

AWICS Scotland News

October 2017



The Scottish Parliament has received new fiscal powers and has revised its budgetary processes.

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The Scottish Government's New Fiscal Powers and Budgetary Process

The Scottish Government recently assumed new fiscal powers including the power to vary income tax that are expected to lead to a massive cultural change in budget processes. This was the conclusion of a Review Group of 'independent experts' that published its report in June 2017. The report put forward four thematic objectives:

- Wider influence in shaping the budget.
- Better transparency and public understanding.
- Greater capacity to respond to challenges.
- Better benchmarking against properly measured outputs and outcomes.

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The report recommended a more strategic approach to the budget, including the publication of economic data in an annually updated medium-term financial strategy in the spring and a fiscal framework out-turn report each autumn. This would lead to a new approach with committees taking account of the budget implications of policies and budget planning made subject to year-round parliamentary and public scrutiny rather than being examined only during the weeks between the budget statement and Bill.

The Scottish Government has responded with a new Budget process that will be adopted as of the 2019/20 Draft Budget. In line with the Budget Process Review Group recommendations, it will offer Parliament a year-round approach to Budget scrutiny within the framework as set out in the Review Group report including the following:

- Full Year Approach: a broader process in which committees have the flexibility to incorporate budget scrutiny including public engagement into their work prior to the publication of firm and detailed spending proposals.
- Continuous cycle: scrutiny should be continuous with an emphasis on developing an understanding of the impact of budgetary decisions over several years including budgetary trends.
- Output / outcome focused: scrutiny should also be evaluative with an emphasis on what budgets have achieved and aim to achieve over the long term, including scrutiny of equalities outcomes.
- Fiscal Responsibility: scrutiny should have a long-term outlook and focus more on prioritisation, addressing fiscal constraints and the impact of increasing demand for public services.
- Interdependent: scrutiny should focus more on the interdependent nature of many of the policies which the budget is seeking to deliver.

It is anticipated that the budget process will become just one part of an expanded financial discussion that will include the wider fiscal framework, a medium-term financial strategy, a fiscal framework out-turn report and, in a spending review year, the statement of objectives or framework documents.

The Draft Budget for 2018/19 will be published in December 2017, subject to parliamentary approval. In keeping with last year's process, the Budget Bill timetable has been amended to provide additional time for Parliament to scrutinise the budget proposals. Derek Mackay MSP, the Scottish Finance Secretary, says this demonstrates good governance and partnership working. Welcoming the recommendations of the Budget Process Review Group, Derek Mackay agreed that publishing the Scottish Budget prior to the United Kingdom Budget would be 'counter-productive' due to the levels of economic and fiscal uncertainty. Derek Mackay has therefore sought agreement that the Scottish Budget be published three working weeks after the Chancellor delivers the United Kingdom Autumn Budget on 22 November 2017. Derek Mackay said that:

"The Budget Process Review Group has been a positive example of Parliament, Government and Civic Scotland working together in the interests of the people of Scotland, and I welcome the recommendations they've put forward. The report confirms it would be counter-productive to publish the Scottish Budget ahead of the United Kingdom Autumn Budget, due to the impact that it may have on Scotland's public finances. (So) I have written to Finance Committee to agree a timetable for our 2018/19 Draft Budget and begin implementing the review group recommendations. I propose setting out our Budget plans on 14 December – three weeks after the Chancellor is due to deliver the Autumn Budget – which is in keeping with previous years.

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“I look forward to working with the Finance Committee and the wider Parliament as we seek to secure a Budget that will deliver for all of Scotland.”

One of the ‘independent experts’ was Don Peebles, the Head of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy in Scotland. He told ‘Public Finance’ that:

“The move from a single-year focus to thinking over the longer-term – that’s a massive step.

“The wider cultural change is going to come from two places. One is greater public involvement in the process, beyond the normal stakeholders and lobby groups. The other is the government, with the assistance of Parliament, which is going to mean a longer-term outlook on finances and well-being. At the moment, the government produces the budget to a specific timetable, and Parliament undertakes budget scrutiny at a fixed point in time. For the public, there is little interaction and dare I say it – little understanding of the process. That interaction is going to change because the tax setting process for income tax is going to be predominantly here in Edinburgh... The relationship that people have with Westminster, which is mature, is going to change into a more mature one with Holyrood.

“I’d like to think it’s more likely to mean greater awareness and understanding of what the intended outcomes are from the government’s perspective, what resources there actually are, and what has to be done by the respective parties to meet those outcomes.

“What we mean by a whole-year approach is a greater awareness on the part of committees that finance and financial consequences are ingrained into what they are considering. Finance is a part of, not apart from, normal policy issues.

“The fact that the United Kingdom government has revised its timetable to bring the budget from the spring into the autumn means an additional complication.

“That was what we thought about in setting out a minimum timescale for publication of the (Scottish) budget after the United Kingdom budget, which means not only that there has to be a budget produced within a few weeks but also appropriate time for scrutiny. In recent years, especially in spending review years, the time for scrutiny has sometimes been compressed to an unacceptable level.”

Scottish Government calls for more devolution after Brexit

The First Ministers of Scotland and Wales wrote to the United Kingdom government in September 2017 urging it to work with them to ensure that further powers are devolved to them after Brexit.

Nicola Sturgeon (the First Minister of Scotland, Scottish National Party) and Carwyn Jones (the First Minister of Wales, Labour) have published 38 proposed amendments to the United Kingdom government’s European Union Withdrawal Bill to protect the devolved powers currently held by the Scottish and Welsh administrations.

The Scottish and Welsh Governments both object to powers being transferred from Brussels to Westminster and then to Edinburgh and Cardiff. They want to see these powers move directly to Scotland and Wales despite statements from the United Kingdom government that its intention is that any powers that are not incorporated into United Kingdom-wide frameworks will be sent on to the devolved parliaments.

They insist that the amendments are not an attempt to stop 'Brexit' but a measure to ensure the devolved nations were factored into the ongoing negotiations.

Speaking after a meeting in September 2017 with Damian Green MP on the issues surrounding the current draft of the European Union Withdrawal Bill, that was also attended by Minister for United Kingdom Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe Michael Russell MSP and Scottish Secretary David Mundell - Deputy First Minister John Swinney said:

"Today's meeting was a useful opportunity for an exchange of views between ourselves and the United Kingdom Government on Brexit and to discuss the current draft of the European Union Withdrawal Bill. The discussions were constructive but we remain absolutely clear that, as things stand, we will not recommend to the Scottish Parliament that it gives its consent to the European Union Withdrawal Bill. We made clear, we are not opposed in principle to United Kingdom-wide frameworks in certain areas – but this must be on the basis of agreement among equals, not imposed by Westminster."

"The bill as currently drafted is impractical and unworkable. It is a blatant power grab which would take existing competence over a wide range of devolved policy areas, including aspects of topics like agriculture and fishing, away from Holyrood, giving them instead to Westminster and Whitehall. That means that unless there are serious and significant changes to the proposed legislation, we will not recommend that the Scottish Parliament give consent to the bill. We will continue to talk to the United Kingdom Government so that the bill is changed to protect devolution. We emphasised to the First Secretary of State that the consent of the Scottish Parliament is required if there is to be agreement in this process."

"United Kingdom Ministers should be in no doubt – to override a vote of the Scottish Parliament and impose the European Union Withdrawal Bill on Scotland would be an extraordinary and unprecedented step to take. The current proposals are a direct threat to the devolution settlement which the people of Scotland overwhelmingly voted for in 1997."

Damian Green MP, First Secretary of State, said that the United Kingdom government was 'ready to listen' to the devolved governments and that the Scottish and Welsh governments would receive more decision-making powers but that:

"The United Kingdom government will not risk our internal United Kingdom market, or make life more difficult or more expensive for United Kingdom companies, workers or consumers."

Scottish Planning Bill and Affordable Housing

In 2015 Scottish Ministers commissioned an independent panel to undertake a review of the planning system. The review included opportunities for people to get involved through both written and oral evidence and an online discussion forum.

Since then the Scottish Government has been working with a wide range of stakeholders, including community representatives, public and private sectors, to explore potential changes to the planning system. Ministers signalled in the Programme for Government that a Planning Bill would be brought forward in 2017.

The Scottish Government is proposing four key areas of change:

- Making plans for the future. They want Scotland's planning system to lead and inspire change by making clear plans for the future. To achieve this, they intend to simplify and strengthen development planning.

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- People make the system work. They want Scotland's planning system to empower people to have more influence on the future of their places. To achieve this, they intend to improve the way they involve people in the planning process.
- Building more homes and delivering infrastructure. They want Scotland's planning system to help deliver more high-quality homes and create better places where people can live healthy lives and developers are inspired to invest. To achieve this, planning can actively enable and co-ordinate development.
- Stronger leadership and smarter resourcing. They want to reduce bureaucracy and improve resources so Scotland's planning system can focus on creating great places. To achieve this, they intend to remove processes that do not add value, and strengthen leadership, resources and skills.

The Scottish Government is therefore making twenty specific proposals as follows:

- Aligning community planning and spatial planning. This can be achieved by introducing a requirement for development plans to take account of wider community planning and can be supported through future guidance.
- Regional partnership working. We believe that strategic development plans should be removed from the system so that strategic planners can support more proactive regional partnership working.
- Improving national spatial planning and policy. The National Planning Framework (NPF) can be developed further to better reflect regional priorities. In addition, national planning policies can be used to make local development planning simpler and more consistent.
- Stronger local development plans. We believe the plan period should be extended to 10 years, and that 'main issues reports' and supplementary guidance should be removed to make plans more accessible for people. A new 'gatecheck' would help to improve plan examinations by dealing with significant issues at an earlier stage.
- Making plans that deliver. We can strengthen the commitment that comes from allocating development land in the plan, and improve the use of delivery programmes to help ensure that planned development happens on the ground.
- Giving people an opportunity to plan their own place. Communities should be given a new right to come together and prepare local place plans. We believe these plans should form part of the statutory local development plan.
- Getting more people involved in planning. A wider range of people should be encouraged and inspired to get involved in planning. In particular, we would like to introduce measures that enable children and young people to have a stronger voice in decisions about the future of their places.
- Improving public trust. Pre-application consultation can be improved, and there should be greater community involvement where proposals are not supported in the development plan. We also propose to discourage repeat applications and improving planning enforcement.
- Keeping decisions local – rights of appeal. We believe that more review decisions should be made by local authorities rather than centrally. We also want to ensure that the system is sufficiently flexible to reflect the distinctive challenges and opportunities in different parts of Scotland.
- Being clear about how much housing land is required. Planning should take a more strategic view of the land required for housing development. Clearer national and regional aspirations for new homes are proposed to support this.
- Closing the gap between planning consent and delivery of homes. We want planning authorities to take more steps to actively help deliver development. Land reform could help to achieve this.

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- Releasing more ‘development ready’ land. Plans should take a more strategic and flexible approach to identifying land for housing. Consents could be put in place for zoned housing land through greater use of Simplified Planning Zones.
- Embedding an infrastructure first approach. There is a need for better co-ordination of infrastructure planning at a national and regional level. This will require a stronger commitment to delivering development from all infrastructure providers.
- A more transparent approach to funding infrastructure. We believe that introducing powers for a new local levy to raise additional finance for infrastructure would be fairer and more effective. Improvements can also be made to Section 75 obligations.
- Innovative infrastructure planning. Infrastructure planning needs to look ahead so that it can deliver low carbon solutions, new digital technologies and the facilities that communities need.
- Developing skills to deliver outcomes. We will work with the profession to improve and broaden skills.
- Investing in a better service. There is a need to increase planning fees to ensure the planning service is better resourced.
- A new approach to improving performance. We will continue work to strengthen the way in which performance is monitored, reported and improved.
- Making better use of resources – efficient decision making. We will remove the need for planning consent from a wider range of developments. Targeted changes to development management will help to ensure decisions are made more quickly and more transparently.
- Innovation, designing for the future and the digital transformation of the planning service. There are many opportunities to make planning work better through the use of information technology. The planning service should continue to pioneer the digital transformation of public services.

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has responded to the Scottish Government’s consultation on their Planning Bill to argue for an increased focus on delivering affordable homes. They argue that not enough is being done to ensure that housing needs are met, referring to the report of 2015 ‘Affordable Housing Needs in Scotland’ that identified a need to build 60,000 new homes a year in Scotland and to the Scottish Government’s target of building 50,000 homes a year of which 35,000 will be affordable.

The Scottish Federation of Housing Association’s proposals to increase the delivery of affordable housing in Scotland include the setting of national and regional targets and to allow local authorities to transfer land at existing value to address the lack of affordable land that is available for housing development. They also recommend that national or regional bodies should be set up to deliver infrastructure up front to unlock key sites.

Sarah Boyack, Head of Public Affairs at the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, told the ‘Scottish Housing News’ that:

“A key driver behind the Planning Review was the concern that Scotland wasn’t building enough houses and its remit was to find solutions to this major problem. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations is concerned, however, that proposals for a new Planning Bill do not focus enough on delivering more quality affordable homes.

“We are proposing a number of actions that we believe will increase the delivery of affordable housing in Scotland, create jobs and meet outstanding. We look forward to engaging with the Scottish Government, and with politicians at Holyrood, as the bill goes through parliament.”

Meanwhile, the Scottish Alliance for People and Places, that includes the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and is chaired by Henry McLeish (former Labour First Minister and a town planner), has come together to help deliver a 'more inclusive, collaborative and innovative' planning system when the Bill is introduced to Holyrood later this year. They intend to promote the need for a planning system that 'inspires and empowers civic participation, recognises the positive force that quality economic development can play in creating a more equal society, and is built on fostering strong relationships through consensus and collaboration'. They aim to put forward a compelling argument for change and develop constructive ideas for how to realise that change by influencing MSPs, Minister and officials.

Speaking at the launch of the Alliance, Henry McLeish said that:

"We want to work with the Scottish Government and Parliament to present an ambitious vision for a refreshed and revitalised planning system in Scotland that plans and delivers the quality economic and social development our country needs, but through collaboration and dialogue. Over the coming months, we will harness the experience and expertise of our members to offer constructive policy solutions that we believe can make this type transformational cultural change a reality."

Craig McLaren, Director of the Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland said that:

"The planning bill is an opportunity to create a planning system that allows everyone to help shape the places they live in. The Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland looks forward to working with partners in the Alliance to help make this a reality."

Sarah Boyack, Head of Public Affairs at the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, said that:

"Quality, affordable, warm homes in well-designed communities are essential for our health and well-being and are an investment in our future. We aim to help empower people to positively influence the places that they live and to ensure a supply of quality housing that meets people's needs across Scotland."

In August 2017, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations responded to the Scottish Government's consultation on their Planning Bill to argue for an increased focus on delivering affordable homes. They argue that not enough is being done to ensure that housing needs are met. The Scottish Federation of Housing Association's proposals to increase the delivery of affordable housing in Scotland include the setting of national and regional targets and to allow local authorities to transfer land at existing value to address the lack of affordable land that is available for housing development. They also recommend that national or regional bodies should be set up to deliver infrastructure up front to unlock key sites.

There is clearly a need for the planning system to support the provision of housing if sufficient new homes are to be built.

Housing Statistics for Scotland provide mixed news

The Housing Statistics for Scotland are published quarterly with the latest edition, published in September 2017 providing mixed news.

First, the bad news: They showed that under the Affordable Housing Supply Programme, 1,592 homes were built between April and June 2017, a 6% decrease on the same period in 2016. The figures also showed that 7,336 homes were built across 2016/17. While this was a 13% increase on the previous year, it represents only 14% of the government's target to build 50,000 new homes over five years. Most of these homes (63%) were new build and the remainder were off-the-shelf purchases or rehabilitations.

Second, the good news: Housing starts and approvals increased between April and June, with 2,076 affordable homes started – a 14% increase – and 1,456 affordable homes approved, 30% more than the previous year, bringing the total number of approvals over the year to 10,612. Also, between 2015/16 and 2016/17, the number of new house builds started, across the public and private sector, rose by 4% from 17,765 to 18,391, the fourth consecutive annual increase and the highest annual number of starts since 2008/9.

Scotland's Minister for Housing, Kevin Stewart said:

“One of the most important factors in any person's quality of life is their housing and access to good quality, warm and affordable housing is a vital part of our drive to secure economic growth, strengthen communities and tackle inequalities.

“This government is committed to delivering more affordable housing per head of the population than the United Kingdom government. We are offering significantly more grant funding for each unit of affordable housing, with each unit in Scotland supported by an average of £52,400 compared to just £25,300 in England.

“We're also building social housing at a faster rate than any other part of the United Kingdom, with the total number of social sector homes started by the end of June 2017 increasing to 6,234, 32% more than the year to end 2016.

“Over the lifetime of this Parliament, we will invest more than £3 billion to deliver 50,000 affordable homes. This is a massive investment backing up our target which is ambitious, challenging and absolutely necessary.”

However, Graeme Brown, Director of Shelter Scotland, said that:

“These figures show that last year only 7,336 new homes were completed under the Affordable Housing Supply Programme. This is just 14% of the Scottish Government's five-year target to build 50,000 new affordable homes.”

Meanwhile, it has been reported that Scotland's councils are ready to deliver 35,000 new social rented homes during the current Scottish Parliament with plans in place to double the number of new homes they provide each year. The 26 council landlords have plans in place for over 14,000 homes by 2021 including the 1,085 homes added in 2016/17. Councils will invest over £1.3billion, around 60% of which will be paid for by tenants through their rents with most of the remainder provided as grant from the Scottish Government.

However, the Scottish Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers has raised concerns about some of the challenges that councils, housing associations and the private sector face in delivering new homes and the risk to the supply of new supported housing caused by welfare reform and the difficulties in delivering new homes in remote and island communities.

The Housing Statistics for Scotland can be found on the Scottish Government's website at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/HSfS>

Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

Following the decision of the Office for National Statistics to reclassify Scotland's housing associations as public sector bodies in September 2016, the Scottish Government has responded by introducing the Housing (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill to the Scottish Parliament. This seeks to place Scottish housing associations back into the private sector thus preventing their borrowing from counting against the Scottish Government's borrowing limits.

The reason why the Office for National Statistics decided to reclassify Scottish housing associations was because of the extent of the powers of the Scottish Housing Regulator to intervene in their affairs. Consequently, the Bill would amend the powers of the Scottish Housing Regulator to ensure the reclassification while continuing to empower the Regulator to protect tenants' interests.

The Bill proposes to reduce the powers the Scottish Housing Regulator has to:

- Appoint a manager to a housing association.
- Suspend, remove and appoint officers of a housing association.
- Exercise control over the disposal (e.g. a sale) of land and housing assets by a housing association (by requiring them to obtain the Regulator's consent to a disposal).
- Exercise consent over any changes to the constitution of a housing association.
- Exercise control over voluntary winding-up, dissolution and restructuring of a housing association (mainly by requiring a them to obtain the Regulator's consent to these actions).

The Bill also provides for Scottish Ministers to modify the functions of the Regulator and to reduce local authority influence over housing associations in regulations.

The Scottish Government is currently out for consultation on the Bill. In its invitation for written views, the local government and communities committee has asked respondents to address the following questions in relation to the aims of the Bill:

- Do you agree that measures should be taken to influence the Office for National Statistics to reclassify Registered Social Landlords as private sector bodies; and if not, please explain why?
- Do you have any views on the appropriateness of the measures proposed in this Bill to bring about this reclassification?
- Do you have views on whether the aims of the Bill could be achieved by other means?
- Any other issues relating to the Bill which you wish to bring to the attention of the Committee?

The closing date for representations is 26th October 2017.

A copy of the Bill can be found on the Scottish Parliament's website at: <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/105852.aspx>

Welfare Reform and Rent

A joint report by Shelter Scotland and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations entitled 'First Month's Rent Flexibilities' has urged Housing associations to require less rent upfront to combat growing arrears under Universal Credit and the benefit cap.

The report found that growing numbers of tenants are struggling to pay their first month of rent upfront and concluded that housing associations should be flexible by requiring one week's rent instead, or alternatively that the Scottish Government should provide loans.

The report included the results of a poll of 27 housing associations that had shown that most of those asking for rent in advance asked for between a week and a month's worth. Several responses highlighted what the report called:

"The detrimental effects that delayed Universal Credit payments were having on tenants and landlords."

Sarah Boyack, Head of Public Affairs at the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, told 'Inside Housing' that tenants were often in debt before their tenancy began, putting them and their landlords in a vulnerable position and that:

"This report highlights the detrimental effects that delayed Universal Credit payments are having on social landlords and their tenants."

Adam Lang, Head of Policy at Shelter Scotland said that:

"It's vital that homeless households, people on low incomes and people who can't access other forms of housing can find a home they can afford. Social housing provides that safety net. But one month's rent in advance for some households is simply not affordable. People starting their tenancy in arrears from which they may not recover is not in anyone's interest, so flexible arrangements such as one week's rent in advance or introducing repayable loans from the Scottish Government could make the difference between affording a home or not for many households."

A Scottish Government spokesperson said that:

"We agree with concerns about the impact of welfare reform and the chaotic introduction of Universal Credit, especially for those making new claims or entering into new tenancies. But it is disappointing the report made no recommendations directed at the United Kingdom Government – the architect of the systems causing these issues. The United Kingdom Government have created this situation and it is their job to fix it. We hope the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and Shelter will join our call for a pause in the roll out of Universal Credit to prevent further hardship. In the meantime, the report highlights several approaches that can continue to be taken by landlords. We encourage all landlords to consider their services in light of the difficulties their tenants may be facing."

Glasgow to develop sustainable solutions to fuel poverty with €4.1million EU grant

More than €4million has been awarded to Glasgow City Council to develop sustainable solutions tackling issues such as fuel poverty, ageing infrastructure and air quality on its new smart street district.

The €4.1million European Union Horizon 2020 programme grant will be used to develop initiatives, such as intelligent energy management systems, which make sharing of energy possible between the various buildings within Glasgow's new smart street district, that runs from George Street, Duke Street and ends at the former meat market site.

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Together with the University of Strathclyde, SP Energy Networks, Siemens, Transport Scotland, Tennents Brewery and Glasgow Housing Association, a package of innovative sustainability measures has been developed. This will involve the deployment of sustainable energy sources such as efficient heat networks, solar panels, urban wind turbines, and energy storage installations, along with energy efficiency improvements for local residents.

In addition to improving energy use in buildings, the project will enhance the provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure within the smart street area, and explore the opportunities around charging through renewable sources, energy management and support to the local electrical grid.

Councillor Anna Richardson, Glasgow city convener for sustainability and carbon reduction, told the 'Scottish Housing News' that:

"This funding from the European Commission will allow Glasgow to benefit from the use of sustainable technologies in tackling issues such as fuel poverty, ageing infrastructure and air quality. Cutting carbon emissions, tackling climate change and increasing access to affordable energy for city residents are key priorities. It will help create job opportunities and contribute to improving the quality of life for residents living and working in the smart corridor district.

"Glasgow is striving to become one of the most sustainable and resilient cities in Europe and harnessing renewable energy and securing future energy supplies for our citizens are a major part of that aspiration. With this official acknowledgement by the European Commission, Glasgow will continue its journey initiated by Sustainable Glasgow and Future Cities initiatives, maintaining our position as a leader in the development of sustainable and smart cities."

Perth & Kinross Council completes new council housing

Tenants have recently moved into brand new Perth & Kinross Council homes at Glenearn Road in Perth. The new modern blocks contain four one-bedroom flats and four two-bedroom flats. The flats are built to the highest standard. All windows and doors are triple glazed and they are insulated well to keep tenants warm and reduce heating bills. The development cost over £1million to construct.

To mark 'Scottish Housing Day' in September 2017, Councillor Peter Barrett (Liberal-Democrat), the council's housing and communities convener, visited the new development to speak to tenants about their new homes. He said that:

"It's fantastic to celebrate Scottish Housing Day and meet the new tenants who have moved into this quality accommodation built by the council. These properties will transform the lives of the new residents and enhance the surrounding neighbourhood. Building more quality affordable housing will be a priority for me as the new housing convener, and I'm very pleased to see the completion of this development on a key site in Perth. Previously the land housed four bungalows which had to be demolished, so we have increased the amount of accommodation on the site through this build. The council's multi-million pound building programme, combined with our work supporting new builds through housing associations, has already seen over 500 new homes delivered right across Perth and Kinross since 2012. This figure includes over 200 new council homes. All of these new properties have been built to the very highest standards in areas where there is an acute shortage of affordable housing for local people."

The Glenearn Road development, delivered by contractor CCG, was funded in partnership by Perth & Kinross Council and the Scottish Government, as part of the council's commitment to increase the supply of high-quality social housing in the area. The council's affordable house building programme has delivered new homes in the towns and settlements right across the region, including Methven, Scone, Alyth, Inchtute, Blairgowrie, Auchterarder, Balbeggie, Rattray and in many sites in Perth. More new builds are in the pipeline, and new developments at Scone and Stanley recently began.

School Library Improvement Fund

The Scottish Government is allocating £1 million to improve school libraries over the next three years. Launched in September 2017 by the Deputy First Minister, the School Library Improvement Fund will be open for education authorities to apply for funding on behalf of school libraries in their area. It will fund projects designed to enhance library provision at schools, as part of a wider approach to improve literacy skills and educational attainment.

Meeting pupils and library staff at Gracemount High School, Deputy First Minister and Education Secretary, John Swinney, said that:

“School libraries play a vital role in supporting literacy and improving attainment. The launch of the School Library Improvement Fund will further strengthen that role – giving school libraries access to additional resource that can improve the service they provide to pupils. This could be improvements to the library environment, funding for additional activity to engage more young people to use the school library or projects that will encourage wider engagement with the local community. We want to know what school librarians, teachers and education authorities think would work best in their school. It is part of a range of new measures to improve and invest in our school libraries -including new improvement guidance and the development of a new national strategy for school libraries in Scotland.”

The School Library Improvement Fund will work alongside new guidance from the Scottish Library and Information Council 'How Good is Our School Library', published in September 2017. Projects will be funded this year based on how well they support the principles outlined in the guidance.

Pamela Tulloch, Chief Executive of the School Library Improvement Fund said that:

“School libraries have a huge contribution to make to education and learning. We know from our research that a well-run, well-resourced school library, with professionally qualified librarians, leads to higher educational attainment and positive attitudes to learning among pupils. With this new fund, along with the evaluation framework and the new national strategy, school libraries will be able to formalise and cement their role in learning and education. A national strategy will allow us to create a consistent approach to service, meaning all pupils across Scotland will have equal access to learning support from a school library.”

The fund will be administered by the School Library Improvement Fund to support projects in four priority areas - reader development, digital creativity, information literacy and health and social wellbeing. The funding will be split over three years as follows: 2017/18 - £100,000; 2018/19 - £450,000; and 2019/20 - £450,000.

The Scottish Library and Information Council is leading the development of a new school library strategy, and a working group has been appointed to facilitate cross-sector contribution. The strategy will be published in summer 2018, ahead of the start of the new academic year.

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Editorial Note

The AWICS Scotland News is published by AWICS Limited. This edition was edited by Adrian Waite. Articles are written by Adrian Waite unless otherwise stated. However, the views expressed are not necessarily those of Adrian Waite or AWICS unless expressly stated.

AWICS Surveys

At AWICS we value feedback from our clients and from users of our website. This is for two reasons:

- We actively seek feedback from clients so that we can evaluate what we are doing now and use the information to improve our services in future.
- We like to have a dialogue with clients and users of our website so that we can understand their developing needs and provide services to meet them as part of a long-term commercial relationship.

We have therefore developed a series of surveys and questionnaires that can be found at: <http://awics.co.uk/questionnaires-and-feedback>

These include a survey about our seminars. Whether or not you have attended one of our seminars recently, I would be grateful if you could assist us by completing our short survey. It can be found at: <https://form.jotformeu.com/71926426584364>

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PLACE AN ADVERTISEMENT IN THE AWICS SCOTTISH NEWS PLEASE CONTACT Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk

About 'AWICS'

'AWICS' is a management consultancy and training company. We specialise in providing support in finance and management to clients in local government and housing in England, Scotland and Wales. We are well known for our ability to analyse and explain complex financial and management issues clearly.

Our mission statement is 'Independence, Integrity, Value'. We therefore provide support to clients from an independent standpoint that is designed to help the client to achieve their objectives. We are passionate about working with the utmost integrity. We believe that we offer the best value for money that is available today!

For more information about our services and us please visit our website at www.awics.co.uk or contact Adrian Waite at Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk. Services that we offer include:

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