

Regional Network Information Pack



Issued with information for Regional Network AGMs 2011

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Regional Network Information Pack

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1) Background on the Development of the Regional Networks

The Regional Networks were established to build partnerships between the Scottish Government and Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) and provide a practical way for the formal tenant movement in Scotland to become involved in the development of national housing policy.

This commitment was set out in the national strategy for tenant participation "Partners in Participation" published by the Scottish Government in 1999. In the absence of any practical way to engage with tenant and resident organisations on national policy development, detailed consultation with Registered Tenant Organisations was carried out to look at how this could be improved.

In 2004 a conference was held for RTOs to explore the options. Those present were clear that they wanted to develop a practical mechanism for getting involved with the Scottish Government in national policy development, with a preference at looking at regional structures. Further wide ranging independent consultation was then undertaken with RTOs in Scotland and the regional network groupings were agreed.

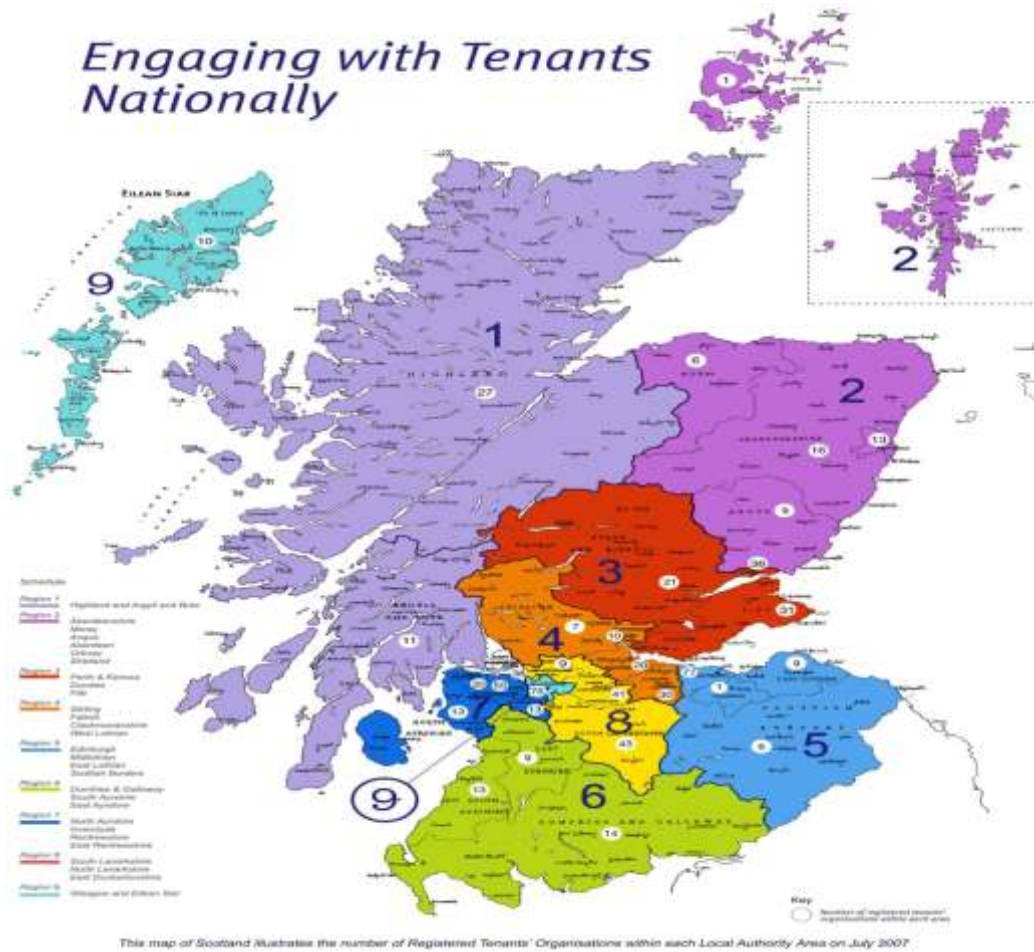
There are around 670 RTOs in Scotland, and over 90 representatives from RTOs were involved in formally establishing the nine regional networks with each network covering a number of local authority areas. Inaugural AGMs were held between January and May of 2008, when committees were elected by an independent election process carried out by the Electoral Reform Service.

There are 9 Regional Networks across Scotland, each covering a defined geographical area. Each network has a committee which is elected at an annual general meeting and represents the interests of tenants and residents in the development of housing related policy at national level.

Over the last few years the networks have made real progress, having a direct input into national policy development, sitting on a range of Scottish Government advisory and sounding boards, responding to national consultations and giving evidence at the Local Government and Communities Committee on the Housing Bill 2010. A number of key changes were made to the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 to further protect tenant interests, following input from the networks. Network representatives meet with the Minister for Housing & Communities on a quarterly basis and have used this opportunity to influence and discuss national housing policy and highlight national issues and concerns including misuse of Local Authority Housing Revenue Accounts. This has led to the Scottish Government agreeing to develop new guidance on HRA and to involving the regional networks in its development.

As the committees move towards their fourth year of formal establishment they can look back at significant achievements. For more information visit www.regionalnetworks.org.uk

The Nine Regional Networks



1. Highland, Argyll and Bute
 2. Angus, Aberdeen Aberdeenshire, Moray, Orkney, Shetland
 3. Perth & Kinross, Dundee, Fife
 4. Stirling, Falkirk, West Lothian , Clackmannanshire
 5. Edinburgh, East Lothian, Mid Lothian ,Scottish Borders
 6. Dumfries and Galloway, South Ayrshire East Ayrshire
 7. East Renfrewshire/ Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire
 8. South Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire, East Dunbartonshire
 9. Glasgow, Eilean Siar
- West Dunbartonshire: Discussions ongoing

2). The role and aims of the Regional Networks

1. Work with the Scottish Government and national agencies in developing and influencing national housing policy.
2. Promote and uphold RTO and tenant's rights and interests at national policy level in housing and other related areas that affect tenants, residents and wider communities
3. Respond effectively to Scottish Government and other relevant consultations and to bring policy issues of national concern to RTOs and tenants to the attention of the Scottish Government
4. Encourage the sharing of information between all Regional Networks, RTOs, the Scottish Government and other related organisations.
5. Increase awareness of the Regional Networks and the RTO movement as a whole within Scotland.

The Regional network structure provides a practical way for the organised tenant movement in Scotland to get involved in national policy development and to provide a broadly representative view of tenant interests and priorities. Alongside the work of the regional networks there are also many other ways for individual tenant organisations and tenants to give their views. Over the last year or two the networks have had considerable success in influencing national policy development- see pages 7-10.

The networks also provide opportunities for those involved to share ideas and good practice across local authority boundaries and between local authority and housing association landlords.

They also work across networks to identify common issues of interest and concern to tenants and wider communities

The network committees do not take up local issues with Landlord's on behalf of RTOs or individual tenants but focus on highlighting tenants and RTO interests in national policy development. Where there is an issue of common concern across networks and where national policy may need reviewed, regional networks do bring this to the attention of the Scottish Government and make a case for change or review.

3) **What's involved? – Being a Regional Network Committee Member**

Each committee is responsible for ensuring that the network sticks to the aims and objectives set out in their constitution. They have overall responsibility for managing the network, meeting regularly to discuss issues and make informed decisions together and ensuring that RTOs within your area are kept informed about the work of the networks.

The committee is responsible for seeking views on national policy Issues so they can give a broadly representative view, which reflects the views of their members, in discussions with the Scottish Government, when responding to national consultations or highlighting issues of concern.

As a committee member you will also be responsible for ensuring that the committee works closely together, taking an active role in its' work. This includes participating in decisions, understanding issues and asking questions, coming to a consensus where required and offering to take the lead on issues where you have special skills, experience or interests.

How much time will be involved?

Each committee normally meets about 6 times a year. Meetings are currently held during the day as this suits all current committee members. Over and above attending committee meetings, you would need to be able to set aside some time to prepare for committee meetings and consider and help contribute to reports and discussion papers

From time to time you may also be invited to represent your committee at events and meetings out with regular meetings and be responsible for reporting back to the full Committee and RTOs within their Region. Depending on your interests you will also have the opportunity to represent the networks as a whole on Scottish Government Advisory Groups and be responsible for feeding back to the regional network committees.

Where does the Committee meet?

The elected committee normally meets on the *day of the week* at *location of meeting*.

How many Committee Places are there?

There are *Number* committee places, *Number* from each Local Authority Area of *List local authority areas*.

Will my expenses be covered? For example to attend meetings or Network business?

All reasonable expenses for attending meetings and other Network business will be covered and reimbursed with public transport being used wherever practical. Expenses will normally be reimbursed on the day of each meeting.

4) A year (10 months actually) in the life of the Regional Networks

It's difficult to do justice to all the work of the regional networks, particularly the work of individual committees, so here are just some of the highlights since March 2010.

With the support of the Tenant Participation Team, Scottish Government, the Regional Network Committees have produced 11 newsletters with a circulation of over 1,000 copies focussing on the activities of individual committees and gathering tenant group and tenant views on the Housing Bill and the Scottish Social Housing Charter. Around 96 committee members attended over 50 individual committee meetings, they held 11 members events, 8 AGMs and participated in a wide range of Scottish Government consultations and Advisory Groups. And had 4 meetings with the Minister of Housing and Communities and one full committee event.

March 2010

This was a particularly busy month for the Regional Networks.

The Regional network committees submitted a paper to the Housing & Communities Minister, Mr Neil, raising concerns on how some Local Authority landlords operate their Housing Revenue Accounts. The paper was written and coordinated by Hugh McClung, Central Network on behalf of the Regional Networks and was the first major policy issue that the Regional Networks have brought to the Scottish Government. This paper was the main topic of discussion at the 3rd meeting network representatives had with the Minister.

The committee member training programme being delivered by the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) continued at pace with sessions in both Glasgow & Edinburgh on Housing policy and team working/leadership skills. The tutors even gave out homework to further test the vast knowledge of those in attendance!

March also saw the networks host an exhibition stand at the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland conference at the SECC in Glasgow to promote their work. The first round of successful Annual General Meetings were also held covering West Strathclyde in Paisley, South West Scotland in Ayr, and Highland & Argyll & Bute in Glasgow.

Danny Mullen represented the networks on the Housing Bill Ministerial Sounding Board and was more than a match for housing professionals in getting across the interests and priorities of tenants.

Kevin Paterson from the Glasgow and Eilean Siar admirably represented the networks on the Housing Policy Advisory Group which considered the future direction of housing policy in Scotland and the issues set out in the discussion paper Fresh Thinking: New Ideas.

April

No less busy than March, the networks made a collective written submission on the Draft Housing Bill to the Local Government and Communities Committee. Danny gave evidence on behalf of the networks directly to this scrutiny committee. Danny provided a compelling case for the networks submission. and for changes to the Bill which would protect tenant interests

Not to be out done Jim Maryniak, chairperson of the Borders, East Lothian, Edinburgh & Midlothian (BEEM) regional network also gave evidence to the committee with the added pressure of having fellow committee members watch his performance from the public gallery.

East Dunbartonshire & Lanarkshire Regional Network Committee met with Alex Neil MSP as part of a planned visit to the Parliament.

Network committee members attended a one day policy course in Glasgow, covering the Concordat between Scottish Government and Local Authorities, national outcomes for the Scottish Government, the operation of Parliamentary Committees, and relations between Scotland and the United Kingdom, a lot to fit in!

The AGM season continued with Central Network having their annual meeting in Livingston, where the proposed Scottish Social Housing Charter was considered. A late influx of members meant it was standing room only!

May

The big news for May was the Regional Network Event in Glasgow which brought all committee members together. It was a packed day covering progress of the housing bill, with a keynote speech from the Housing & Communities Minister Mr Neil who used the opportunity to talk about the recently launched Housing Policy discussion, "Fresh Thinking, New Ideas." with the networks being the first tenant audience to hear directly from the Minister about this.

Two further AGMs took place with Glasgow & Eilean Siar in Glasgow and BEEM in Edinburgh, with much discussion on the Social Housing Charter.

A number of network committees also submitted responses to the Scottish Government's consultation on 'Eviction of Tenants in the Social Rented Sector'.

June

More successful AGMs were held - Tayforth in Dundee and Northern Lights in Aberdeen. Tayforth Committee also held a seminar for tenants in Perth to gather views on what they wanted included in the Charter - and the networks also hosted an exhibition stand at the TIS conference in Clydebank.

July

The summer holidays saw a quieter month for the networks, except for those lucky enough to attend Holyrood for the Queens Garden Party. Representatives from each network were invited to attend in recognition of all their hard work and commitment locally and nationally.

August

August saw the start of an ambitious consultation programme across the length and breadth of Scotland on the Scottish Social Housing Charter- organised by the Tenant Priorities team. This brought Regional Network committee members, tenants and tenant and resident groups, landlords, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Housing Regulator together to start thinking about the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the modernised Scottish Housing Regulator. Inverness set the pace closely followed by Falkirk & Dumfries.

September

A further meeting with the Housing & Communities Minister took place. And at Mr Neil's request the regional networks submitted a paper on the "Perceived Decline of Estates" which was ably compiled by Eric Allan from the Northern Lights Network on behalf of the networks.

Charter Events now moving to Aberdeen, Ayr and Glasgow.

More work took place on the development of revised Housing Revenue Account guidance with network representatives meeting with Scottish Government officials and Audit Scotland.

Vince Heneghan from Tayforth, Tina Beattie from BEEM, Rose Bowie from East Dunbartonshire & Lanarkshire, and Jim Hendry from South West Scotland represented the networks on the newly established Ministerial Charter Sounding Board.

Final network responses submitted to the Government's housing discussion, "Fresh Thinking, New Ideas" are submitted.

October

More Charter Events take place in Paisley, Dundee, Wishaw and Haddington.

The networks host an exhibition stand and workshop at the Tenant Participation Advisory Service's annual conference in Dundee.

Danny Mullen, secretary of Central Region is given the Tenant/Resident representative of the year award as part of the Tenant Participation Good Practice Awards for his work both locally in West Lothian and nationally.

November

Final Charter consultation events held in Edinburgh and Lochgilphead. Steve Byrne, chairperson for Highland and Argyll & Bute network, takes to the airwaves on Argyll FM to promote the event in Lochgilphead and encourage tenant views on the Social Housing Charter.

Central Region hold a members event in Alloa on the Charter and BEEM hold an event in Edinburgh. 50 plus questionnaires returned by tenant groups and individuals to the BEEM committee on what tenants want to see in the Charter. Other network charter consultation responses submitted.

Jim and Rose head to Edinburgh for the 2nd Meeting of the Ministerial Charter Sounding Board. Hugh McClung attends the West Dunbartonshire Federation AGM to explain the work the regional networks have done to highlight misuse of housing revenue accounts, this is well received. Hugh also encourages West Dunbartonshire RTOs to join the networks when they are ready to get involved.

December

Snow and travel chaos dominated the news and the regional networks meeting with the Minister for Housing & Communities falls victim to the weather – rescheduled for January 2011. On a positive note Hugh Wilson Fraser, chairperson of the Southwest Scotland Regional Network had a trip to Buckingham Palace to collect his MBE from the Queen in recognition of his commitment to the tenant movement in his community.

January 2011 onwards

January: networks meet with Minister for Housing and Communities, Alex Neil.

February onwards: network committees prepare to consult their members on the Scottish Social Housing Charter discussion document and work with the Scottish Government on their Strategy and Action Plan for Housing in the Next Decade - "Homes fit for the 21st Century". The AGM cycle starts again.

For more information about the regional network that covers your area log on to www.regionalnetworks.org.uk