

# AWICS Scottish News

## November 2015



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### Welcome

Dear Reader,

In this issue we start with a piece on the recently released programme of the Scottish Government for 2015/16. The major points here are on education, but it also includes sections on empowering local communities, including participatory budgeting, revisions to the planning system, a rural investment fund, and many more. While many policy initiatives may still depend on the outcome of the next Scottish election in May, one legal instrument that has just passed through the Scottish Parliament is the Private Tenancies (Scotland) Bill that we focus on in the second article. We then provide a brief update on the impact of welfare reform in Scotland and the response by the Scottish Government stemming shortfalls with Discretionary Housing Payments.

We highlight a new reporting tool released by the Scottish Housing Regulator for viewing and comparing provider performance easily and the National Housing Trust's success in delivering affordable housing across Scotland. Finally the newsletter updates you with news and developments in Perth and Kinross Council, one of the principal clients of AWICS.

As usual, please feel free to mail us your comments, thoughts, suggestions at [Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk](mailto:Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk).

Kind regards,

Adrian Waite

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### **Scottish government programme unveiled — focus on Education**

The Scottish Government has unveiled its programme for 2015/16, representing the last government programme released by the Sturgeon administration prior to the Scottish Elections in May 2016.

The cabinet took 'participation', 'fairness', and 'prosperity' as the guiding principles for this year's programme putting a special emphasis on education reform. For this, the Scottish government is introducing a 'National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education' that stipulates a system of standardised assessments for literacy and numeracy. This is hoped to improve the evidence base for future interventions where evidence on school attainment has so far been patchy and hampered by varying assessment procedures.

Student attainment performance in Scotland came under fire last year when reviews by the Rowntree Foundation documented a persistent attainment gap between students from deprived and non-deprived areas. Pupils aged five from non-deprived areas were on average 10-13 months ahead of peers from deprived areas. Taking this as a wakeup call to action, Stewart Maxwell, member of the Scottish Parliament and member on the Education and Culture Committee, stated in early 2015:

*"We have committed to looking at this issue over the course of 2015. We are determined to hold the Scottish Government and other bodies to account for their performance on an issue of fundamental importance to pupils and parents across the country."*

Commenting on the government's efforts on education reform and the National Improvement Framework, Nicola Sturgeon said,

*"At its centre is a commitment to introduce an Improvement Framework for schools, to help us drive up attainment in all schools, and to close the attainment gap. We aim to ensure that children in all parts of Scotland – whether in our least or our most affluent areas – have a fair chance to flourish."*

*"These new assessments will introduce greater consistency to Curriculum for Excellence. They will provide reliable evidence of a child's performance or progress - but they will not be the sole measurement. This is not about narrowing the curriculum or forcing teachers to "teach to a test". It is not a return to the national testing of old. Moreover, the assessments will inform teacher judgment - not replace it."*

In terms of the devolution agenda, the programme flags that starting from April 2016, the Scotland Act (2012) will allow Scotland to set its own income tax for the first time, but any changes to income tax need to be applied to all tax bands and the Scottish government says that it is working towards additional powers to vary tax bands as well.

The Scotland Bill 2015/16 will provide for the further devolution of spending powers to Scotland, but is still on its way through the House of Commons. Therefore, certain policy initiatives, including amendments to the income tax bands, will yet have to wait, and cannot yet be considered by the Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish Government's programme emphasises the effort it makes to influence the content of the Scotland Bill to include more comprehensive powers over welfare. For example, the programme states that:

*"The new powers that have been proposed by the UK Government fall short of what was promised to the people of Scotland. We will continue to demand that those promises are delivered. But at the same time we are acting with pace and creativity to be ready to use the limited powers that are proposed, and we will do so in consultation with others."*

*"We are continuing discussions with the UK Government to secure changes to the Bill both to meet the Smith Commission recommendations in full and to go beyond those recommendations and deliver a Scotland Bill that empowers the Scottish Parliament to meet the challenges Scotland faces."*

In preparation for the expected devolution of spending and welfare powers, work has started on a new Social Security System for Scotland. Here the Scotland bill 2015-16 foresees devolution of 'around £2.6billion (14.6%) of benefit expenditure in Scotland that is currently all controlled by the United Kingdom Government'. Again, the outcome will depend on the final form of the Scotland Act. The government programme states that:

*"The Scottish Government now works towards a Social Security Bill that will add on to the introduction of Universal Credit across the UK, to mitigate the impact of Welfare cuts, and to abolish the bedroom tax."*

The programme also contains a chapter on 'strengthening our communities' that emphasises the principles of participation of a wider demography through, for example, community investment schemes and a rural housing fund. The most significant bill likely to be passed this year may be considered to be the Private Tenancies Bill that is referred to further below. Other measures and government commitments announced in the programme include:

- Home buyers will receive additional support through a top-up to the Help to Buy scheme. The government has pledged £195million over the next three years to help up to 6,500 households.
- A new private tenancies bill has been suggested that will 'give tenants in the private rented sector increased security, while giving landlords, lenders and investors the confidence to continue investing in the sector. This will provide more predictable rents and protection for tenants against excessive rent increases, including the ability to introduce local rent controls for rent pressure areas'. We write more about this in the next article.
- The Scottish government continues work on implementing land reform. We have previously reported on this. The Scottish Government's plans are for 'modernising and improving land ownership and rights over land'. Furthermore, the new Community Empowerment Act passed in June gives communities rights to own land and buildings. An associated £19.4million Empowering Communities Fund has begun to invest in hundreds of community-based organisations supporting thousands of people.
- A commission is underway that researches alternatives to the present council tax system that's based on property valuation. In 2007 the Scottish Government proposed replacing Council Tax with a Local Income Tax but this proposal was frustrated by the United Kingdom Government.

The Scottish Government programme for 2015/16 can be downloaded here:  
<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/09/7685/0>

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## **Private Tenancies Scotland Bill — increased tenure security for tenants and landlords**

The Scottish private rented sector continues to gain in importance, rising from 5% to 11% as a proportion of housing tenure over the last decade. During this time, the properties available for rent rose from 161,000 to 273,000, a rise partly attributed to the new mortgages that allowed for financing buy-to-rent purchases and an increase in house prices. Now, over half of tenants (57%) in private rented schemes are in the 16-34 year age bracket many of them on lower to middle-income groups.

Hence, the private tenancies Scotland bill has been introduced to the Scottish Parliament following a review of private tenancy schemes in Scotland that looked into the state of the rented accommodation sector in Scotland. The group, that had a remit to review the 'suitability and effectiveness of the current private rented sector tenancy regime' in particular the arrangements relating to security and length of tenures, recommended a reform of the various tenancy arrangements (including the current tenancy for the private rented sector, short assured tenancy, and assured tenancy) into a 'new private tenancy' with the goal to provide 'clarity, simplicity, ease of use, and flexibility'.

According to the Scottish Government, the new Private Tenancies Bill 'will increase security of tenure for tenants while providing appropriate safeguards for landlords, lenders and investors. This is part of the Scottish Government's broader approach to reforming the private rented sector to make it a more professionally managed and better regulated sector, that provides good quality homes, and is attractive to those who want to live, work and invest in it'. Specifically, the measures included in the bill are designed to:

- Streamline the tenancy system by introducing a Scottish Private Rented Tenancy that replaces the current Assured system. Pre-tenancy notices will no longer be required.
- Remove the 'no-fault' ground for repossession, meaning a landlord could no longer ask a tenant to leave simply because the fixed-term has ended, but instead better provision is made for cases of repossession that cover intention to sell or re-occupation.
- Provide more predictable rents and protection for tenants against excessive rent increases. Rent increases can only happen once per year and need to be announced three months in advance in writing.
- The law will also provide local authorities with means to introduce rent controls in areas with high housing demand.

Nicola Sturgeon's commented:

*"The Private Tenancies Bill provides tenants with protection against excessive rent rises, while also giving clear rights and safeguards to landlords."*

Ashley Campbell, cited in the Scottish Housing News, commented on the proposal:

*"The forthcoming Private Tenancies Bill represents an opportunity to increase standards in a rapidly-expanding sector which now houses over 300,000 households in Scotland and we look forward to working through the details. The introduction of measures to regulate letting agencies operating in Scotland also provides an opportunity to increase professional standards and improve the experiences of private renters. However, we would also welcome greater commitment from the government to support private landlords and letting agents in becoming more professional, bringing homes up to standard and creating a sector that is truly an attractive option for people looking for a place to call home."*

Graeme Brown, director of Shelter Scotland, said:

*“The private rented sector is now home to 330,000 households across Scotland, including around 85,000 families with children. The changes included in the bill will begin the process of reforming the private rented sector and making it more modern, stable, flexible, predictable and fairer for everyone that calls it home.”*

Jon Sparks, chief executive of Crisis UK, added:

*“With the private rented sector continuing to grow – and the ending of an assured shorthold tenancy now the leading cause of homelessness across the UK – it is particularly encouraging that greater protection for tenants is at the heart of the Scottish Government’s housing plans through the removal of the ‘no fault’ ground for eviction.”*

Many consider that the Scottish government’s rent reforms take steps in the right direction. It is certainly a different direction to that which is being taken in England. Measures such as the introduction of rent controls were suggested in Labour’s last election manifesto for pressured areas, such as London, but this approach has been rejected by the United Kingdom Government. Looking further afield, countries such as Germany manage to sustain a substantial and good quality private rented sector alongside rent controls. The Independent recently reported a Survation poll that found that only 6.8% of respondents are ‘somewhat’ or ‘strongly’ opposing the introduction of such controls showing broad based support in the population also in England. Clarification and simplification in the protection of tenants including cases where no rent payments flow and better protection of tenure after fixed-term contracts end are often considered to be good for greater stability of tenancies in a market that is increasingly occupied by low- and middle-income households. At the same time, it will provide landlords with clearer guidelines in case they wish to reoccupy the property they own or where they wish to sell.

The full text to the bill can be found here: [Link to bill](#)

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## **Welfare Reform in Scotland**

It is estimated that the existing welfare reforms have had the following impact in Scotland:

- 105,000 households are affected by the bedroom tax, of these, 83,000 are under-occupying by one bedroom and 22,000 are under-occupying by two or more rooms.
- With around 586,000 households in the social rented sector, it is estimated that 18% of all households in the sector are affected.
- Depending on the measure of inflation used, the average weekly loss in 2012/13 prices is between £11 and £12. This gives an estimate total loss of Housing Benefit to the sector of between £60million and £65million a year.

The Scottish Government has responded by directing new money to agencies helping people facing benefit cuts. This includes:

- A cash injection of £300,000 for services such as those provided by Citizens Advice Scotland
- Setting up a new £1.7million fund providing direct support to advice services
- Further £3.4million to be spent over the next two years on helping organisations mitigate the impacts welfare reforms.

The Welfare Funds (Scotland) Act 2014 was the first step towards setting out in law the permanent arrangements for the £33million Scottish Welfare Fund. The Fund that has been delivered by local authorities on a voluntary basis since April 2013, provides day-to-day living expenses to those on low incomes who are in crisis as well as providing essential household items to those in need. The Act places a duty on local authorities to maintain a welfare fund that will allow this local safety net to continue.

The Act also gives new powers to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman to allow him to scrutinise local authority decisions if an applicant is unhappy with the outcome. This will provide an independent review function for individuals who apply for help from the fund.

On 8<sup>th</sup> July 2015, George Osborne announced the summer budget of the new Conservative government. The budget has implications for the Scottish government's fiscal position in two primary ways. First, cuts in budgets of United Kingdom government departments translate to reduced transfer payments to the Scottish government. Second, the summer budget contained a number of reductions to welfare payments to reduce welfare spent by £12billion, achieved partly through cuts to working-age benefits, including tax credits and Local Housing Allowance, that will be frozen from 2016/17 for four years (excluding maternity pay, paternity pay and sick pay), and a reduction in the benefit cap to £20,000 outside London.

An analysis by the Scottish Government estimated that the measures in the Summer Budget might affect households in Scotland by £700million reducing incomes of 200,000 to 250,000 households in Scotland. While those on incomes between £45,000 and £100,000 will benefit from tax breaks, those on incomes below £10,600 will fail to see a benefit. In Scotland there are 77,000 individuals on job seekers allowance and 450,000 households depending on housing benefits. Seven in ten Scottish Households who receive tax credits are in-work households. 90% of tax credits go to households with incomes of £20,000 and less. Already half of all households living in poverty are in-work households.

In response to measures such as the bedroom tax in particular the Scottish Government has seen an increase in the number of Discretionary Housing Payments. A prime factor for the increase in pay-outs of Discretionary Housing Payments was the introduction of the under-occupancy charge (also known as 'Bedroom tax') that is deducted from housing benefit for recipients where they are deemed to occupy a property that exceeds their household size. Under this regulation, one spare room causes a reduction in housing benefit payments by 14% or 25% for two spare rooms.

Overall, the Scottish Government spent more than £40million on discretionary housing payments after local authorities received 89,000 applications in the first three months of this year. This is an increase by one third (37%) over the previous year. By end of June, the Government had already spent 84% of its allocated budget for Discretionary Housing Payments. In response to the surge in demand, the Scottish Government has reserved an additional £35million to cover the budget shortfalls in 2015/16.

Commenting on the developments and the increasing Discretionary Payments made to Scottish welfare recipients, member of the Scottish Parliament Keven Steward commented:

*"This highlights exactly why the Scottish Parliament needs full powers over the welfare state to allow us to support and empower people – rather than pushing more people into poverty like the Tories have done."*

*"Iain Duncan Smith hides from answering questions at Scotland's Parliament – but the sooner he comes here to explain his seemingly unending austerity agenda, which makes life so difficult for so many vulnerable and hardworking Scots, the better."*

Graeme Brown, director of Shelter Scotland, said:

*"That 84,000 households received the help they needed to pay for their homes is good news, but the plain fact that so many could not afford to cover their housing costs in the first place just goes to show the true extent of Scotland's housing crisis."*

*"We urge every local authority to do all they can to help as many people as possible as a matter of urgency and anyone struggling to pay rent to apply for help that is available."*

*"Failure to do so would mean that some people would face the very real threat of mounting rent arrears, eviction and homelessness."*

The Scotland Bill will include new fiscal and welfare powers for the Scottish Government that the Scottish Secretary David Mundell has described as 'a game-changer'. The Bill will enable the Scottish Government to top up existing benefits, introduce new ones and vary tax credits. The United Kingdom government intends that the new powers would come into force in April 2017 – a year ahead of the original timetable. David Mundell told 'Public Finance' that:

*"Scottish government ministers will be able to design a significant part of Scotland's welfare system and control income tax to pay for it... "If they want to top up existing benefits, they will be able to. If they want to introduce payments to those in short-term need, or design new benefits in those welfare areas being devolved, that will also be an option available to them... Powers in the Scotland Bill ensure the Scottish Parliament will have the means to pay for any changes, but it will have to justify them to the public, as under the new arrangements, income tax raised in Scotland will stay in Scotland and be spent in Scotland."*

However, Scottish Finance minister John Swinney has said that the Bill retains key vetoes for Westminster, and that the new powers would also be severely constrained by Westminster-driven budget cuts; and many commentators, including former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, consider that its provisions fall short of the commitments that were given by the United Kingdom government at the time of the Scottish independence referendum. The Scottish Government has also criticised the plans to reduce tax credits and child benefit.

John Swinney has stated that the Scottish Parliament could refuse to implement the reforms unless the fiscal settlement underpinning them is fair to Scotland. He considers that the spending cuts planned by Westminster would severely restrict the Scottish Government's options for designing a more socially just benefits regime:

*"We estimate that by 2019/20 the cuts in the benefit provision for Scotland will be about £6billion... If you're asking me can we afford to find £6billion to replace all of those cuts, then at this stage it looks very unlikely that we would be able to do that."*

Scottish Social justice secretary Alex Neil published a paper in October 2015 setting out the main messages from an extensive public consultation on how the new powers should be used. He promised that the Scottish Government would publish its own consequent plans by the end of the year. He said that the consensus from the consultation was for a fairer and less punitive benefits system that did not stigmatise recipients:

*"This feedback is helping us develop our own social security system which we will ensure treats individuals with respect and removes the barriers that cause confusion and anxiety for some of the most vulnerable people in our society... The new system will have at its heart a set of principles and values. This will include ensuring people are treated with respect and dignity when applying for, being assessed for, and receiving disability-related benefits."*

The Scottish government has announced that it will publish a new paper by the end of 2015 setting out its vision of how the new welfare powers contained in the Scotland Bill could best be used.

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### **Scottish Housing Regulator provides new digital reporting tool on service performance**

In early October, the Scottish Housing Regulator published the Annual Report and Accounts for 2014/15. In the report the Scottish Housing Regulator noted the successful use of an online facility to gather landlord reports for the past period.

The reporting tool was released alongside the newest landlord report done by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Similar to university rankings, that many parents and students may be familiar with, the comparison tool allows users to benchmark the performance of different landlords and to compare performance with the previous year. It does not, however, produce a performance ranking. The reporting charts are based on the key priority areas stated by landlords in returns for the Scottish Annual Housing Charter. These are: homes and rents, quality and maintenance, neighbourhoods, tenant satisfaction and value for money.

Commenting on the tool to Scottish Housing news, Kay Blair, the chair of the Scottish Housing Regulator, said:

*“Following the launch of our first landlord reports last year, tenants told us they were a useful and accessible way to find out about their landlord’s performance when it comes to the things that matter most.*

*“Our online comparison tool lets tenants quickly see how their landlord performed this year, how that compares with last year and how it compares with other landlords across Scotland.*

*“Publishing these reports is about helping to empower thousands of tenants across Scotland and encouraging an open dialogue between tenants and landlords to help achieve the best quality of social housing in Scotland.”*

In their Annual Report and Accounts, the Scottish Housing Regulator comments on the success of the tool:

*“Our website had a fivefold increase in the number of visitors, and we have had excellent feedback about the reports and comparison tools. 93% of landlords told us the portal is easy to use; in this way, we are minimising demands on landlords.”*

The interactive reporting tool can be found here: [Reporting tool](#)

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### **1,000 homes built with support by National Housing Trust**

Housing statistics for the past year show an improved outlook for housing provision in Scotland. In 2011/12 there were 13,514 new starts and 15,973 completions by Local Authorities, Registered Social Landlords (housing associations) and private developers. Compared to the levels of 2011, new build activity was up by more than 2,000 units while completion slightly increased from a negative of 2000 units compared to 2011/12 to just about 1000 less units. The Scottish government is already set to achieve its goals for delivering 30,000 affordable homes during this parliament. By March 2015, nearly 27,000 homes had been successfully delivered.

The National Housing Trust has also reported optimistic news. Across Scotland, 1,000 units have been successfully delivered over a time frame of the past four years. The total value of these units is £146million. It has also been reported that the Scottish National Housing Trust development activities have supported 1,300 jobs involved in the construction of these properties.

Originally the Scottish National Housing Trust was a collaboration between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Futures Trust. Under the Scottish National Housing Trust investment model, developers and local authorities co-fund the development of new homes. The local authority's financial risk is underwritten by the Scottish Government. Each party commits to make the newly developed homes available to below-market rent for a period up to ten years after which the units are sold with existing tenants offered a preferential buyer status.

Housing Minister Margaret Burgess celebrated the announcement. She said:

*"It is a remarkable achievement for all those involved that more than 1,000 National Housing Trust homes have now been completed across Scotland. By giving people the chance to have a good quality home at an affordable rent, this ground-breaking initiative is making a huge difference to people's lives."*

*"The National Housing Trust is providing affordable homes without the need for grant subsidy and is well on track to deliver over 2,000 new homes in communities across the country."*

*"The initiative is also boosting our construction sector and wider economy, helping to strengthen communities, promote social justice and tackle inequality."*

*"Against a challenging financial background, the Scottish Government is doing everything it can to increase supply. Over the lifetime of this Parliament, planned investment in affordable housing will exceed £1.7billion and we will surpass our target of 30,000 new, affordable homes."*

Speaking at Scotland's Housing Conference, Gail Matheson, representing the developer who contributed to the development of the 1,000<sup>th</sup> Scottish National Housing Trust funded house, said:

*"[We have] been delighted to have been involved with the National Housing Trust initiative. Since the introduction in 2011, we have built 135 homes with a further 17 due for completion shortly. The construction work has been a boost to the economic activity in the area and the homes have provided many people and families with a very real way of being able to become home owners. A deposit to support a mortgage is a requirement for lenders and NHT allows people to save for a mortgage whilst staying in the home that they will buy. The initiative has proved to be extremely popular and demand remains high for the flats and houses that we have built."*

Overall, the Scottish National Housing Trust intends to deliver up to 2,000 units.

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## **Local Authority Housing Income and Expenditure 2014/15**

In October 2015 Scotland's Chief Statistician issued the 2014/15 statistics on local authority housing revenue account income and expenditure. These statistics are published annually and this year the main findings are:

- Total housing income and expenditure. Total housing revenue account income at £1.1billion is forecast to exceed total housing revenue account expenditure at £0.9billion, a surplus of £205million.

- Council houses and rents. There were an estimated 314,400 council houses in Scotland on 2015. Average council rent was £65 per week on average, ranging from £50 per week in Moray to £90 in The City of Edinburgh. This significant difference in rents between different authorities has existed for some time and reflects differences in costs between different authorities – in particular differences in capital financing costs arising from the fact that levels of debt vary significantly between authorities due to historical decisions about capital financing.
- Management and maintenance of stock. Average expenditure on management and maintenance was £1,880 per house in 2014/15, down £3 per house on 2013/14. However, there are significant differences in expenditure between different authorities. In the past the Scottish Government has complained that expenditure has tended to increase in real terms and that the differences in levels of expenditure in different authorities are not easily explained.
- Rent arrears. In 2015, rent arrears on all properties on council housing revenue account properties stood at £55million, representing 5.5% of the Standard Rental Income on these properties. This has increased by £5m since 2014.
- Capital expenditure. Local Authorities' capital expenditure totalled £665million in 2014/15. Of this, £430million was spent on improvements to existing dwellings and £195million on new construction and conversion.
- Housing debt. Local Authorities budgeted to spend £280million on loan charges (interest, capital repayment and loan fund expenses) in 2014/15. Council housing debt increased by £350million in 2014/15 to reach £3.6billion. Since the introduction of prudential borrowing in 2004 and the setting of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard councils have increased their capital expenditure and funded it largely through borrowing. More recently councils have borrowed to fund the building of new council houses.

In summary the financial position of local authority housing revenue accounts in Scotland continues to be strong.

Copies of the statistics can be downloaded from the Scottish Government website at: [HRA Local Authority Housing Income and Expenditure \(2014/15\)](#)

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### **Client update: Perth & Kinross Council**

In October 2015, the final meeting of the precursor to local Integration Joint Board was held paving the way to completion of the integration of health and social care in Perth & Kinross. Robert Packham took up the new position as Chief Officer for the Perth and Kinross Integration Joint Board. Coming with a long career spanning various senior management roles in health care and with the experience of leading a private practice, Robert Packham has ample experience and expertise that he brings into this new role. Speaking to Scottish Housing News, he said:

*"This is a milestone for health and social care integration in Perth and Kinross. The Pathfinder Board has done a huge amount of preparation work to get us to this point.*

*"The Integration Joint Board will now take forward that work. Our job will be to improve outcomes for everyone who uses health and care services. We will support our teams here in Perth and Kinross to provide safe, effective and responsive care.*

*"We will work to better anticipate and prevent the challenges that ageing can bring and to help people avoid the known causes of ill health. I look forward to getting on with our work to make a positive difference to people's lives.*

Councillor Dave Doogan, Convenor of the Housing & Health Committee added,

*"I am looking forward to working with Robert and the Integration Joint Board. His extensive professional experience will prove invaluable as we move forward. Working with NHS Tayside and our partners in the third sector we have made considerable progress towards preparing our organisations and services for integration."*

Perth and Kinross Council is looking for individuals to sell their former council property back to the Council through a 'Buy-back' scheme. So far the council has bought back fifty homes through the scheme. Councillor Dave Doogan said:

*"Like most other areas of Scotland, there is an acute shortage of social housing in Perth and Kinross. The Buy-Back scheme, along with other initiatives such as our extensive house building programme, is making more and more affordable social housing available for local people."*

*"I would encourage any homeowners living in an ex-council property to consider the Buy-Back scheme if they are thinking of selling their home. We are always looking for suitable properties."*

Furthermore, the council updated its Common Allocation Policy (CAP), a process through which applicants for social housing approach one point of contact that can provide them access to the combined portfolio of affordable homes offered across the council, Caledonia Housing Association, and Hillcrest Housing Association. The policy changes are hoped to contribute to the following outcomes:

- Compliance with legislation and good practice
- Awarding of more points to reasonable preference groups (those with urgent or exceptional needs, e.g., due to harassment cases, those homeless, transfers, those on the waiting list)
- Greater flexibility in allocating two bedroom housing
- Reduction in the length of time homeless applicants wait for permanent housing
- Targeting of those in urgent need of housing in a fairer and more consistent way whilst preventing them from applying as homeless
- Responsiveness to the housing needs of our own tenants.

Earlier this October, Perth & Kinross Council considered whether to become a Living Wage Accredited employer. The accreditation is awarded by the Scottish Living Wage Accreditation Initiative as a way to champion adequate pay.

According to Poverty Alliance that established the initiative in the first place, the 'living wage' is a concept and associated method to calculate it that goes back to Benjamin Rowntree, the son of Joseph Rowntree. It was initially proposed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The modern living wage campaign started in 2001 by parents struggling to make a living off minimum wage contracts in London. Under this standard, the employer pays a rate above minimum wage that the employer chooses to pay. The current living wage suggested by the Living Wage foundation is £9.15 in London and £7.85 anywhere else. Rather than a statutory obligation to pay, the foundation sees the living wage as 'a movement and a demonstration of best practice and fair work'.

Since 2012, the council has been paying all its direct employees no less than the living wage, but for national accreditation, the council will now have to work on a plan that will eventually also commit its suppliers that are 'regularly providing it with services or delivering them on its behalf on Council premises' to adopt the living wage. Thus, as part of the accreditation process, the council will revise its procurement strategy accordingly. Ian Miller, Council Leader, said:

*"Paying the Living Wage is an important indication of an organisation's commitment to fair work practices and a positive approach to its workforce. There are benefits to individuals and families who can access the goods and services that most people deem necessary to maintain an acceptable standard of living. Employers also benefit through increases in productivity and improved staff retention, morale and commitment."*

*"Furthermore, our economy benefits from additional spending on goods and services. We are in a good position to build on our existing commitment as an employer who already pays the Living Wage to all our employees."*

AWICS has supported Perth & Kinross Council by providing training in housing finance and welfare reform.

More information on the living wage can be found on the Living Wage Foundation website at: <http://www.livingwage.org.uk>

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### **AWICS Webinars — a convenient way to access training**

For a long time, AWICS has provided dedicated seminar series and in-house training to customers all over the United Kingdom. Since 2006, over 3,000 individuals across England, Scotland, and Wales attended our courses to carry out their roles more effectively.

Traditionally, AWICS has arranged training seminars in good quality conference venues around the country. For example, we have held seminars in London, Oldham, Wrexham and Falkirk. Our training venues are ideal for the small groups and we traditionally restrict our training seminars to a small number of attendees.

However, we have now broadened our training offer. The Internet has become a medium we have all become used to and therefore we invite you to join us in webinars in the autumn and winter of this year.

These webinars will look at a range of subjects of interest to clients in local government and housing and will be held between October and January. They will last between 1½ and two hours and will offer participants plenty of opportunities for questions and discussion as well as a presentation on the topic. The cost will be £50 a session plus value added tax.

The webinars will confirm to the same standards that clients have come to expect at our seminars and workshops but will offer a different format in which to learn and exchange information and points of view. Participants in each webinar will also receive a digital copy of the presentation used and a digital copy of a briefing paper on the subject.

Please find below a list of our upcoming webinars that are especially relevant in Scotland:

<i>Webinar subject</i>	<i>Upcoming Webinars</i>	<i>Bookings</i>
<b>Welfare Reform and Work Bill</b>	Online — 16 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2015, 2pm	<b>Book</b>
<b>Scottish Social Housing Finance</b>	Online — 13 <sup>th</sup> Jan 2016	Coming soon

Information about all our webinars is on our website at: <http://www.awics.co.uk/webinars.asp>

A brochure about all our webinars can be downloaded from:  
<http://www.awics.co.uk/dynamicdata/data/docs/webinar%20brochure.pdf>

Further information will be posted on our website as it becomes available and can be requested by emailing [enquiries@awics.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@awics.co.uk).

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## Publications

We have a range of publications for sale. Our most recent is on 'Welfare Reform: The Implications for Housing & Local Government'. For further details please see:  
<http://www.awics.co.uk/welfarebook15.asp>

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## Client and reader survey (please give us feedback)

Please consider to give us feedback on how we are doing through our client survey: [link](#).

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## Editorial notes



This newsletter was edited by Sebastian Weise. He is a freelancer and PhD student at the Centre for Digital Innovation at Lancaster University. He is knowledgeable about participatory urban planning, local government, government reform, and geospatial services.

The AWICS Scottish News is published by 'AWICS' Limited. Articles are written by Adrian Waite unless otherwise stated. However, the views expressed in articles are not necessarily those of 'AWICS' or Adrian Waite unless expressly stated.

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# 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](http://www.awics.co.uk) or contact Adrian Waite at [Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk](mailto:Adrian.waite@awics.co.uk). Services that we offer include:

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## ADVERTISEMENTS

### Eden District Council

#### Solicitor



Fixed Term Contract for 12 months, 37 hours per week

Salary: - £32,778 - £34,746

To assist the Legal Services team to provide a comprehensive legal service across a range of District Council activities. You will be a qualified solicitor with excellent communication skills and a good general knowledge of the law affecting local government. You should have previous local government experience, be able to work independently and be able to provide high quality advice and assistance to Officers and Members of the Council. This post is deemed to be a Politically Restricted post.

The role is based in Penrith. To carry out the duties of the post, there will be an occasional requirement to travel around the District or to work in the evening to attend scheduled meetings.

For more information including the job description, person specification and an application form;

- visit our web site on [www.eden.gov.uk/jobs](http://www.eden.gov.uk/jobs)
- email [human.resources@eden.gov.uk](mailto:human.resources@eden.gov.uk)
- telephone (01768) 212210
- write to Human Resources, Town Hall, Penrith, Cumbria, CA11 7QF

**Please note all applications must be made on the Council's standard application form and CV's will not be considered. No agencies please.**

**The closing date for applications is 10am on Tuesday 17 November 2015.**

## **Eden District Council Housing Development Officer**

Permanent contract; 37 hours per week

Salary £30,178 - £31,846

The need for housing that meets local needs and is affordable is a significant and high profile priority for Eden District Council. The Council is seeking to recruit a highly motivated officer to lead on the delivery of affordable housing and to play a key role in developing new mechanisms for accelerating the delivery of all types of housing in the district.

The successful candidate will have the vision to imagine and develop new mechanisms to enable the accelerated delivery of housing. They will also have the ability and experience to;

- understand and assess the need for affordable housing;
- provide high quality advice on planning issues relating to the delivery of housing and
- enable the delivery of affordable housing including working with private house builders

Eden District Council administers one of the most beautiful areas in England but with much of the area consisting of small rural locations, the delivery of affordable housing is challenging yet rewarding. The post holder will work with a wide range of partners and will need to ensure that they share a vision and that each contributes effectively. To ensure the efficient delivery, the post holder will also need to work closely with the rest of the small and supportive housing team together with Council Members, Parish Councils and the public.

If you think you have the vision and stamina to make a significant and positive impact on this key priority for the Council then this might be the job for you.

For further details of either post including the job description, person specification and an application form;

- visit our web site on [www.eden.gov.uk/jobs](http://www.eden.gov.uk/jobs)
- email [human.resources@eden.gov.uk](mailto:human.resources@eden.gov.uk)
- Telephone (01768) 212210
- or apply in writing to Human Resources, Town Hall, Penrith, Cumbria, CA11 7QF

**Please note all applications must be made on the Council's standard application form and CV's will not be considered. No agencies please.**

**The closing date for applications is 10am on Monday 16 November 2015**

**Interviews will take place on 25 or 26 November 2015**

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Adrian Waite will be speaking at this conference on 'Business planning post-election. How can you prepare?'

For further information please visit the Chartered institute of Housing website at:  
<http://www.cih.org/events/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/events/data/Paddy/NE%2520Conf%252002015>

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