

Ned Sharratt
Assistant Clerk
Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

24 April 2015

Dear Ned

Public Petitions Committee Petition PE1539

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to explain our work in relation to RSLs' provision of information to tenants and customers and to seek our view on petition PE1539.

As the regulator of social housing in Scotland, our statutory objective is to safeguard and promote the interests of current and future tenants, homeless people and other people who use services provided by social landlords. We see informed and empowered tenants as an important part of effective regulation.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 requires Scottish Ministers to set standards and outcomes which social landlords should aim to achieve, and to publish these in a Scottish Social Housing Charter (the Charter). It is the responsibility of each landlord to meet these outcomes and standards. It is our role to monitor and report on landlords' performance in achieving the outcomes and standards in the Charter.

The Charter states that social landlords should manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides. This outcome covers all aspects of landlords' communication with tenants and customers.

Our Regulatory Framework states that we expect landlords to have effective arrangements for proper dialogue with tenants and to ensure that they have appropriate ways to involve, where relevant, those who are not tenants but receive services from them including homeless people, owners and Gypsies/Travellers. It is important that all service users are given the opportunity to have their views heard and that landlords can demonstrate that they are responding to them.

Each year RSLs are required to submit an Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) to us which reports on their progress against the Charter outcomes in delivering housing services to their tenants. We publish a report for each landlord using the ARC data that landlords have submitted to us which shows tenants and service users, and other interested parties, how well the landlord is performing. Last year we introduced an on-line comparison tool which allows tenants and other service users to compare their landlord's performance against others. This has been well-received by tenants and

other stakeholders. We also require landlords to make this information available in appropriate ways to all of their tenants.

We have recently published our first [National Report on the Scottish Social Housing Charter](#). The report's key findings were that 88% of tenants of Scottish social landlords are satisfied with the service provided by their landlord and that keeping tenants informed has the biggest impact on increasing tenant satisfaction.

In addition to the Charter, all RSLs must comply with our published Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management. Standard 2 requires RSLs to be open about and accountable for what they do; the accompanying guidance details the information that should be provided to, and sought from, tenants and other service users:

- The RSL gives tenants, service users and other stakeholders information that meets their needs about the RSL, its services, its performance and its future plans.
- The governing body recognises it is accountable to its tenants, has a wider public accountability to the taxpayer as a recipient of public funds, and actively manages its accountabilities. It is open about what it does, publishes information about its activities and, wherever possible, agrees to requests for information about the work of the governing body and the RSL.
- The RSL seeks out the needs, priorities, views and aspirations of tenants, service users and stakeholders.
- The governing body takes account of the above information in its strategies, plans and decisions.
- The RSL is open, co-operative, and engages effectively with all its regulators and funders, notifying them of anything that may affect its ability to fulfil its obligations. It informs us about any significant events such as a major issue, event or change as set out and required in our notifiable events guidance.

We take a risk-based and proportionate approach to regulation. This means that we focus on the areas that present greatest risk to the interests of tenants and other service users. We gather annually and review a wide range of performance and financial data and regulatory intelligence about all RSLs to identify any risks to our statutory objective.

We do not carry out cyclical inspections of RSLs. This means that we do not regularly assess each RSL's compliance with all our Regulatory Standards. We can, if it is brought to our attention, deal with a concern from a tenant that their landlord has failed to provide information. But this relies on tenants being aware of the information requirements placed on their landlords.

I hope the Committee finds this explanation of our role and work informative. We do not have a regulatory view on the petition's proposal. The standards and outcomes set in the Charter are still relatively new. Our analysis of landlords' first annual Charter returns highlights the importance tenants place on being kept informed by their landlord. We are in the relatively early stages of our new role in monitoring landlords' performance against the Charter, and trends in performance will be clearer over time. At this point, we have seen no evidence of a risk to tenants' interests regarding landlords' provision of information.

Yours sincerely

Michael Cameron
Chief Executive