1. The Management Committee of **Govanhill Housing Association**, a community controlled association, is pleased to give evidence to the Equalities Committee. The Association, voluntary organisations, the Community Council and the Govanhill community have been engaged in raising the profile of poor housing and health along with major issues facing migrant communities for a number of years. A Petition was submitted to the Scottish Parliament in June 2008.

‘Petition by Anne Lear, on behalf of Govanhill Housing Association, calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to conduct an inquiry into the responsibilities of private landlords, the levels of social housing below tolerable standard, and the impact ‘slum’ living conditions has on the health and wellbeing of both residents and the wider community, and whether such conditions should merit
housing renewal area status and additional Scottish Government funding.’

2. The Petition is still open, with both the Minister for Communities and Glasgow City Council answering questions at a meeting in March this year. The petition and relevant correspondence can be accessed following the link http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/petitions/docsP1189.htm Much of the correspondence between the petitioners, Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Executive is relevant to the enquiry.

3. The drafting of the petition was supported by Govan Law Centre. The Law Centre has opened a sister centre the Govanhill Law Centre, mainly to respond to the immediate needs of the migrant communities in the area. The Association have asked the law centre to contribute to this paper given the important nature of the housing advice work they carry out for the migrant communities in Govanhill. A paper is appended which highlights the plight of their clients, many of whom live in unimproved privately let properties in Govanhill.

Housing Condition

4. The northern part of Govanhill has had £120 million of public investment in bricks and mortar over 35 years and is managed by the community through Govanhill Housing Association; the property includes privately owned as well as affordable rented housing and some property let out by private landlords. The Housing Association owns 75% of these 2200 improved tenement flats on the Northern side of the area and factors most closes. There is a planned cycle of major repairs carried out to this property and it is mostly in good condition and well managed.

5. However, our comprehensive tenement improvement work was halted ten years ago and we weren’t able to tackle work required to the remaining 1210 unimproved pre 1919 tenement flats in the area. There was a view expressed at the time by the Scottish Executive and Glasgow City Council that the unit cost of tenement improvement was far too high and that it would not be appropriate to raise residents expectations by considering further declarations of Housing Action Areas when funding would not be available. At that point in time the number of owner occupiers far outweighed the number of private landlords and there is evidence the property was in poor condition. This was the position before the latest wave of migration. Severe overcrowding is now common place, with consequences for sanitary conditions, poor health and further deterioration due mostly to a lack of comprehensive maintenance of the common parts and management of the properties.

6. Of the 1210 unimproved pre 1919 tenement flats in the south of the area around 900 of the flats are now in the ownership of private landlords; some own large portfolios of property in Govanhill and in some cases elsewhere in the city. Some own one or two properties. 300 unimproved flats are owner occupied. The Association own very few unimproved properties in the southern part of the area. Many of the
tenements have been left unfactored due to bad debts causing some factors to withdraw from factoring.

7. Social Survey of Unimproved pre 1919 Tenement Housing (2009) coordinated by the Association and funded by the Scottish Government of all 1200 properties (74% response rate) shows 52 languages being spoken by the people living in the unimproved properties. It’s estimated that 15% of the unimproved properties in the southern part of Govanhill are occupied by East European migrants. A further 35% are occupied by other BME communities.

- 25% respondents had been in Govanhill for less than a year
- 42% for less than two years
- 18% of Private tenants had no tenancy agreement
- 75% of Private tenants had paid a deposit
- 70% highest level of private lets in one street block
- 46% aware of a factor for the property
- 15% of all respondents on social housing waiting lists

8 Technical Survey of pre 1919 Tenement Housing (2009) of all of the unimproved properties shows that there is a direct correlation between the very poor condition of the properties and tenure type. The common parts of properties with most privately rented properties are in worst condition. The survey work was carried out by architects and engineers and coordinated by the Association with Glasgow City Council funding. Many of the private landlords do not reinvest any rental income in improvement of the common parts of the tenements or in some cases the interior of the flats.

GCC Investment

9. Glasgow City Council has over the last eighteen months (using the 2006 Housing Act) restarted the tenement improvement programme with major investment over a two year period of over £7m shared expenditure between the council and other owners. The City Council has committed to continue this programme over the next year or so, however there is concern that investment will become more difficult as budgets are put under considerable strain and the Private Sector Housing Grant is no longer ring fenced leaving around a thousand flats unimproved. It is the Associations opinion that owners will continue to sell their properties, some because they are unable to afford the improvement costs without substantial grant funding being available. The Association will be unable to buy any unimproved properties as Housing Association Grant has not been made available by the City Council.

10. The City Council have made the case for further capital funding for Govanhill through the petitions process, however do not support the acquisition of property in that area by the Association for social housing provision.

11. The Association believe that during the improvement process there require to be additional resources made available to support the tenants and resident’s. The
Association when in the past, improved the stock it owns (Under the 1974 Act) acting as agents of the City Council, with direct funding from Government, provided considerable support for owners and private sector tenants alike. **It is important that the rights of private sector tenants are protected and that they are provided with security of tenure as improvement schemes are developed.**

12. The City Council have undertaken a recent staffing review and it seems there may be less people to support the programme of improvement work and this will impact on the kind of support which can be given to tenants and residents involved in any improvement programme. The Housing Association has the expertise and experience to support a broader regeneration approach however no longer has the financial or legislative framework to work with.

13. **Barriers to migrants accessing social Housing**

   ‘Some service providers highlighted the problem that the majority of social housing stock was inappropriate given the average Roma family size and that social housing providers could not tolerate overcrowding given the legal framework within which they worked. Moreover, waiting lists in the area were already significant. In any case, without access to housing benefit in times of unemployment, the suitability or otherwise of currently available stock is neither here nor there. Furthermore, exclusion from housing benefit also limits choice in the private sector, condemning Roma to the perpetual occupation of accommodation provided by ‘slum landlords’.

   *(University of West of Scotland Report on the Situation of the Roma Community in Govanhill –Full report attached)*

14. There are a number of migrants now housed by the Association in the Govanhill area; however we would agree that the main barrier for migrants is the problem of workers registration and access to housing benefit.

**Private Sector Housing Regulation**

15. Many of the failings of Private Sector Housing Legislation in relation to regulation of the private sector are currently being addressed through two new pieces of Housing legislation, the first is at the Local Government Committee and the second is being drafted. As well as the problem of resources to continue the improvement programme in the area, there are real challenges for the local authority in engaging with private landlords in relation to their part in the improvement process when grants are no longer available to them. *(The 2006 Housing Act)* However not all of the issues being faced in the Govanhill area will be.
16. Issues in relation to landlords and letting agents acting on their behalf are outlined in the Govanhill Law Centre Paper which is attached and gives examples of the problems faced.

Health

17. As of 2006, Govanhill is the most densely populated (15,072) and ethnically diverse (minority ethnic groups are proportionally 847% higher in Govanhill than the Scottish average) neighbourhood in the South East of Glasgow. Govanhill residents, in relation to the Scottish average, are experiencing significant health inequalities:

- Deaths in under 75s as a result of Coronary Heart Disease in Govanhill are 56% higher than the Scottish average
- Deaths in under 75s as a result of Cancer in Govanhill are 20% higher than the Scottish average
- Deaths related to drug misuse in Govanhill are 201% higher than the Scottish average
- The annual rate of drug-related hospital patients from Govanhill is 319% higher than the Scottish average
- The annual rate of alcohol related and attributable hospital patients from Govanhill is 153% higher than the Scottish average
- The annual rate of psychiatric hospital admissions in Govanhill is 49% higher than the Glasgow average

18. In terms of the wider determinants of health, Govanhill residents face further social, economic and environmental inequalities relative to the Scottish average:

- The proportion of the population in Govanhill classified as income deprived is 85% higher than the Scottish average
- The proportion of children in workless households within Govanhill is 114% higher than the Scottish average
- The rate of serious violent crime within Govanhill is 159% higher than the Scottish average
- The rate of reported domestic abuse within Govanhill is 45% higher than the Scottish average
- The proportion of the households in Govanhill classified as overcrowded is 163% above the Scottish average
- The rate of child road accident casualties in Govanhill is 59% higher in Govanhill than the Scottish average
- The proportion of new born babies from Govanhill classified as low birth-weight is 88% higher than the Scottish average
  (Source Centre for Population Health)

19. It should also be recognised that these figures are correct as of 2006 and do not reflect the influx of migrant populations to the area in the last four years.
20. It is clear to the Association and others working in the area that there are clearly health impacts arising from the continued poor condition of unimproved tenement properties, overcrowding, and infestations. There is currently a study underway to look at the impacts on unimproved housing conditions overcrowding and infestations on the incidence of Asthma.

Services

21. The area currently has Scottish Government Equally Well Test Site Status which is being managed through the South East Area CHCP. As part of the Equally Well Test Site work, a Neighbourhood Management Team of Service Providers has been meeting and has established a HUB. The HUB is currently based in the Housing Associations offices in Govanhill. The service providers which include, most of the statutory services, the police, community safety services, environmental health, fire brigade, landlord regulation, HMO, and the association are meeting on a daily basis to resolve day to day issues in the area.

22. This is a newly established method of working, coordinated by the Community Planning Partnership and which at this point is developing. This has been supported by the provision of rent free accommodation to the HUB by Govanhill Community Development Trust which sees the sustainment of such a joint approach to service delivery as being essential the area. It is hoped it will be supported into the future with what are recognised as scarce resources. A front of house service for the community has not yet been develop, however is planned. The Association and its subsidiary company Govanhill Community Development Trust have been working alongside community groups, residents groups, and voluntary organisations to come together as one umbrella group, Govanhill Community Action. GoCA will play an active role in the design of future service delivery.

23. The Integration Network includes a number of voluntary organisations providing services to the migrant communities. Funding for these services comes from various sources including the Fairer Scotland Fund through the Community Planning Partnership. There is great concern that some of these vital services will not continue to be funded next year. Given the route that many migrants follow in coming to Govanhill, these services are essential and without them there will be no access to advice. Many of the migrants find themselves destitute on arrival. All of these support agencies find themselves under massive pressure to respond to the number of individuals looking for help. The number of migrants looking for help far outweighs the support available. Both Crossroads and the Govanhill Law Centre have clear evidence of the growth of the demand for services.

Communication in an area where more than 50 languages are spoken.

24. Language is clearly a barrier which can restrict residents accessing services. The Association, as a member of ‘Happy to Translate’, is committed to communication at a professional interpreting and translation standard. The Association employs a number of
bilingual staff who can speak Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi. Staff also speak Spanish, French, German and Polish.

25. Through the ‘Big Word’, we have access to 254 languages and dialects within a minute of a request by telephone and written translations within 24 hours. The Association uses professional face to face interpreting as and when required.

26. The main support agencies in the area also employ Slovak and Roma speakers. At times those services are shared.

**Conclusion**

27. Employment has not been covered in this paper in any detail. We fully acknowledge that employment has to be considered alongside Health and Housing issues in this area. We are keen to support people who are unable to access employment through normal routes. The Association, Govanhill Development Trust and its partners are awaiting an outcome to a major funding application to Government to support an employment and regeneration initiative to support migrants into work and into more sustainable housing options.

28. There is a commitment from service providers and the community to work together to ensure the effective and efficient use of existing resources in the area and it is recognised that resources will be limited in the future. This is a vibrant area to live in and there are a large number of positive initiatives underway, however Govanhill is in a unique situation not mirrored elsewhere in Scotland; not continuing to support the improvement of the tenement improvement programme and the service providers in the area would have a major impact on residents basic human rights and would worsen the already poor health record of the people who live here.

Govanhill Housing Association

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