



GLASGOW
AND EILEAN SIAR
REGIONAL
NETWORK
bringing tenants and
residents together

HOUSING SPECIAL

THE HOUSING BILL
SCOTTISH HOUSING
CHARTER

ALLOCATIONS

HOUSING REGULATOR

HOUSING REVENUE
ACCOUNT

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO
YOU

GET INVOLVED

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

In 2001 the Housing (Scotland) Act was passed, the first major housing Act for some time.

The Act focused on many areas that concerned tenants and was designed to provide guidance and protection to landlords and tenants alike.

Duties of landlords, homelessness, allocations, Scottish Secure Tenancies, short Scottish secure tenancies, rent, repairs, right to buy, tenant participation, consultation, regulation of social landlords, registration of landlords, housing management .

This was the first time that an act had provided tenant involvement and it was intended to provide much more clarity than had previously been given to landlords & tenants alike.

Unfortunately, whilst much is in the Act, tenants were not involved, and in the following years there have been areas which could have been much improved.

In defence of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, it does give tenants many of the legislative tools with which to protect themselves, however the spirit of consultation and engagement which landlords were expected to adopt has often not been forthcoming.

Tenants have also expressed dissatisfaction at their involvement with landlords and regulation.

The next decade brings several challenges to the social housing market, all of which have to be addressed: Homelessness targets 2012, Scottish Housing Quality Standards 2015 and a general need for many more houses to be provided for the future.

This led to the requirement to improve the current legislation and to where we are today.....

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN TO YOU?

In July 2009 the Government published a paper 'Identifying the Priorities of Tenants of Social Landlords' which identified some key areas for tenants and also highlighted areas where tenants felt they were not being treated properly.

The Housing Bill, Tenants Charter, new Housing Regulator are the last chance tenants are likely to have to influence the future of housing in Scotland for a while.

There is a shortage of housing everywhere in the country at the moment, complaints about anti-social housing, repairs, lack of tenant participation, environment (estate management etc) are growing and our priorities are changing.

As families become smaller and the Homelessness Act begins to bite, the demand for more houses is increasing yet it is not as simple as building more houses and funding is not unlimited.

Tenants need to be treated fairly across the country and where participation is required or tenants rights are being abused we feel that it is a duty to protect all and future tenants regardless of whether they have a local authority landlord, Housing Association landlord or RSL, or private landlord.

If you don't speak up you can't moan at the result



The Scottish Social Housing Charter

There are two types of charter, a 'normal' type often a mission statement or way of thinking, and the 'legislative' type, set in law. The new Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) is the second type and will be set in law by parliament.

Your region has been involved from day one and will continue to contribute to the charter through your comments and ongoing events. The government has also set up a discussion site for the charter which can be accessed through the regional networks site www.regionalnetworks.org.uk

The charter is the most likely place where tenants can influence the future of their housing.

The charter has the potential to set measurable 'outcomes' for tenants & landlords alike. How landlords should deal with anti-social tenants, allocations, tenant participation are such examples.

Although some are trying to turn the charter into a set of 'outcomes' the regional networks, tenants organisations and many others want a more defined approach avoiding the wooliness of the past.

Historically a lack of clarity has led to different interpretations by landlords, and many tenants are unhappy with the levels of participation, activity and trust they currently receive.

Our intention is to make the charter a much more measurable and specific document that supports tenants wishes and supporting landlords in protecting their stock and tenants environments alike.

The Scottish Housing Regulator

Along with the new Housing Bill and Housing Charter, there is a need for the current system of regulation to be changed. Many tenants do not know about the regulator, and of those who do, there have been questions as to its performance.

If the Bill and Charter are more specific/ clear as to what housing offers, and what tenants require from landlords then we can move forward to better measurement of the services we all receive.

At the same time, more focus will be put on the new Regulator and how they carry out their duties.

We are currently representing tenants on the Tenants Regulatory Advisory Group – talk to us.

Allocations

Many tenants are concerned about the current allocations policy of landlords and how they operate. We have been actively working on the Allocation Policy Group, and new guidelines have been posted for consultation on the Scottish Government website.

The main concern is often that in spite of policies to protect and grow the community, often more than not the Homelessness allocation overrides any other form of points and allocations process. People waiting 10- years on a list are 'gazumped' by people playing the system or needing a home.

Please remember not all homeless people are 'problem' tenants. In this climate divorce and separation, younger pregnancies, repossession all play a part.

Should adherence to a fair allocations policy be included in the future, and should the new Regulator be checking this? We think so

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) & transferred homes.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is an account used by local authority landlords where monies from rents is kept and can only be used for specific uses on homes and estates. A few months ago it was raised that some landlords were allegedly misusing this money. This was brought to the attention of the Minister for Housing and a report from the networks has followed. Some areas have noticed monies being returned to the account since we raised the issue, however our work is not done.

Glasgow and the Western Isles, does not have any HRAs however when many properties were transferred from Glasgow City Council, Scottish Homes or other transfers, tenants fought for many years to protect their properties by 'ring fencing' their finances and conditions. It has been brought to our attention that some Large Scale Voluntary Transfer landlords (LSVT) have approached Scottish Government about setting aside of these contracts.

Are you aware that this could allow all your protection including rent agreements, repairs agreements, the 30 year plan for your houses to be thrown away to name a few?

If you think your landlord is thinking about setting aside your transfer contracts, or using your finances on other houses let us know **URGENTLY** so we can build a picture and maybe take some action.

The Housing (Scotland) Bill

The new Housing Bill is the most important piece of housing legislation for a decade, and incorporates several areas not covered in the previous Act. And the amended Act in 2006.

Reform of the Right to Buy and Scottish Social Housing Charter (see next section) are some of the most important changes. Landlord registration and an improvement in regulation are other key features.

The main difference with is the fact that the Scottish Government is adopting a more consultative approach with Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) the Regional Network and many other organisations such as Chartered Institute of Housing, COSLA, TIS, TPAS, landlords and you the public.

The Bill has currently passed its 1st stage and is nearing the 2nd stage where some amendments will be made. Stage 3 and Royal Assent is expected around the end of the year or beginning of 2011.

We are hoping that you will look at the Bill on the website, and let us know what you think is missing or needs to be included in the Scottish Social Housing Charter & Regulator discussions.

The Regional Network has regular meetings with the Housing Minister.

Get involved

Glasgow & Eilean Siar has 80+ RTOs yet we rarely hear from over 30% of them. The most common complaint is apathy or the lack of new members, we would like to change this. It is important to us that we include as many of the tenants living in our region as possible and to do this we need you.

Write, email, phone whatever, we don't mind, and if you are looking at setting up a registered tenants organisation (RTO) then let us know and we will help.

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