



Citizens Advice Scotland Housing Bill Briefing

April 2024

Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), our 59-member Citizen Advice Bureaux (CAB) and the Extra Help Unit, form Scotland's largest independent advice network. Scotland's Citizens Advice Network is an essential community service that empowers people through our local bureaux and national services by providing free, confidential and independent advice. We use people's real-life experiences to influence policy and drive positive change. We are on the side of people in Scotland who need help and we change lives for the better.

Background

CAS welcomes the introduction of the Housing Bill to the Scottish Parliament and are keen to work with all parties to help the Bill realise its full potential. Housing is a core area of CAS' policy work and we want to see everyone in Scotland living in safe, high quality, affordable and sustainable homes. Improving the rented sector is central to this.

Our evidence from the network of bureaux across Scotland tells us that finding and affording a home is becoming increasingly difficult, and many people are living precariously in homes in poor conditions. We know that the Cost of Living Crisis continues to affect both tenants and landlords, with rising costs making staying in the private rented sector unsustainable for individuals in both groups. We want to ensure that tenants and landlords are aware of and empowered by their respective rights and responsibilities as well as ensuring that good landlords are supported to remain in the sector.

With this in mind, we support the principles of the Bill and urge parliamentarians to support its passage through Stage 1.

Areas of interest

The Housing Bill covers a number of different areas, some of which we look to our colleagues in specialist organisations to advise on the best way forward. However, there are a number of key areas of interest for CAS, based as always on evidence from our network. These are:

- > Rent control
- > Unlawful evictions
- > Joint tenancies

Key statistics

Last year, the Citizens Advice network in Scotland gave out over **53,000** pieces of housing advice, which accounted for around **5%** of all advice. Housing advice was often sought in tandem with other areas of advice such as benefits, debt and utilities. The most frequently sought types of advice were:

- > Private rented sector housing (**22%** of all housing advice)
- > Local Authority housing (**17%**)
- > Access to and provision of accommodation (**11%**)

Advice on Private rented sector rents made up **11%** of all PRS advice, averaging around **320** pieces of advice per quarter last year. Advice on rents has been extremely variable over the last two years, which we attribute to policy interventions in this area.

Demand for advice on illegal or unlawful eviction in the PRS has been growing over the last two years, averaging around **4%** of all PRS advice, or over **100** pieces of advice per quarter.

Our data on joint tenancies advice shows that demand for this type of advice is low but growing and we have seen many examples of how tenants living in this arrangement have been badly affected by the loophole in the Cost of Living Act which allowed rent increases above the cap if one tenant exited the tenancy. We have also seen evidence of tenants being unable to leave joint tenancy arrangements if they cannot secure the agreement of the other tenants, or if their replacement is deemed unsuitable.

! Citizens ALERT

To illustrate this, one of our CABs in the East of Scotland has recently worked with a client who is a recent graduate and a joint private tenant with another graduate. As the client has completed his studies and wishes to return to his own country, he gave his notice to the landlord and recommended a replacement tenant. The landlord is not accepting the replacement tenant, and as such, the client's tenancy is continuing as before with the client obligated to pay rent despite no longer requiring the accommodation.

Further data can be provided upon request.

For more information please contact:

Aoife Deery, Senior Social Justice Policy Officer - Aoife.deery@cas.org.uk

www.cas.org.uk



@CitAdviceScot



CitizensAdviceScotland

The Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux - Citizens Advice Scotland.
Scottish charity (SC016637) and company limited by guarantee (89892)