding non-revaluation appeals has decreased by 58,849 or 65%, since this figure was first collected in March 2022. The number of outstanding non-revaluation appeals as at 30 September 2024 will be published in December 2024.
 94. The independent Barclay Review of Non-Domestic Rates called for reforms to the appeals system to modernise the approach, reduce appeal volume and ensure greater transparency and fairness, and a new two two-stage appeals system was introduced on 1 April 2023.
95. The Committee will continue to track how effective the new appeals system has been in contributing to a reduced appeal volume and greater transparency and fairness.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Housing issues

96. This section of the report reflects on the housing issues considered by the Committee this year. Specifically it considers the Committee's work on:

- Housing to 2040
- Retrofitting of housing for net-zero
- Rent control in the private and social rented sector
- Short-term lets regulations
- Building safety including cladding, RAAC and damp and mould in the rental sector

Housing to 2040

97. Over the course of this session the Committee has examined different aspects of the challenges facing the housing sector in Scotland. In particular, the Committee has focussed on whether the affordable housing target is achievable and issues around rent caps in the private and social rented sectors. This year the Committee agreed to hold sessions looking at the sector in its totality and in particular the adequacy of the Scottish Government's Housing to 2040 strategy.

98. The Committee held two roundtable sessions on Housing to 2040 with relevant stakeholders. The Official reports of these sessions can be accessed via the following links—

[Official Report: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 20 February 2024](#)

[Official Report: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee , 27 February 2024](#)

99. Subsequently, the Minister for Housing gave evidence to the Committee responding to the issues raised in the sessions—

[Official Report: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 16 April 2024](#)

100. In addition, the Committee held a session 30 April with a particular focus on rural housing—

[Official Report: Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 30 April 2024](#)

101. In these sessions stakeholders expressed support for the ambition of Housing to 2040, but questioned whether it was deliverable in the current climate or indeed whether it had ever been deliverable. Moreover, stakeholders expressed severe concerns about the current homelessness figures and the potential impact of capital funding cuts to the supply of affordable housing.

102. The Committee wrote^{xxi} to the Minister for Housing after the conclusion of the sessions and a received a response from the Minister in July.^{xxii}

103. In the months following these sessions there was an increased sense of the perilous position of the housing sector in Scotland. In June 2023 Argyll and Bute Council had been the first local authority to declare a housing emergency and over the following months the number of councils declaring housing emergencies significantly increased. At the time of writing 12 local authorities have now declared housing emergencies.

104. Following local authority declarations, in May 2024 the Scottish Government supported an amended motion in the Scottish Parliament declaring a national housing emergency, in acknowledgement that there was a record number of people experiencing homelessness. Stakeholders have highlighted that this emergency has been precipitated by a variety of factors including:

- a shortage of affordable housing
- demand for social housing outstripping supply
- increased rents in the private sector
- high inflation
- freeze of local government housing allowance rates
- labour shortages linked to Brexit
- cuts in Scotland's capital funding settlement from the UK Government.

105. In his July letter to the Committee the Minister pointed to his parliamentary statement on 20 June, setting out the Scottish Government's initial response to the

^{xxi} [Correspondence from the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 4 June 2024](#)

^{xxii} [Correspondence from the Minister for Housing to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 12 July 2024](#)

tackling the housing emergency. The plan set out a range of action organised under three strategic pillars:

- More high quality, permanent homes
- The right homes in the right places
- A permanent home for everyone

106. The Minister also stated that tackling the housing emergency will rely on a joint approach between UK, Scottish and local government. He further noted that Housing to 2040 remains the key overarching strategy for the housing sector in Scotland and the Scottish Government intends to review actions and priorities in the short term to respond to the housing emergency.

107. In the context of the housing emergency, the Committee has agreed to continue this work into the coming year with a particular focus on the emergency and the adequacy of the response to it, but also with a view to looking toward how we move beyond the emergency to a sustainable housing ecosystem that ensures housing for everyone in Scotland. The Committee issued a call for views over the summer and began evidence sessions on this inquiry in November 2024.

108. The Committee hopes through this work to identify effective measures to respond to emergency, but also ambitious and deliverable measures to move beyond the emergency. The Committee hopes that when it returns to this issue next year there is evidence that the emergency is being responded to effectively and there is progress toward a clear and achievable pathway toward a sustainable housing system for all.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Retrofitting of housing for net zero and the climate change plan

109. Homes in Scotland account for around 13% of Scotland's total greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, to meet the target of reducing overall emissions by 70% by 2030, and the net zero target by 2045, Scotland's homes will need to become significantly more energy efficient and use zero or almost zero carbon heating sources.

- 110. The Scottish Government aims to reduce emissions from heat in buildings by 68% from 2020 to 2030.
- 111. In its reports so far this session the Committee has expressed concern about the lack of urgency in progressing this issue. In particular, the Committee has highlighted the lack of funding being made available to deliver on retrofitting and the lack of public awareness of what is required of individuals.
- 112. The Committee continued this work in April 2024, by jointly holding an event on net zero and Scotland's housing with the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee and the Scotland's Futures Forum. The event resulted in the production of a report.^{xxiii}
- 113. The purpose of the event was in part to inform the Committee's scrutiny of Climate Change Plan and a promised bill on Heat in Buildings. It is disappointing therefore to find that the Climate Change Plan has been delayed and we are yet to see a Heat in Buildings bill introduced although it was announced in this year's Programme for Government.

114. In last year's report the Committee concluded by looking forward to considering a Climate Change Plan that would set-out an ambitious, clear and deliverable pathway for reducing emissions from buildings. It is disappointing therefore to reflect a year on that this has not come to pass. The Committee hopes that when the Committee comes to consider its report next year it is in the context of having considered a climate change plan and a Heat in Buildings bill, reflecting a greater urgency about the need to progress these issues. It is welcome at least to see that the Scottish Government has committed in the Programme for Government to introducing a Heat in Buildings bill.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Source:

Rent Control in the private and social rented sector

- 115. Over the last two reports the Committee has considered rent control in the context

^{xxiii} <https://www.scotlandfutureforum.org/scotlands-housing-and-net-zero-conference/>

- of the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act and regulations laid under that Act.
116. The measures in the Act initially applied from 6 September 2022 to 31 March 2023 but the provisions could be extended for two further periods of six months with parliamentary approval. Any provision in the Act could be ended early or be suspended.
117. These powers expired in April 2024 and as such there is no longer a rent cap in place. The Committee did, however, consider regulations at its meeting on 5 March, which provided for an amended adjudication process.
118. The amended adjudication process provides that if a tenant decides to take a rent increase notice to adjudication, Rent Service Scotland or the Tribunal may restrict how much the rent can increase by. Under the pre-emergency legislation rent adjudication system, the Rent Officer would set a rent based on the open market rent which could be higher or lower than the proposed rent. The regulations amend this so that on adjudication, the rent will be based on the lowest of three figures:
- the open market rent,
 - the rent requested by the landlord, and
 - a new taper that supports the transition away from the rent cap.
119. This amended adjudication process applies until April 2025, but can be extended, with parliamentary approval, annually.
120. The intention is, however, that the provisions will be superseded by the Housing (Scotland) Bill. The Housing (Scotland) Bill was introduced in the Parliament by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice on 26 March 2024. The Bill has been the focus of the Committee's work during May, June and September. Moreover, the Committee began work on this Bill before it was introduced, working with lived experience panels to understand the challenges facing tenants and landlords.^{xxiv}

121. The Committee's Stage 1 report on the Bill has now been published. At the heart of the Committee's scrutiny, is a focus on protecting tenants while ensuring that housing supply is at the same time increased. As it continues its consideration of the Bill and, should the Bill be passed, monitors the impact of the legislation, the Committee will want to ensure that both of these ambitions are realised. It is critical, particular in the context of a housing emergency, that we get this Bill right.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Short-term lets regulations

122. The Committee continues to closely monitor the short-term lets licensing scheme.
123. As last year, the Committee notes ongoing concerns about the impact of the licensing scheme on the short-term lets industry and the tourist industry more generally. Similarly, local authorities have continued to express concerns about their capacity to manage this process and local community representatives have continued to highlight ongoing issues with anti-social behaviour.
124. In last year's report the Committee noted the Minister's intention to continue to pursue the licensing scheme while continuing to listen to the concerns of stakeholders. He also noted that the Scottish Government would be bringing forward an update on the implementation of the Licensing Scheme next year although this might not be as extensive as the previously envisaged review.
125. This year the Committee considered the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Short-term Lets) Amendment Order 2024, which amended the order to respond to some urgent stakeholder concerns. The Committee sought written views from stakeholders on the Order before taking evidence from the Minister for Housing at its meeting on 25 June 2024.
126. Respondents were broadly supportive of the Order's proposed changes, although several contended that they were insufficient and that further changes were needed. A majority of members agreed to support the Order, but to return to consider the Order in the context of the update.
127. The Scottish Government's [Short-Term Let Licensing Implementation Update Report 2024](#) was delayed but was published on 30 August 2024 and the Committee invited stakeholders to comment on it in writing. The Committee will hear from the Minister for Housing on the issues raised by stakeholders at its meeting on 19 December 2024.

128. The Committee recognises that the licensing scheme has only been in place for a short-time and as a consequence it is difficult to assess its impact. Nonetheless the Committee will continue to closely monitor the impact of the scheme on the tourism economy, communities who live in the vicinity of short-term lets and local authorities. While the Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's update, it would welcome an indication from the Scottish Government of plans for a more fundamental review of the Scheme as originally envisaged.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Building safety

129. In 2022 the Committee held the first of its annual sessions on building safety in the context of scrutinising the [Building \(Scotland\) Amendment Regulations 2022 \(SSI 2022/136\)](#).
130. That first session focussed almost entirely on the cladding remediation programme.
131. Since then the Committee's work on building safety has broadened out into three separate, but related strands:
- Cladding remediation
 - Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)
 - Damp and mould
132. Each of these three areas are considered in turn below.
133. Before looking at each of these issues, however, the Committee reflects on a more general point on building quality. In particular, the Committee has frequently raised the possibility of the undertaking of Building MOTs along with a register containing the make-up of all buildings in Scotland. The Committee continued to explore this issue in the context of its work on cladding and RAAC.
134. The Committee considers that there would be merit in building MOTs as a preventative approach to managing buildings across Scotland. Likewise, the

Committee considers that a register of buildings and what they are made of would have significant long-term benefits. For example, there is still not a definitive understanding of how many buildings with potentially flammable cladding on them in Scotland. Having such a register would have given an immediate picture of the extent of the issue in Scotland.

135. The Committee appreciates that it has raised this issue with the Scottish Government on a number of occasions, but would nonetheless welcome the Government's continued reflection on this as the Committee continues to see considerable merit in these suggestions.

Cladding

136. In last year's report the Committee expressed its ongoing concerns about the slow progress being made in the cladding remediation programme. This is a concern that dates back now seven years to the Grenfell Tower fire.
137. In this context, the Committee welcomed the introduction of the Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Bill. The primary purpose of this Bill was to expedite the cladding remediation programme.
138. The Bill gives the Scottish Ministers powers to identify and remediate risks to life posed by potentially flammable building cladding systems, and establish a "cladding assurance register" to hold details of cladding system surveys and remedial works. The Bill would also allow Scottish Ministers to establish a "responsible developers scheme". This would require developers of buildings clad with potentially flammable material to contribute towards any survey and remediation of buildings that they constructed. Failure to agree to such arrangements could see a developer added to a "prohibited developers list" - which would prohibit them from carrying out any development, or any class of development specified in regulations.
139. Given the urgency of the predicament of people living in buildings with potentially flammable cladding Parliament agreed to apply an expedited timescale to the Bill. Nonetheless, the Committee ensured that there was time for a call for views and a series of oral evidence sessions^{xxv} including a roundtable session^{xxvi} with owners and tenants of properties with potentially flammable cladding.
140. The Committee agreed to support the general principles of the Bill^{xxvii}, however, the Committee expressed concern about the capacity of the workforce to undertake the work needed to deliver the programme. The Committee also emphasised the need to ensure that owners and tenants were given clarity on when they could expect to see remediation completed. The Committee also noted that the issues impacting on owners and tenants were not limited to cladding and yet the Bill was only conceived to respond to that issue.

^{xxv} <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/s6/housing-cladding-remediation-scotland-bill>

^{xxvi} [Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 23 January 2024](#)

^{xxvii} [Stage 1 Report on the Housing \(Cladding Remediation\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#)

141. The Bill received Royal Assent on 21 June 2024. The Committee was hopeful that the Bill would precipitate a rapid increase in the speed of remediation. Indeed, the Minister for Housing told the Committee that all buildings in the pilot programme would be on a pathway to a single building assessment by summer 2024.
142. In summer 2024 the Committee wrote to the owners and tenants of affected buildings and the Minister for an update. The responses can be found below:
- [Minister for Housing](#)
 - [Perry Jenkins](#)
 - [High Rise Action Group Scotland](#)
 - [Paul Turnbull](#)
 - [Scottish Tenants Organisation](#)
 - [Alan Millar](#)
143. The Committee asked tenants and owners three questions. Firstly, tenants and owners were asked if there had been any progress in remediation. None of the respondents indicated any progress having been made and in some cases noted considerable frustration with assessments having been undertaken as many as three years ago and no steps taken since.
144. Secondly, tenants and owners were asked if there was any more clarity on timescales for when remediation might take place. In general the responses were again negative although two respondents noted potential timescales with one suggesting work beginning in summer 2025 and another noting a potential completion time in 2026.
145. Thirdly, and finally, the Committee asked about whether communication from the Scottish Government had improved. This had been a key concern for stakeholders during the Committee's scrutiny of the Bill. Again, for the most part, respondents suggested that there had been no improvement in communication for the Scottish Government although it should be noted that two respondents had noted a very recent improvement in communication.
146. In its response, although specifically asked about it, the Scottish Government made no mention of the pathway to remediation for buildings in the pilot programme. Indeed, the Scottish Government's response notes that remediation work has only started on 5 of the 107 buildings in the programme.
147. The response also notes that the standards for the assessments are yet to be agreed although that is expected to happen in November 2024.
148. In terms of those buildings outwith the pilot programme, it is particularly disappointing to note from the Minister's letter that there is still not complete clarity even on how many buildings are in need of assessment and remediation if necessary.
149. As far as communication is concerned, the letter appears to place considerable reliance on engagement with the High-Rise Scotland Action Group. While this is to

be welcomed, it should be recognised that this group does not represent the interests of all people affected by this issue.

150. In addition to the letter, the Scottish Government also highlighted its intention, as set out in the Programme for Government, to bring forward a building safety levy bill, which would establish a building safety levy on developers to fund remediation work.

151. The Committee looks forward to scrutinising this Bill and hopes that it can contribute to increasing the pace of remediation.

152. As it stands, however, progress in relation to remediation is unsatisfactory. As the Committee noted at the start of this section of the report, it is now seven years since the Grenfell Tower fire yet only five buildings in the pilot programme have begun remediation, there is still not an agreed model for assessment and there is no complete picture of the number of buildings across Scotland that need to be assessed. This is without even considering whether there is the necessary workforce and funds to deliver on this programme of remediation or whether dealing with the cladding issues alone will actually respond to the issues faced by people living in affected buildings.

153. At the very least, communication with those people in affected properties needs to improve. From those the Committee has heard from, with a couple of exceptions, this is not happening and if nothing else, people should be kept updated and have some indication of when assessments and remediation, if necessary, will take place. It is not sustainable to rely so heavily on communication with one group.

154. Progress must be swifter. The Committee will be applying close scrutiny to the Scottish Government's actions on cladding remediation and would welcome an opportunity to question the Minister for Housing further on this issue as soon as possible.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete

155. In last year's report the Committee announced its intention to undertake work on the issue of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) elements in public buildings across in Scotland and the risk of their sudden, catastrophic failure. The Committee was keen to understand the extent of the problem in local authority owned and managed buildings and whether Councils have the staff and resources necessary to survey buildings with RAAC elements, and to take remedial action where this is found to be necessary.
156. The Committee held a session on 3 October 2023^{xxviii} with key stakeholders as well as the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice.
157. The Committee has continued to follow this issue closely. At its session on 16 April 2024^{xxix} with the Minister for Housing the Committee focussed on the impact of RAAC on housing rather than in public buildings in light of recent events in Aberdeen where around 500 homes were found to contain RAAC. The Committee explored with the Minister what was being done to respond to the particular situation, what was being done to identify other housing that may be in similar situation and how the insurance issues this raised were being responded to.
158. The Committee notes the ongoing work being undertaken by the Scottish Government's cross sector working group, which has been the focus of the Scottish Government's efforts on this issue.

159. The Committee will return to this issue shortly. The Committee will be keen to see what progress is being made by the cross sector working group and how those local authorities particularly impacted by this issue are responding as well as understanding the implications for those living in affected properties.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

^{xxviii} [Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 3 October 2023](#)

^{xxix} [Official Report of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 16 April 2024](#)

Damp and mould in the private rental sector

160. The issue of damp and mould in social and private rented housing prompted considerable public concern and media interest following the death of two-year old Awaab Ishak who tragically died in 2020 as a result of a severe respiratory condition due to prolonged exposure to mould in his home.
161. Awaab lived in a housing association home in England. The coroner investigating the case said, “this “should be a defining moment for the housing sector in terms of increasing knowledge, increasing awareness and a deepening of understanding surrounding the issue of damp and mould.”
162. Last year the Committee held sessions to try and understand the extent of the problem in Scotland and agreed to revisit the topic on at least an annual basis.
163. One of the challenges to understanding the extent of the problem, as it has been in other areas of work for the Committee, is the lack of high quality data. The Minister highlighted the Scottish Household Survey, which was due to be published this year an the potential for this survey to give a better idea of the extent of the problem.
164. The Committee followed up on this in its annual session on building safety on 16 April 2024. And On 4 June the Committee wrote to the Minister for Housing, in amongst other things, seeking an update on in relation to work on damp and mould. In particular, the Committee highlighted concerns about the potential for energy efficiencies solutions to exacerbate damp and mould issues. More fundamentally, while the Committee noted that the Scottish Household survey suggested that the prevalence of damp and mould was still not extensive and had not increased since the last survey the Committee also noted the concerns expressed by ALACHO about the house condition survey data not being of sufficient quality to provide a true picture of the quality of Scotland’s houses. Indeed the low prevalence of damp and mould did not match with members' experience of properties in their regions and constituencies.
165. The Minister responded on 12 June 2024 and noted that the Scottish Government was cognisant of this issues around the interrelationship between energy efficiency and damp and mould and is working with the sector on it. As regards the data issue, the Minister noted that he would be working with COSLA and ALACHO on this.

166. The Committee has agreed to return to this issue on an annual basis and hopes that conversations between the Scottish Government and COSLA and ALACHO will result in the collection of data that we can make confident judgements upon.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Planning issues

167. As with last year, this year the Committee's consideration of planning issues focussed on NPF4. This section of the report considers that work.

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)

168. NPF4 sets out the Scottish Government's strategy for Scotland's long-term development, and guides decisions on every application for planning permission submitted in Scotland.
169. Scrutiny of drafts of NPF4 was a key feature of the Committee's work in the first two years of this session.
170. In reporting to Parliament on the draft NPF4, the Committee agreed that it would monitor the effectiveness of NPF4 on an annual basis, holding the Scottish Government to account on whether or not NPF4 is meeting its ambitions. NPF4 took effect in February 2023 and the Committee returned to look at NPF4 a year on. The Committee held sessions in May 2024.
171. Specifically, the Committee held evidence sessions on the following dates:
- [7 May 2024](#)
 - [14 May 2024](#)
 - [21 May 2024](#)
172. The Committee [wrote to the Minister for Public Finance on 26 June 2024](#) following up on the issues raised in the review sessions. The Minister subsequently [responded on 30 August 2024](#).
173. In the Committee's correspondence with the Minister the Committee raised particular concerns about the capacity of local authorities to deliver on NPF4. The

Minister recognised this challenge and highlighted the Scottish Government's Investing in Planning consultation as a means to develop proposals to respond to these challenges. The Minister also highlighted the critical role to be played by the National Improvement Champion.

174. The Committee recognises that it is too early to form any judgements on NPF4. Nonetheless, for NPF4 to be successful local authorities must have the capacity to deliver on it. The Committee looks forward to re-visiting this next year and in particular will be interested to see what outcomes there are from the Scottish Government's investing in planning consultation.

Progress since last year's report



No progress



Some progress



Good progress

Work in 2024/25

175. As the Committee turns to its fourth year, its focus will again be on its three guiding principles:
- The Committee wants to prioritise and focus on a number of key issues and pursue them throughout the session.
 - The Committee wants to work closely with stakeholders and communities to identify these issues, scrutinise them and track them throughout the session.
 - The Committee wants to demystify the worlds of local government, housing and planning and enable people to engage with them better contributing to better outcomes.
176. In June 2024, the Committee agreed a programme of future work. The programme is structured around a set of key themes under each element of the Committee's remit.

Local Government

177. At the heart of the Committee's work on local government is a focus on ensuring that local government can be as effective as possible in delivering for the communities it serves and empowering those communities.
178. This work is connected to the Local Governance Review and New Deal with Local Government, with all other parts of the Committee's work, linked to these two initiatives.
179. It is clear that over the course of this year more questions have been raised about the financial sustainability of local government. In recognition of this the Committee has agreed that the financial sustainability of local government should be added to key considerations informing the Committee's work on local government.
180. In looking at empowering both local government and in turn communities, the Committee will look at the relationship between central and local government, what local government needs to work well and if attitudes should change to ensure that power is devolved to the right levels to provide real community empowerment. The Committee's work will focus on the following key themes:
- Are local government and central government working effectively together as equal partners to deliver on shared priorities and reduce inequalities?
 - Does local government have the necessary:
 - clarity on what is a local government matter and what is central government matter,
 - certainty and levels of funding,
 - flexibility, and

- autonomy

- Is local government pursuing a public service reform agenda, working effectively and collaboratively to make best use of finite resources to deliver for its communities?
- Do we have the right structures in place to allow local government to be effective, maintain services and support its workforce?
- Are communities being empowered to shape their priorities and deliver them?

181. In pursuing these themes, the Committee will continue to undertake work this year in relation to:

- The Local Governance Review
- The New Deal with local government
- The financial sustainability of local government
- Understanding barriers to local elected office

In addition, the Committee will continue to monitor progress in relation to its work on:

- Post-legislative scrutiny of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015
- Community Councils
- Community Wealth Building
- Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill

Housing

182. The second element of the Committee's remit relates to housing matters. Central to the Committee's work is a focus on ensuring that Scotland has the right number of homes needed to meet current and future need and that house building is taking place in the right places and to the right standards.

183. Since the Committee agreed its approach to scrutinising housing policy last year, housing problems have become more acute, culminating in the announcement of a national housing emergency . The Committee will focus on the following themes:

- What does it mean to have a housing emergency and how is the Scottish Government working with partners in the private and public sector to respond to it?
- Are we building enough homes or bringing enough homes back into use to meet Scotland's current and future housing needs?
- Are we making the best use of land in Scotland to meet Scotland's housing

needs?

- Are we building homes with a focus on placemaking?
- Are we creating and sustaining a mix of housing that is financially and physically accessible to all?
- Are we building homes that provide for affordable warmth and zero emissions?
- Are we ensuring that new and existing homes are safe and of a high quality?

184. In pursuing these themes the Committee will undertake a housing inquiry that will focus on the response to the housing emergency and how in Scotland we can move beyond the housing emergency to a functioning housing ecosystem that works for all. Moreover, the Committee will continue to pursue work in relation to particular facets of this ecosystem by:

- continuing its scrutiny of the Housing (Scotland) Bill;
- Scrutinising the Scottish Government's approach to net zero housing in the context of the forthcoming Heat in Buildings Bill;
- Scrutinising the effectiveness of the Scottish Government's short-term lets licensing scheme
- Examining the prevalence of damp and mould in the rental sector and the adequacy of the response to it;
- Scrutinising the Scottish Government's progress in the assessment and remediation of buildings with potentially flammable cladding;
- Scrutinising the response to the challenges presented by RAAC.

Planning

185. The Committee's focus around planning continues to be on the National Planning Framework 4, which came into effect in February 2023. As noted earlier in this report, the Committee undertook its first annual review of NPF4 earlier this year. The Committee will return to do so again in spring 2025. A key focus of that work, as it was this year, will be whether Scotland has enough planners with the right skills to deliver on the ambitions of NPF4.

Conclusions

186. The Committee draws this report to the attention of the Parliament.
187. While recognising a variety of different extenuating factors, it is nonetheless disappointing that more progress has not been made across the different areas scrutinised by this Committee. The Committee hopes that when it returns to consider its tracker report next year it will be able to note more progress made in relation to the issues contained in this report.

