



The Northern Light

Issue number 3—Autumn 2011

Regional Networks Event—Glasgow—22nd August 2011

Committee members attended this event in the imposing Scottish Government Office building on the Broomielaw. The event was chaired by Rena Smith from Tayforth, recently made an MBE for her 20 years of service in Tenant Representation. Attendance from all the regions was very good and the programme included an address by the Scottish Housing minister Mr Keith Brown, MSP, an outline of the future role of the Scottish Housing Regulator by Ms Kay Blair, Chair of the new Regulator Board and a presentation on the Social Housing Charter by Ms Anne Cook of the Housing and Regeneration Directorate. Members had an opportunity to put questions to the Minister and Kay Blair and following the formal business of the morning the lunch interval provided an opportunity for more informal chat and photo calls.



Time for earnest discussion.



Question time for the Housing Minister

The afternoon was given over to breakout sessions on the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the future of the Regional Networks with positive input from all members and their colleagues from the Directorate.

Region 9—Glasgow and Eilean Siar, Rena Smith and the Directorate staff are to be congratulated on a very successful event.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter joint housing events.

Events to discuss the latest consultation document on the Charter were held on 27th September in Elgin's Mansion House Hotel and in Aberdeen on 28th September in the Town and County Hall at the Town House. Despite the limited number of places available, there was an excellent turnout and tenants were very well represented. The meeting was formerly

opened by Mr Donald Urquhart Head of Housing for Aberdeen City who welcomed all the delegates. In his address he highlighted the need for housing in all sectors and the stress on the housing system during the current economic crisis. Regarding the consultation document he reminded the meeting of the importance of submitting responses by the cut off date of 1st November and stressed that social landlords recognise the need for a charter and understand the close relationship between the desired outcomes, self assessment of housing matters and regeneration. The charter aims not at more regulation but improvement in it. The outcomes it sets forth are relevant, not ambiguous, achievable, clear and aim for transparency and continuing tenant involvement. The charter seeks to address the needs of tenants and landlords to foster a spirit of cooperation between them.

Mr Michael Boal from the Scottish Government Housing, Regeneration and Commonwealth Games Directorate set out the purpose of the day and introduced his colleague Ms Anne Cook who went on to explain the Charter and its purpose. There followed a brief question and answer session before delegates formed into groups to consider and discuss the outcomes proposed in the charter. Following a lunch break the groups reformed and discussed the Charter questionnaire and some responses to that.

In summing up it was felt that some very useful input was gained from and by the delegates who attended and the team from the Scottish Government whose task it is to work through the responses to the

The Charter is now entered into the final consultation and discussion stages and the process is open to all interested parties. Input from tenant groups and individuals is vital and following this phase the Charter will be placed before Parliament with the aim of enactment and passing it into law in the Spring of next year.

The Charter forms an important element in the effort to improve conditions in social housing across Scotland and in turn affect the quality of life in the community. It aims to give tenants, prospective tenants, the homeless and other customers a clear understanding of what they should expect from their landlord and clarifies the landlord's position on what they should be delivering in their provision of housing. In addition it seeks to encourage continuous improvement in the housing sector and provide all customers with clear information on their landlord's performance.



Regional Treasurer Diana Foxcroft an active tenant representative.

The Scottish Housing Regulator

Under the provisions of the Scottish Housing Act 2010, the structure and role of the Regulator came under review and since the start of this year much has been done towards the new approach to regulation being implemented from early next year. On September 1st a consultation document was published to which responses from tenants and other interested

are invited. The region will also be formulating a response to the discussion document. Individual or group input to the discussion can be made through the committee or directly to the SHR. More information is available on their website at www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/newregulator and the closing date for responses is 25th November.

The Regional Networks are involved in this consultation and committee members met with the members of the Board and staff of the SHR on 30th September. The meeting was opened by Lisa Peebles a member of the new housing Regulator Board who welcomed everyone and outlined the programme for the day. She spoke of the need for regulation in the social housing sector for the benefit of tenants as these include some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Alec Condie a tenant and founder member of the Fife Housing Partnership who is now one of the tenants on the new Housing Regulator Board then gave the meeting an overview of the Housing Regulator and the wish to involve tenants. The Regulator intends to make a risk based but proportionate approach to examination of the social housing sector in Scotland with focus on key aspects of performance tailored to suit the size and status of each landlord. Landlords will be expected to involve tenants in their annual self assessment submitted to the Regulator and will be held to account by their tenants to provide an effective service based on best practice and giving good value for money.

During the morning and afternoon delegates took part in workshops that looked at the proposals in the consultation

For example, in regard to the involvement of tenants in the work of the Regulator by discussion with tenants, engagement with RTOs on strategic issues, gathering input from tenants and other service users and the future role of the Tenant Assessors on the Regulators inspection teams. Another area of discussion was the enhanced powers available to the Regulator to investigate and enquire into the running of a housing service, the ability to inspect and hold landlords to account where necessary.

It was felt that Network members who represent a broad spectrum of tenants of local authorities and registered social landlords made a positive contribution during the discussions with informed and relative comments and questions.

What we are Doing.

Since the last newsletter the committee have had two meetings. Minutes of these are published on the website at www.regionalnetworks.org.uk and circulated to member organisations. Officers attended a Chairs and Secretaries meeting where following a talk on the Scottish Housing Regulator by Michael Cameron from the inspection team and Simon Little a member of the Board, topics for discussion included the Charter, the website and training requirements for committee members from all our member RTOs. Stanley Green raised a question on the application of a Housing Support Charge in all regions and with the Secretary is now collating information from other regions.

All member RTOs have been sent copies of the amended Constitution and asked for nominations to fill vacancies on the Regional

Committee. So far response has been limited perhaps through there being a break in scheduled meetings during the summer period. Members are again urged to take the opportunity to nominate representatives to the Committee.

The regional portion of the website is now up to date save for a couple of lost minutes of earlier meetings. If any member has copies of such minutes the Secretary is keen to have details to be added to our website.

In promoting the Networks the Secretary has given a presentation on Northern Lights at one RTO annual general meeting and, with the Chairman, participated as exhibitor at the Aberdeen City Tenants Open Day. Further presentations are due to be made to Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire tenants at forthcoming events.

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Networks involvement

This issue of the newsletter has covered at length meetings to discuss the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the new framework for the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Some critics have said that the Networks have produced no benefits for them since their inception. In truth, the Networks are deeply involved with the Scottish Government and considered by them as stakeholders in discussion and consultation on housing policy for Scotland. The Government are committed to enhanced levels of tenant involvement in this sector and are keen to listen to the views and concerns of tenants. Consultation with the Networks on matters such as benefits reforms, allocation policies etc, provide ministers and members of parliament with valuable information on which to base their proposals for improvement in the housing

Authorities and Registered Social Landlords through their representatives on Registered Tenant Organisations and to form a direct link between those tenants and the Scottish Government.

At the last Chairs and Secretaries meeting the future of the Networks was discussed and it was generally felt that there is scope and the desire for greater tenant involvement in housing matters. The Social Housing Charter and the Scottish Housing Quality Standards are two areas where the opinions of tenants, their wishes, their needs and their concerns have been taken into account.

That is why you are again urged to consider your involvement in the networks, to help strengthen the Committee with new members and to let us have some indication of your own problems and views of housing matters.

**The next committee meeting is on
27th October at Johnstone House,
Rose Street, Aberdeen.**

If you have any queries, input to the agenda or the ongoing discussions, or any matters relating to housing that you think can be raised through the networks, please do not hesitate to contact the Secretary at the address below:

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Cyrus, DD10 0BY or by e-mail at
richard.leiper@tiscali.co.uk**