

What makes a house a home?



The People's Conference

Report 2023

warm
facilities myself
watertight quiet
pleasant bed cosy location
need
affordable content
comfortable everything worries
secure dry
comfort well-maintained beautiful
atmosphere happy calm own stable
world peace
feasible light shelter
proper good cooking
respite clean
space safe

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The People's Conference & Lothian Voices

The People's Conference is an annual event for people with lived experiences of mental health issues to come together and discuss things that are important to them. It offers opportunities to connect with likeminded people, discuss what is affecting them in their lives, and think about how they might change things for the better. This year's conference was in November.

Lothian Voices collective advocacy group, supported by CAPS Independent Advocacy, organise the event. Lothian Voices is a collective advocacy group for people with lived experience of mental health issues from the Lothians. The group is an opportunity for people to bring their lived experiences together and have a voice through events, consultations, attending the Scottish Parliament Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health and more.



Pictures show attendees at the table discussions during the People's Conference



Organising the People's Conference

A key part of the People's Conference is how it happens. As well as being a platform for people to have their voice heard on the day of the conference, the process of planning the format of the event and the follow up are all ways in themselves for people to be involved, empowered, and have a voice. The group decides what the event is going to discuss based on what feels important for them.



Picture shows attendee delivering introduction speech at the People's Conference.

What makes a house a home?

Lothian voices decided to discuss the topic of housing this year at the conference as it is an issue that affects so many people, especially in the Lothians. This is particularly timely given that Edinburgh city council has recently announced a housing crisis.

Lothian voices group had previously researched and looked at surveys carried out by both Shelter and AdvoCard. Members of the group felt putting together an open letter to the Scottish housing minister, Paul McLennan, based on people's views at the conference would be a good outcome.

Format of the day

25 people in total attended the conference. A member of Lothian Voices introduced the day and told everyone about the group and the topic of the conference. Then we moved onto table discussions based on the key questions.

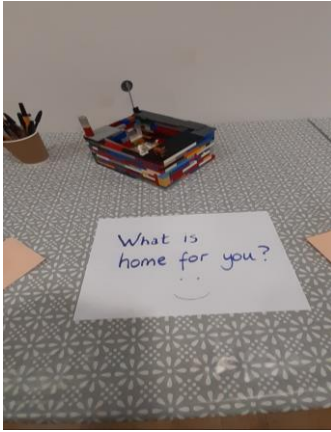


Picture above shows people at table discussions at the People's Conference

Key questions

- What issues have you faced in your own life with housing?
- How have these issues affected your wellbeing, such as your mental and physical health?
- What has your experience been like with external parties linked to housing i.e. the council, Citizen's Advice, Shelter etc.
- Do you have experience of using housing indexes? How easy are they? What barriers do people face when using them?
- What solutions do you think there are and how could we make these changes?
- What would you like to tell Paul McLennan (Minister for Housing) in the open letter?

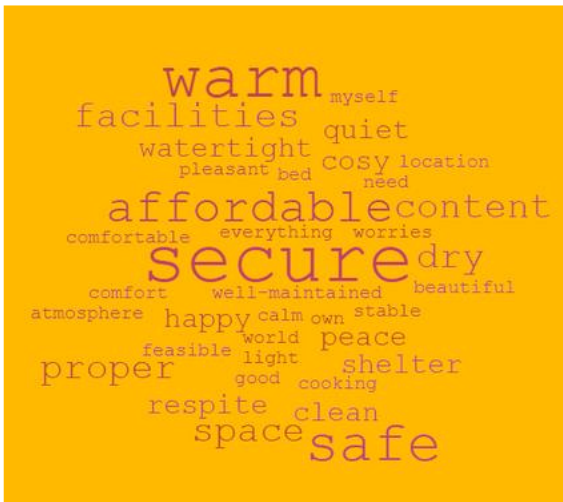
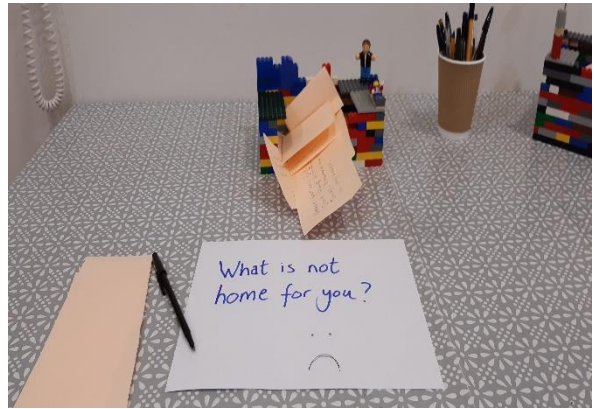
Lego houses



2 Lego houses were created and attendees were asked to write their ideas of what did and did not make a home for them and add them to the houses on post it notes.

Pictures show lego houses: “what is home for you” & “what is not home for you”

Below is a summary of the words attendees felt made a house a home (left) and those that stopped it feeling like a home (right)



Format of the day

After lunch, people were given the choice of whether they wanted to make creative zines related to housing or if they would like to join a group discussion to look at formulating a housing related question to raise at Parliament.

Zines

Attendees created zines with various art materials (e.g. magazines, pens, paper, paint, glue etc) based on what makes a home and housing in general.

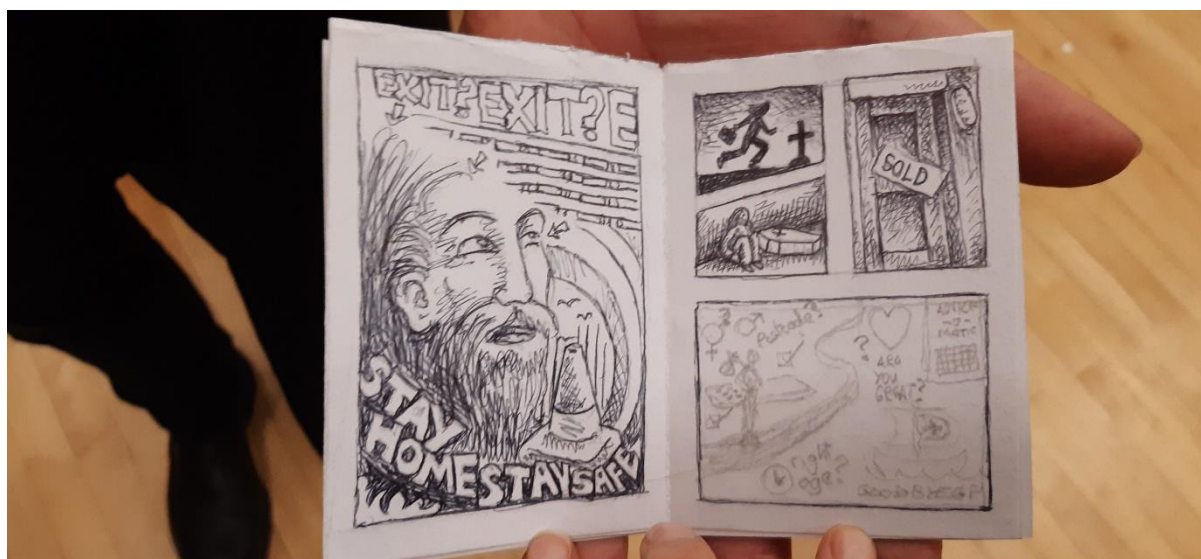
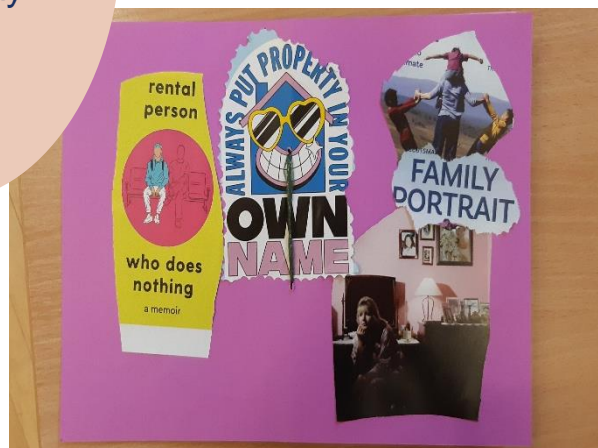
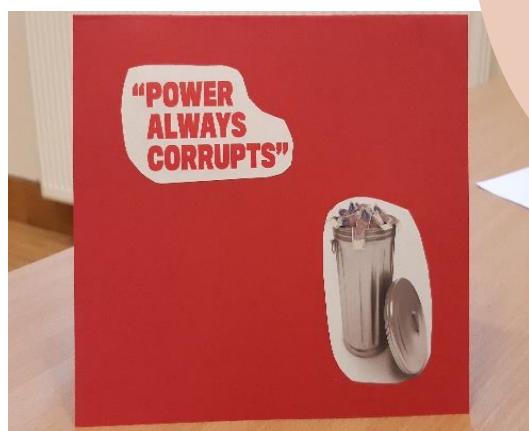


Pictures show people creating zines from art materials





Some of the
creative
zines made
on the day!



Question for Parliament



Picture shows CAPS staff member kneeling writing next steps on a whiteboard

A group of conference attendees discussed what question related to housing they would like to raise at parliamentary level given the opportunity.

Some of the suggestions discussed are below.

People with lived experience want the opportunity to attend the cross-party parliamentary group on housing.

Scottish Government have policies and targets in place to mitigate difficulties faced by people who have experienced mental health problems when seeking housing. The policy is right on paper, but there is a discrepancy between policy & practice. What can be done to ensure the policy and the practice match up?

There must be a system in place to ensure people who become homeless have access to services e.g. GP, dentist & benefits.

Key themes

Key themes that came out of the table discussions and question to parliament discussion were:

- There is a lack of affordable, accessible housing.
- Suitable housing should be a human right, despite the Edinburgh housing crisis.
- People have found it hard to get hold of housing services or found them confusing or inaccessible to use (e.g. indexes).
- Issues of digital poverty and ableism were discussed, with people feeling “passed from pillar to post” in a confusing and difficult to navigate system with unclear timescales and lacking communication.
- Issues around housing suitability or disrepair (e.g. mould, damp, lack of space, repairs)
- The cyclical link between housing and services. Without a postcode or phone, it is very hard to access GP, dentist, psychiatric help or benefits.
- Whether a person receives adequate housing support being compared to a lottery, often depending on factors outside of their control.
- These issues leave people feeling trapped, isolated, stressed, anxious and angry, reliant on friends, family or charities for help.
- Lack of accessible help from housing associations & council or unavailable or understaffed services.
- Fear and stigma of sharing mental health struggles with housing services.
- It feels like a competition to get housing.

Proposed solutions

Many ideas of ways to help the housing problem were discussed. Below are some examples:

- For empty houses to be invested in, repaired, and put back in the housing stock.
- More accessible, good quality well maintained affordable, secure, sound proofed, social housing.
- For social housing to be given priority over short term lets and student housing (or for some of these properties to be released to the social/private sector).
- Ongoing support & continuity once people have a tenancy.
- Positive experiences with housing staff to be the norm (for them to know the individual, the issues, be funded, well trained and trauma informed).
- For people to know their housing rights and how to seek support.
- For less assumptions to be made about everyone having a computer, the internet, a phone or a postcode.
- For services to be accessible without prerequisites and help given to those struggling.

Finally, we came back together as a group to summarise the points raised at the conference and to start to formulate what everyone thought was important to include in the letter to Paul McLennan. It was agreed attendees would be invited to a further meeting to finalise the content of the letter before it would be sent.

Quotes from the day

“Listen to us, we know what we need.”

“Homelessness can happen to anybody, most times its a month away.”

“Social housing doesn’t end with a cheap roof; it should meet *your* needs and that might be different for different people.”

“Should everything that homeless people have to do feel like an IQ test?”

“No one cares about one trapped disabled person”.

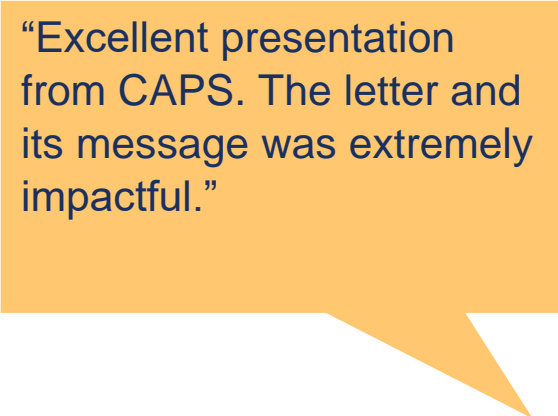
“Just because Edinburgh is oversubscribed doesn't mean safe housing isn't a right”.

“I see good friends of mine sleeping rough while fancy housing they can't afford is built up around them”.


Next steps

Lothian voices and attendees at the conference were asked to be involved in a further meeting to compose the letter to Paul McLennan, Scottish minister for housing, which was then drafted and sent to him. [Read the letter here.](#)

Lothian Voices has already presented a summary of the People's conference at the *Thrive Edinburgh Conference: Curious! An opportunity...* in November 2023. At this conference, group members shared the discussions on the day & read out the letter we composed and sent to the housing minister. The presentation was very well received. Here are some examples of feedback we got:



“Excellent presentation from CAPS. The letter and its message was extremely impactful.”



“Amazing presentation by the Lothian Voices collective advocacy group!!”

CAPS will ask conference attendees to meet with us again in January to decide on a question to be raised at Parliament and take this forward with Lothian Voices group.

CAPS will ensure that this report is distributed to everybody who registered for the event.

CAPS will also publicise this report on our website through our networks and will continue to present it at other relevant forums. We welcome invitations to present these views and are open to conversations about change.

Lothian Voices are also exploring other ways of having their voices heard, including planning to create a short play from a lived experience perspective.

Thank you!

Lothian Voices would like to thank everyone who attended & shared their views on the day, and the CAPS staff who facilitated the event.

A huge thank you goes out to the Lothian Voices group for organising the event!



Picture shows one of the creative zines made at the People's Conference.

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