



The Scottish Social Housing Charter



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The Scottish Social Housing Charter

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1. Introduction

1 Status of the Charter

1.1 As required by section 31 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, the Scottish Ministers, in this Scottish Social Housing Charter, set the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities.

1.2 The Charter was approved by resolution of the Scottish Parliament on 14 March 2012. It has effect from 1 April 2012 and continues to apply until the Parliament approves a revised Charter.

1.3 Before submitting the Charter to the Scottish Parliament for approval, and as required by section 33 of the 2010 Act, the Scottish Ministers consulted the Scottish Housing Regulator; tenants in social housing and their representative bodies; social landlords; homeless people; and other stakeholders about the Charter's contents. They have taken account of all their views to ensure that the outcomes in the Charter:

- describe the results that tenants and other customers expect social landlords to achieve
- cover social landlords' housing activities only
- can be monitored, assessed and reported upon by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

1.4 The Charter replaces the performance standards set out in the guidance that the Scottish Ministers issued under section 79 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 in November 2006. It does not replace any of the legal duties that apply to social landlords, but in several cases the outcomes describe the results social landlords should achieve in meeting their legal duties.

2 Purpose of the Charter

2.1 The Charter will help to improve the quality and value of the services that social landlords provide, and supports the Scottish Government's long-term aim of creating a safer and stronger Scotland. It will do so by:

- stating clearly what tenants and other customers can expect from social landlords, and helping them to hold landlords to account
- focusing the efforts of social landlords on achieving outcomes that matter to their customers
- establishing a basis for the Scottish Housing Regulator to assess and report on how well landlords are performing. This assessment will enable the Regulator, social landlords, tenants and other customers to identify areas of strong performance and areas needing improvement.

2.2 The Regulator's reports will also help the Scottish Government ensure that public investment in new social housing goes only to landlords assessed as performing well.

3 Scope and content of the outcomes and standards

3.1 The Charter has seven sections covering: equalities; the customer/landlord relationship; housing quality and maintenance; neighbourhood and community; access to housing and support; getting good value from rents and service charges; and other customers. It contains a total of 16 outcomes and standards that social landlords should aim to achieve. The outcomes and standards apply to all social landlords, except that number 12 applies only to local councils in relation to their homelessness duties; and number 16 applies only to councils and registered social landlords that manage sites for Gypsies/Travellers.

3.2 Each section is accompanied by a short narrative that describes the context of the outcome or standard, including the areas of activity to which it applies and any relevant legal duties connected with it. The narrative is not part of the outcome that social landlords should achieve, and does not tell them how to achieve it. That is a matter for each landlord to decide in consultation with its tenants and other customers.

4 Assessing social landlords' achievement of the outcomes

4.1 Social landlords are responsible for meeting the standards and outcomes set out in the Charter. They are accountable to their tenants and other customers for how well they do so. They should ensure their performance management and reporting systems show how well they are achieving the outcomes; identify any areas where they need to improve; and enable them to report to their tenants and other customers and the Scottish Housing Regulator.

4.2 Under the 2010 Act, the Scottish Housing Regulator is responsible for monitoring, assessing and reporting on how well social landlords, individually and collectively, achieve the Charter's outcomes. It will consult on and then publish its arrangements for doing so.

5 Reviewing and revising the Charter

5.1 Unless stakeholders raise urgent and significant concerns about how the Charter is working in practice, the Charter will apply for five years from 1 April 2012. In consultation with stakeholders, Scottish Ministers will review its effect on the quality and value of social landlords' services, and its value to tenants and other customers, social landlords and the Scottish Housing Regulator. The review will start within two years of the Charter coming into force, so that Scottish Ministers can take the review's findings into account in preparing a revised Charter, which will take effect from 1 April 2017.

2. Charter outcomes and standards

The customer/landlord relationship

1: Equalities

Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:

- *every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.*

This **outcome** describes what social landlords, by complying with equalities legislation, should achieve for all tenants and other customers regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. It includes landlords' responsibility for finding ways of understanding the needs of different customers and delivering services that recognise and meet these needs.

2: Communication

Social landlords 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 other customers. It is not just about how clearly and effectively a landlord gives information to those who want it. It also covers making it easy for tenants and other customers to make complaints and provide feedback on services, using that information to improve services and performance, and letting people know what they have done in response to complaints and feedback. It does not require landlords to provide legally protected, personal or commercial information.

3: Participation

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- *tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.*

This **outcome** describes what landlords should achieve by meeting their statutory duties on tenant participation. It covers how social landlords gather and take account of the views and priorities of their tenants; how they shape their services to reflect these views; and how they help tenants and other customers to become more capable of involvement.

Housing quality and maintenance

4: Quality of housing

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- *tenants' homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by April 2015 and continue to meet it thereafter, and when they are allocated, are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair.*

This **standard** describes what landlords should be achieving in all their properties. It covers all properties that social landlords let, unless a particular property does not have to meet part of the standard. Beyond SHQS, landlords should be looking for cost-effective ways of achieving higher energy-efficiency standards for their properties, to provide warmer homes for their tenants and help to meet climate change targets.

During this Charter's lifetime, the Scottish Government will consult on higher standards. If adopted, these new standards will form part of the next Charter.

5: Repairs, maintenance and improvements

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- *tenants' homes are well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done.*

This **outcome** describes how landlords should meet their statutory duties on repairs and provide repairs, maintenance and improvement services that safeguard the value of their assets and take account of the wishes and preferences of their tenants. This could include setting repair priorities and timescales; setting repair standards such as getting repairs done right, on time, first time; and assessing tenant satisfaction with the quality of the services they receive.

Neighbourhood and community

6: Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes

Social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure that:

- *tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.*

This **outcome** covers a range of actions that social landlords can take on their own and in partnership with others. It covers action to enforce tenancy conditions on estate management and neighbour nuisance, to resolve neighbour disputes, and to arrange or provide tenancy support where this is needed. It also covers the role of landlords in working with others to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Access to housing and support

7, 8 and 9: Housing options

Social landlords work together to ensure that:

- *people looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them*
- *tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options.*

Social landlords ensure that:

- *people at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness.*

These **outcomes** cover landlords' duties to provide information to people looking for housing and advice for those at risk of becoming homeless. These duties include helping tenants and people on housing lists to review their options to move within the social housing sector or to another sector.

10: Access to social housing

Social landlords ensure that:

- *people looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and their prospects of being housed.*

This **outcome** covers what social landlords can do to make it easy for people to apply for the widest choice of social housing that is available and suitable and that meets their needs. It includes actions that social landlords can take on their own and in partnership with others, for example through Common Housing Registers or mutual exchange schemes, or through local information and advice schemes.

Outcome 11: Tenancy sustainment

Social landlords ensure that:

- *tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.*

This **outcome** covers how landlords can help tenants who may need support to maintain their tenancy. This includes tenants who may be at risk of falling into arrears with their rent, and tenants who may need their home adapted to cope with age, disability, or caring responsibilities.

12: Homeless people

Local councils perform their duties on homelessness so that:

- *homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice; are provided with suitable, good-quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed; and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.*

This **outcome** describes what councils should achieve by meeting their statutory duties to homeless people.

Getting good value from rents and service charges

13: Value for money

Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that:

- *tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.*

This **standard** covers the efficient and effective management of services. It includes minimising the time houses are empty; managing arrears and all resources effectively; controlling costs; getting value out of contracts; and giving better value for money by increasing the quality of services with minimum extra cost to tenants, owners and other customers.

14 and 15: Rents and service charges

Social landlords set rents and service charges in consultation with their tenants and other customers so that:

- *a balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services, and how far current and prospective tenants and other customers can afford them*
- *tenants get clear information on how rent and other money is spent, including any details of individual items of expenditure above thresholds agreed between landlords and tenants.*

These **outcomes** reflect a landlord's legal duty to consult tenants about rent setting; the importance of taking account of what current and prospective tenants and other customers are likely to be able to afford; and the importance that many tenants place on being able to find out how their money is spent. Each landlord must decide, in discussion with tenants and other customers, whether to publish information about expenditure above a particular level, and in what form and detail. What matters is that discussions take place and the decisions made reflect the views of tenants and other customers.

Other customers

16: Gypsies/Travellers

Local councils and social landlords with responsibility for managing sites for Gypsies/Travellers should manage the sites so that:

- *sites are well maintained and managed.*

This **outcome** applies only to those councils and other social landlords that are responsible for managing these sites.

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3. A note about language

We use some key phrases throughout the Charter, which we explain below.

Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, Section 31

Section 31 of the Act says that:

‘Ministers must set out standards and outcomes which social landlords should aim to achieve when performing housing activities.

The document in which those standards and outcomes are set out is to be known as the “Scottish Social Housing Charter”.’

Long-term aims

The Scottish Government has five long-term aims, known as the strategic objectives. Everything it does should contribute towards making Scotland:

- wealthier and fairer
- healthier
- safer and stronger
- smarter
- greener.

The Charter supports the aim of creating ‘A safer and stronger Scotland’.

Outcome

- An outcome is a result we want to happen.
- The Charter sets out the results that a social landlord should achieve for its tenants and other customers.
- The Charter is not about what a landlord does or how it does it. It is about the customer’s experience of using a landlord’s services.

Scottish Housing Regulator

The Regulator is the new, independent body that the Scottish Parliament has created to look after the interests of people who are or may become homeless, tenants of social landlords, or users of the services that social landlords provide. The Regulator will monitor, assess, and report on how landlords are performing against the Charter's outcomes and standards.

Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)

The SHQS is the Scottish Government's main way of measuring the quality of housing in Scotland. The Scottish Government wants social landlords to bring their stock up to the standard by April 2015. Some properties may not have to meet all parts of the standard.

Social housing

- Housing provided by councils and housing associations under a Scottish Secure Tenancy or Short Scottish Secure Tenancy.

Social landlord

- A council landlord.
- A not-for-profit landlord, registered with the Scottish Housing Regulator (for example, a housing association, or co-operative).
- A council that does not own any housing but provides housing services, for example services for homeless people.

Stakeholder

A person or organisation with an interest in social housing and the way it is regulated. The following are some examples of stakeholders:

- The Scottish Housing Regulator.
- Tenants of social landlords and bodies representing the interests of tenants.
- Homeless people and bodies representing the interests of homeless people.
- Users of housing services provided by social landlords and bodies representing the interests of those users.

- Social landlords and bodies representing the interests of social landlords.
- Secured creditors of registered social landlords and bodies representing those secured creditors.
- The Accounts Commission for Scotland.
- The Equalities and Human Rights Commissions and other bodies representing equal opportunities interests.

Standard

- A level of quality that every social landlord should achieve.

Tenants and other customers

- People who are already tenants of a social landlord.
- People who may become tenants in the future – for example, someone who has applied for a tenancy.
- Homeless people.
- People who use the housing services provided by a social landlord – for example, home owners who pay a social landlord to provide a factoring service, or Gypsies/Travellers who use sites provided by a social landlord.



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