

PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Commercialisation, technology and building thriving communities top priorities for housing leaders

- New report by Zurich Municipal highlights housing trends in the UK
- Commercial activities, use of artificial intelligence and ensuring resilience of communities key priorities for housing leaders
- Brexit, universal credit and poverty top the list of main challenges faced by housing providers
- Different approaches to resolving the housing crisis in Scotland and England

A series of interviews with housing leaders has called attention to the complex challenges facing social housing providers nationwide, with technology and commercial activities to generate profit topping the list of the opportunities and threats facing the sector.

[The report](#), published today at the National Housing Federation conference by Zurich Municipal, a major housing insurer in the UK, highlights the rapid adoption of innovative technologies as a key emerging risk in the housing sector. Underpinning this challenge is a broader concern about whether digital risks are properly understood at board level.

While many housing associations are adopting a ‘Robin Hood’ model – selling homes to fund their investment in social housing – some are also taking on additional services that have little hope of generating returns, such as social care, which can contribute to building community resilience.

There is also recognition that housing associations have a crucial role in providing the right blend of housing to meet the needs of different demographics, including the ‘working poor’ and younger people who cannot afford to buy.

While housing associations across Britain face many common challenges, the political, economic and social landscape in Scotland means CEOs north of the border are responding to these challenges very differently.

One of the key challenges facing housing associations in Scotland is the government’s ambitious target to build 50,000 affordable homes by the end of the current parliament in 2021. Of that figure, 35,000 are earmarked for social rent. The challenges – for some at least – are finding land to build on and complex relationships with local authorities.

However, both north and south of the border, Brexit, universal credit and poverty top the list of pressing issues that have a significant impact on the housing sector as well as the communities they operate in.

Allison Whittington, Head of Housing at Zurich Municipal, commented on the report findings: “The UK housing sector finds itself under immense pressure to meet targets set by the Government and deliver affordable housing solutions across the demographic spectrum. Whilst accelerating commercial activity, which in turn provides capital funding for further investment, as well adopting new technologies can help housing providers achieve the above, it is very important for housing leaders to understand the risks they may bring. Managing those risks accordingly is crucial to building thriving and resilient communities.”

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Notes to Editors

Report based on interviews with 8 senior leaders of social housing providers in the UK. Full report is available here https://newsandviews.zurich.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ZM_Housing-CEO-report.pdf

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