

East Dunbartonshire & Lanarkshire Regional Network Summer Newsletter 2016

Message from the Chair

Jeanette Arneil



As chairperson of East Dunbartonshire & Lanarkshire I am very proud of the work the Regional Networks have achieved. We have given evidence to the Infrastructure and Capital Investment (ICI) committee on how the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) engages with their customers, and I am pleased to say that the Regional Networks now have a liaison group and a member of our committee attends these meetings regularly.

We were also involved in an Housing Revenue Account (HRA) working group with Scotland's Housing Network which resulted in a toolkit being created to help tenants plan their involvement in the HRA.

We continued our dialogue with the Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess MSP, and this direct contact with Mrs Burgess has been beneficial in raising the profile of the Regional Networks. Our National Event took place on the 8 March 2016, which I had the pleasure to chair, this was a great opportunity to hear the Minister give a farewell speech to the members of the Regional Networks. I hope this positive dialogue continues with her successor, Kevin Stewart MSP, Minister for Local Government and Housing.

I believe that your hard work and dedication ensures that tenant participation stays on the national agenda. I hope you enjoy this edition.

East Dunbartonshire and South and North Lanarkshire held a successful AGM on the 22 August 2015 at the Mercure Hotel in Glasgow, this gave the committee an opportunity to tell the attendees what the Regional Networks had been doing to represent their interests nationally.

The meeting was an opportunity to hear from RTO's directly about:

- The quality of service that social landlords are delivering – including any feedback on the condition of social housing when it is allocated to new tenants;
- The extent of tenant empowerment and opportunities that tenants have to influence their landlords; and
- Whether the introduction of the new Regulator and the Social Housing Charter are having a positive impact on services and tenant empowerment.

This is extremely positive steps for tenants and residents in Scotland and shows the important influence of the Regional Networks – Scottish Ministers are speaking to tenants and residents about things that matter to us and the RTO's. Regional Networks represent your views and are driving meaningful change by working in partnership with the Scottish Government on National Policy issues. Our next AGM will be held in the Jury's Inn on the **27 August 2016**. We would encourage you to attend.

The Review of the Scottish Social Housing Charter is now live and can be accessed at the following link:

<https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/social-housing-services/scottish-social-housing-charter>

Regional Network National Event



Over sixty Regional Network Committee members came together from across Scotland on Tuesday 8 March 2016 in Glasgow and received a very warm welcome by the event Chair, Jeanette Arneil, who represents East Dunbartonshire and Lanarkshire Regional Network.

Jeanette was delighted to welcome Margaret Burgess MSP, Minister for Housing and Welfare who, as you are aware, was standing down as Minister and MSP in the forthcoming Scottish Parliamentary elections. Mrs Burgess MSP gave reflection on her time as Minister and stated that

'This Government greatly values the Regional Networks input into discussions on housing policy. I have been impressed by all your work to ensure that the interests and priorities of tenants are included in national housing policy and legislation'

As the Minister left the podium and she disrupted by a couple of loud mouthed cleaners, luckily for everyone they didn't get their hands on the microphones or all Glasgow would have heard them.



They were discussing the merits of the Social Housing Charter and upcoming review.

Lynda Johnstone from The Tenants Information Service (TIS) facilitated a panel on Charter Review, the Annual Return on the Charter and Regulation. The general view was that since the Charter had been implemented that services had improved for tenants and that landlords were working with tenants to promote scrutiny activities within their area.



Some landlords are further ahead than others but the SHR indicated that things were improving and that tenant satisfaction scores among some landlords had improved but it would take a time for scrutiny practices to be a culture in some organisations.

In the afternoon session, Lesley Fraser, the Scottish Government's Director of Housing, Regeneration and Welfare, gave a presentation on the Joint Housing Delivery Policy Group (JHDPG) with a focus on Housing, Health and Social Care Integration.

William Fleming, Head of Housing Services Policy Unit, gave an overview of the Private Rented Sector Housing Bill. The Bill aims to improve security of tenure for tenants and at the same time providing safeguards for landlords, lenders and investors. It gives predictability on rent increases, while at the same time gives protection against excessive rent increases enabling tenants to challenge the Rent Service Scotland. It brings in a clear single tenancy system with a model tenancy and ends 'no fault' evictions. At the same time it creates specific grounds for landlords regaining possession of their property. The programme for the Bill has now passed Parliament and will come into force by 2018.

This was an interesting and informative day thanks to all who planned the event.

Margaret Burgess, Minister for Housing and Welfare, visits North Lanarkshire Council



Staff and Tenants at NLC promote partnership working

North Lanarkshire Federation of Tenants and Residents Association welcomed Margaret Burgess, Minister for Housing and Welfare, to the area, to hear first-hand about the success story across North Lanarkshire in re-letting high quality homes and putting tenants and their aspirations firmly at the heart of the modernised service.

The Federation, in partnership with North Lanarkshire Council (NLC), has delivered a number of changes to housing services. These changes include the use of new technology, tenant led scrutiny, new house letting standards and improved communication.

Over the past three years, NLC reduced rent loss by over £125,000 and cut the time taken to re-let a house to 24 days. North Lanarkshire Council is Scotland's largest local authority landlord. They have a housing stock of approximately 36,900 homes; deal with around 3,250 void properties a year and carry out over 150,000 repairs.

The Minister was welcomed by Elaine McHugh, Head of Housing Services with North Lanarkshire Council and Anne McGhee, Chairperson, North Lanarkshire Federation, and took in a presentation about the Local Homes Service. The Minister then took a tour of the Local Homes hub to see for herself the new technology in action.

Anne McGhee, Chairperson of North Lanarkshire Federation said: "A lot of time and effort goes into our scrutiny activities to make sure we get it right first time, and we agree next steps and changes with the council's housing services who are very supportive in all our scrutiny activities."

Also present were Peter Winnie from Coatbridge Federation, Jim Leonard from North Lanarkshire Federation, Des Murray, Head of Housing and Property and Nancy Robertson, Development Officer, Tenant Information Service.

Housing Minister Margaret Burgess said:

"I am pleased that North Lanarkshire Federation of Tenants and Residents Association has put tenant empowerment at the heart of its activities.

It is essential that the quality of service that social landlords are delivering, including any feedback on the condition of social housing when it is allocated to new tenants, is maintained."



Mystery Shopping: the South Lanarkshire Approach

The Repairs Scrutiny Group agreed to undertake a mystery shopping exercise of the repairs service. They have agreed to focus in the first instance on 'reporting a repair' to assess how well services are delivered.

Mystery Shopping gives landlords a better understanding of how their tenants and other customers perceive the quality and level of service being provided. It compliments satisfaction surveys by providing feedback about direct experiences of dealing with staff.

Mystery shopping increases tenant participation in the standards of service delivery. It is a good method of involving tenants who have never previously participated as well as building the capacity of those already active tenants. It is another dimension to tenant participation which involves tenants who may not be keen to participate in traditional tenants associations or committees.

Tenants who become mystery shoppers gain useful personal skills to assist them in their own lives while at the same time assisting landlords to focus on improvements by providing information on the quality of current services.

South Lanarkshire staff and the Tenants Development Support Project worked together

to create scenarios that the "mystery shopper" could use and these were measured on common calls to the repairs centre.

Prior to undertaking the shopping exercise the Project facilitated a training session for shoppers. This would give more detail on the theory behind mystery shopping, and how it relates to the new regulatory framework for social housing. It would also give shoppers the opportunity to learn the scenarios and where relevant to practice these with fellow shoppers



South Lanarkshire Tenants
Development Support Project

New Ministers announced

First Minister for Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, has announced her new cabinet.

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security & Equalities is Angela Constance MSP who has taken over from Alex Neil MSP.



The new Local Government and Housing Minister is Kevin Stewart who has taken over from Margaret Burgess.

Committee Members 2015/16

East Dunbartonshire

Clive King, Cowgate TARA - Clive.king@live.com

North Lanarkshire - John Joseph Watters , Mornay & Nithsdale Tara

John Duffy - **Treasurer**—Mornay & Nithsdale Tara—marianduffy@live.co.uk

Peter Winnie - **Secretary**, Coatbridge Federation

Irene Codona, Bargeddie— sewbyhand@yahoo.ca

South Lanarkshire - Jeanette Arneil - **Chair**—Clydesdale HA—jeanette@arneil.eclipse.co.uk

Donna Murray – **Vice Chair**—LATRA—donnamurray74@rocketmail.com

Jackie Taylor - LATRA— latrasecretary@mail.com

Robert Lewis - LATRA—Larkhall.area.tenants.and.residents.association@hotmail.com