

✓ **MAKING A DIFFERENCE!**



RTO Regional Network Conference hailed a success **Page 6**



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editorial

A **nne Cook, Head of the Scottish Government social housing team, reflects on some of the housing highlights of the past year and what's in this edition.**

Following extensive stakeholder consultation, the revised Scottish Social Housing Charter took effect on 1 April 2017. Tenants and landlords told us that the Charter is making a big impact on promoting more tenant involvement and scrutiny and is helping to make real improvements in the standard and efficiency of services to tenants. During the year we also launched the 'Stepping up to Scrutiny' toolkit and training pack as a free resource to support scrutiny activities. It's been great to see tenant scrutiny taking off and becoming part of mainstream housing activities.

After almost 10 years of operation The Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO) Regional Networks decided it was time to undertake a comprehensive review of their organisational structure. The Networks consulted with their members on how to develop a new

structure which would help them work efficiently and effectively in promoting tenant and resident views and ideas. A new 4 Regional Network structure is being set up which will broaden representation to other landlord recognised groups including scrutiny groups. You can read more about this in page 6. The network Annual General Meeting's (AGMs) will take place in May and June 2018 – if you are part of an RTO or landlord recognised group and would like to get involved in national policy discussions please look out for your invite and come along to the AGM!

A key housing management project this year is the development of new practitioner guide on allocations and suspensions which we have recently commissioned Craigforth Consulting and CIH Scotland to produce. It will supersede and replace previous practice guidance on allocations published in 2011 and suspensions guidance published in 2009 and will be developed in close consultation with housing practitioners, ensuring that the guide reflects the experience of practitioners on the ground.

The guide will support Local Authority and RSL landlords in reviewing their allocations policy and managing the allocation of their housing stock, and will also provide practice examples to help landlords ensure their allocations policies and practices provide a clear and coherent approach to allocations that meet local needs.

And finally as this is the 'Year of Young People 2018' I would encourage you all, from local RTOs to landlords, to think about how you can involve young people in the work you do. We'd be delighted to hear about any successes you have and we will cover them in the next edition of the newsletter.

Please contact the tenant priorities team on tpadminsUPPORT@gov.scot or on 0141 244 5448 if you would like a copy of the toolkit or training pack.

I do hope you find the newsletter of interest and enjoy this edition.

Anne Cook
Social Housing Services
Manager



foreword

It has been yet another busy, challenging and successful year for me as Minister for Local Government and Housing. We are making good progress on our target to build 50,000 affordable homes during the lifetime of this parliament with 35,000 of them for social rent. I have been lucky to see some of these new homes and meet the tenants who live in them, it is very encouraging hearing what a difference these homes are making to them and their families.

I want to ensure that those who live in the social rented sector receive good services from their landlords and the Scottish Social Housing Charter and development of tenant scrutiny continues to have a positive impact on this for tenants across Scotland. In October last year, I attended the Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland's Excellence Awards which celebrate success and achievements across the sector and I was delighted to present the Excellence in Scrutiny Award to Trust Housing Association.

The work Trust Housing Association and many landlords are doing to promote tenant scrutiny and the

commitment of the tenants involved demonstrates that this can make a positive impact on services. One way I understand the priorities and views of tenants and residents is through my regular meetings with the Registered Tenant Organisations (RTO) Regional Networks. I look forward to working with them over the coming year.

I am also committed to improving standards in the Private rented sector. Around 770,000 people rent from a private landlord and over the last few months, three big reforms have been put in place. A new Private Residential Tenancy was introduced which was the biggest reform of the sector in over 25 years. The tenancy will improve security, stability and predictability for tenants, balanced with appropriate safeguards for landlords. Civil disputes in the private rented sector are now considered by the Housing and Property Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland and no fee will be charged for anyone taking a case to the Tribunal. The new Letting Agent Code of Practice also came into effect on 31 January 2018 and will professionalise the sector. From that date, all letting agents in Scotland must comply with

the code and have until 1 October 2018 to apply to the Scottish Letting Agent Register.

The terrible events at Grenfell tower in June 2017 focused minds on tenant safety. We are fortunate that in Scotland we already have robust building and safety housing standards but we cannot, of course, be complacent. The Government very quickly set up a ministerial working group on building and fire safety, with a remit to review building and fire regulatory frameworks. As part of this a tenant and resident panel was established to feed into this work and ensure that their views are taken into account. I know that many landlords acted quickly to reassure their tenants after the tragedy and continue to work closely with them.

I look forward in the coming year to continuing to work with all stakeholders to ensure that Scotland's housing aspirations are achieved.

Kevin Stewart
Minister for Local
Government and Housing

The Scottish Social Housing Charter – Working Together to Achieve Change

As we approach six years since The Scottish Social Housing Charter was introduced, it provides a great opportunity to highlight what has been achieved since 2012 and to share how tenants and landlords are working together to achieve its sixteen outcomes and standards.

2017 was an important year in the charter's development, following an extensive review with stakeholders during 2016, a revised charter was introduced in April 2017 for a further 5 years. Charter performance is assessed and reported on by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). We have seen steady improvements in landlords' performance against the charter outcomes and standards since charter reporting began. Nine out of ten tenants are satisfied with the homes and services their landlord provides, in eleven out of the sixteen outcomes and standards performance has improved or been maintained and landlords continue to have strong performance in the service areas most important to tenants.

Tenants and landlords have told us that it is not just about an improvement in services, the charter has resulted in better communication between tenants and landlords, ensuring the services that are provided reflect tenants, needs and priorities. It has focussed greater

attention on value for money and has helped tenants and others understand in more detail how their landlord operates. Tenants have also told us that working together with their landlord to achieve change has provided them with additional skills and confidence.

It's clear that the charter has been a catalyst for increasing tenant involvement, and this has been most obvious in the development of tenant scrutiny activity. From large national housing associations and Councils to smaller community based associations, tenant involvement in scrutiny is helping to improve and shape services on the ground. Highlighted are just a few examples of how the charter and charter reporting information are being used by tenants to improve services.

Prospect Community Housing Association Scrutiny Group

"The SHR charter performance information helped us choose which area to focus on as a scrutiny group. We used it to improve our knowledge about Prospect's performance compared to others."

East Lothian Housing Association Tenant Involvement Group

"Our Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) has sub groups for scrutiny and focus groups (TIG-Scrutiny and TIG-Focus),

which look at performance and how we deal with areas where we perform below expectations. For example: TIG-Focus scrutinises our annual return on the charter each year as part of the checks made before decisions are made about what goes into our annual 'How We're Doing' booklet. They check audit trails, can request clarification on anything if the audit trail isn't clear, and can pass on anything they think needs a closer look to TIG-Scrutiny."

A copy of the Charter can be downloaded from this link <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/03/8379>



The Prospect group at a recent scrutiny meeting



Organisational Review of the Registered Tenant Organisation Regional Networks



The Regional Networks, established in 2008, are made up of members nominated from registered tenant organisations (RTO's) across Scotland. They get support from the Scottish Government's Tenant Participation (TP) Team and provide a practical and effective way for the formal tenants' movement in Scotland to work with the Scottish Government in developing national housing policy, providing a broadly representative view of tenants' thoughts and interests.

The networks work to ensure that tenant and tenant group interests are considered in national policy, responding to Scottish Government consultations and helping to develop and influence policy.

As it was over 10 years since the Regional Networks were established, the network committees decided to review their structure including the current geographical split. The chairs and secretaries of the

Regional Network committees met in November 2016 and agreed to review the structure due to a reduction in the number of RTOs throughout Scotland and to reflect the development of scrutiny focussed tenants groups. A working group was set up by the Regional Networks to look at various options for restructuring and following extensive consultation decided to change from the current nine regions to a four region structure.

The Regional Networks Annual Conference last November marked the start of the restructuring process with the interim committees agreeing that a single constitution would be adopted by each of the 4 Regional Networks. The workshops at the event also focused on how the new committees would promote the networks and raise awareness of their work. They also considered how they could adopt more effective

ways of working, attract new members with appropriate skills and knowledge, and be better able to respond to emerging issues.

Membership is being extended to scrutiny groups and other recognised tenant groups, and members see this as a positive step in encouraging more people to get involved. Each network has developed a communications and work plan and these will be used to focus their work, how they will operate and how they involve members, and gather feedback and views on issues. Delegates at the conference discussed what training new committee members would require to ensure they will operate effectively and have the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them to get fully involved in policy discussions and this will be a key priority once the new committees are elected.

Tenant Participation Champions

The Regional Networks were delighted to be recognised at the 2017 Tenant Participation Advisory Service National Good Practice Awards in St Andrews in October. They were runners-up in the competitive “Tenant Participation Champions” category.

The awards recognised the commitment, effort and time given by tenant and resident volunteers over the last nine years and their work in ensuring that tenant and tenant group interests are represented in policy development and legislation. The Regional Networks are unique in the UK, providing a strong voice for tenants nationally and highlighting the strength of tenant involvement in Scotland. They have developed effective working relationships and are well respected by housing professionals, the Scottish Government and Ministers.

In the past 12 months, the networks have contributed to several Scottish Government working groups, ensuring that tenant views and ideas are at the heart of policy development. These include the SHR Liaison Group, the Joint Housing Policy Delivery Group, the Housing and Older People’s Group and the Welfare Reform Group. They also responded to consultations

on social security reform and the Scottish Housing Charter and gave evidence at the Local Government and Communities Committee at the Scottish Parliament on the review of the Charter. These contributions have had a direct impact on the policies the Scottish Government introduce.

“To have the work of the Regional Networks recognised was really

appreciated as they are made up entirely of volunteers,” said Hugh McClung from Stirling Tenants Assembly. “It’s good to note the support from the Scottish Government’s Tenant Priorities Team which has helped us make an impact on housing policy and practice in Scotland.”



The late Ronald Ritchie, Steve Christie, George McGuinness MBE, Hugh McClung MBE and Anne Cameron are presented with their runners up award.

New Regional Network Structure

The new networks will be:

Region 1 – North of Scotland Regional Network

Region 2 – South East Scotland Regional Network

Region 3 – South West Scotland Regional Network

Region 4 – Central Scotland Regional Network

To keep up to date with what's happening with the regional networks visit their website at <https://www.regionalnetworks.org.uk/>

Cath McCarthur and Angela Sulo from the former BEEM Regional Network now Region 2 taking part in the Conference workshop.



Engaging with Tenants Nationally

This map of Scotland illustrates the number of Registered Tenants' Organisations within each Local Authority Area at April 2017.

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| Region 1 | Region 3 | Region 4 |
| 1, Aberdeen City | 18, Dumfries and Galloway | 25, Clackmannanshire |
| 2, Aberdeenshire | 19, East Ayrshire | 26, East Dunbartonshire |
| 3, Angus | 20, East Renfrewshire | 27, Falkirk |
| 4, Argyll and Bute | 21, Inverclyde | 28, Glasgow City |
| 5, Dundee City | 22, North Ayrshire | 29, North Lanarkshire |
| 6, Highland | 23, Renfrewshire | 30, South Lanarkshire |
| 7, Moray | 24, South Ayrshire | 31, Stirling |
| 8, The Western Isles | | 32, West Dunbartonshire |
| 9, Orkney Islands | | |
| 10, Perth and Kinross | | |
| 11, Shetland Islands | | |

Region 2

- 12, City of Edinburgh
- 13, East Lothian
- 14, Fife
- 15, Midlothian
- 16, Scottish Borders
- 17, West Lothian

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 Scottish Government GI Science & Analysis Team, March 2017, Job 5891 - ab



Bill Chapman, Chair of Region 1, Anne Cook, Head of Social Housing Team, and William Fleming, Branch Head of the Housing Services Policy Unit, open the Regional Network Conference.

CIH Excellence 2017 Awards



The CIH Excellence 2017 Awards Ceremony, held in Murrayfield last October, celebrated the fantastic work going on in housing across Scotland.

Trust Housing Association scooped the CIH Excellence in Scrutiny Award sponsored by the Scottish Government. Minister for Housing and Local Government, Kevin Stewart MSP, presented the award which recognised the achievements made by the association to develop scrutiny activities that deliver service improvements and good outcomes for their tenants.

Trust demonstrated sustained and continually improving tenant scrutiny where outcomes for tenants are being improved as a direct result of scrutiny

activity. They overcame geographical challenges, workload and the recruitment of panel members to develop effective scrutiny activities.

“Our scrutiny group refers to the Scottish Social Housing Charter as our bible, said Katrina Hamilton from Trust Housing Association. It uses its outcomes as the basis of all their scrutiny work, testing how well Trust meets the outcome they are focussing on in each scrutiny project. The scrutiny projects always involve looking at relevant Scottish Housing Regulator publications and using the Comparator Tool to identify higher-performing RSLs, who are then visited by panel members to inform their recommendations.”

Katrina added, **“Our panel members look at our performance on a quarterly basis, and also at the ARC prior to its submission to SHR. They use this information and benchmarking to contribute to our self-assessment, which then determines their next scrutiny topic.”**

The other finalists, pipped at the post, were East Lothian Council's Tenant Scrutiny Project and South Lanarkshire Council's Budget Scrutiny Group. All worthy nominees and praised for their scrutiny work.

You can read more about the awards on the CIH website: <http://cih.org/excellenceawards>

As scrutiny activity is relatively new to Scotland, it is important to recognise, and share knowledge of innovative systems that landlords and tenants have developed to excel in their scrutiny activities.

Landlord and tenants must work collaboratively to develop effective scrutiny arrangements across the organisation, and can demonstrate positive outcomes for their tenants in line with the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

If you require a copy of the 'Stepping Up to Scrutiny Trainer Toolkit' and/or the 'Practice Guide for Tenants and Landlords' contact tpadmins@gov.scot. The toolkits are designed to help social landlord organisations develop and improve their scrutiny activities and practices in addition to understanding the scrutiny activities linked to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and related regulatory framework.



A new tenancy for the PRS

December 2017 and January 2018 have seen significant changes in the private rented sector in Scotland which provides homes for 770,000 people.

The tenancy system establishes the legal agreement between tenant and landlord, and is an important part of making sure the private rented sector functions well.

On 1 December 2017 a new type of tenancy - the private residential tenancy - came into force. It replaces assured and short assured tenancy agreements for all new tenancies and will provide security, stability and predictability for tenants and appropriate safeguards for landlords, lenders and investors.

What the changes mean for private lets

The new private residential tenancy will:

- be an open-ended tenancy, which means a landlord will no longer be able to ask a tenant to leave simply because the fixed term has ended;
- provide more predictable rents and protection for tenants against excessive rent increases;
- include the ability to introduce local rent caps for rent pressure areas; and

- provide comprehensive and robust grounds for repossession that will allow landlords to regain possession in 18 specified circumstances.

Any existing short assured and assured tenancies will continue, but new tenancies granted in the private rented sector from 1 December 2017 will be private residential tenancies.

The Scottish Government has developed guides for landlords and tenants about the private residential tenancy. These are available online at:

- <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/private-residential-tenancies-tenants-guide/>
- and
- <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/private-residential-tenancies-landlords-guide/>

A digital model private residential tenancy agreement is available on the Scottish Government website, which landlords can use free of charge to create a tenancy agreement that complies with the new legislation.

Shelter and the Scottish Association of Landlords are working in partnership with the Scottish Government to raise awareness of the new tenancy using digital, social and print media across Scotland. For more information see the Shelter campaign New House Rules at <https://scotland.shelter.org.uk/newhouserules> and the Scottish Association of Landlords' videos about what the changes mean for landlords <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCCPXaD88Ro> and how to use the digital model tenancy agreement <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0q7smCMY3I>

Councils can apply to Scottish Ministers for a cap on rent increases for up to five years to deal with hotspot areas, those where rent increases are too high and causing undue hardship to tenants.



Kevin Stewart MSP, Minister for Local Government and Housing, said:

“The private rental sector has grown substantially in recent years and now provides a place to call home for 760,000 people.

“This is the biggest change to the sector for a generation and will bring about significant improvements in private renting, benefiting both tenants and landlords.

“We want to ensure everyone has a safe and warm place to call home. The new tenancy sits alongside our wider ambitions for housing in Scotland- not least our ambitious commitment to deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes during this Parliament, including that for rent.”

Regulating letting agents

Letting agents have an important role in helping the private rented sector to be professional and well managed, providing good-quality homes that people need.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 introduces a framework for the registration of letting agents to help improve service and professionalism within the industry.

This framework includes:

- Mandatory registration of letting agents – applicants will be required to be assessed as ‘fit and proper’ to undertake letting agency work and meet minimum training standards to be admitted to the letting agent register. Letting agents will have until October 2018 to register.
- A statutory letting agent code of practice which comes into force on 31 January 2018. It sets out the service standards that letting agents must meet and will give tenants and landlords the ability to challenge poor practice.

- A new means of redress to the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland (Housing and Property Chamber) - landlords, tenants and Scottish Ministers will be able to go to the tribunal where there has been a breach of the code of practice. Where an agent has failed to comply with the code, the tribunal must issue an enforcement order setting out the steps the letting agent must take to rectify the problem.
- Powers for Scottish Ministers to obtain information and of inspection, to monitor compliance and support enforcement.

These measures will give landlords and tenants confidence in the standard of service they should expect from a letting agent and give them the means to challenge poor practice where this arises.

If you require further information please contact:

For the private residential tenancy: PRSTenancies@gov.scot

For letting agents regulation: lettingagentregulation@gov.scot



Linda Leslie, Private Rented Sector Team leader, discuss the new legislation with private rented sector tenants.

More affordable homes for communities across Scotland

Making sure that everyone has a safe, warm and affordable home is central to the Scottish Government's drive for a fairer and more prosperous Scotland. Access to good quality, energy efficient housing strengthens communities and tackles inequality. We are therefore determined to increase the amount of good quality housing across the country, which is why the Minister for Local Government and Housing was delighted to announce in December that more than 70,000 affordable homes have been delivered since 2007 – including 48,813 homes for social rent.

We are fast approaching the end of the second year of our five-year commitment to deliver at least 50,000 affordable homes by in this Parliamentary term – 35,000 of which will be for social rent – backed by over £3 billion of investment.

We will continue to work closely with councils, registered social landlords and other partners to realise these ambitious targets. We have listened to what the housing sector needs to deliver and have set out how we will support it through the 'More Homes Scotland' approach. Our work

in tackling infrastructure blockages through a flexible grant and loan fund, and the provision of long-term resource planning assumptions for councils for 2018/19 to 2020/21, are examples of actions that have been taken to help address some of the challenges of delivering affordable housing on the ground.

By harnessing all of our skills and capacities, we can continue to deliver more of the right homes in the right places. The importance of this was seen at first hand by the Minister for Local Government and Housing when he opened a housing association development in Lanarkshire last summer. The Minister saw the difference that having the right home had made to a family whose son has autism and was pleased to hear that their new home and its garden had made a huge difference to their son's quality of life.

We have made a healthy start towards the delivery our affordable homes target and we are confident we will meet it. We know that there are challenges ahead, but we have shown that we can deliver on housing and we will continue to do so.

Further information on the More Homes Scotland approach is available at <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/more-homes-scotland/>.



Huntly Street, Inverness, Highland Council



Dunbeg Phase 2, Argyll and Bute, Link Group



Stevenson Court, Largs, North Ayrshire Council
- Built on the site of the Stevenson Institute – dated 1893, a social, literary and recreational centre – which was abandoned after a fire in 2009. The Bell Tower has been reinstated as a landmark feature to the front of the flats.

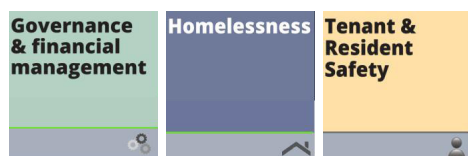
Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) launches discussion on future of social housing regulation

The SHR has published a discussion paper setting out its early ideas of the future of Scottish social housing regulation. And it wants to hear tenants' views.

When SHR introduced its current regulatory framework in 2012, it said it would review it after five years. The discussion paper is the first step in that review. SHR will consult on formal proposals later this year.

SHR has signalled its continued commitment to protecting tenants' interests. George Walker, SHR's Chair, said, "We're in the early stage of the regulatory framework review. But I can guarantee that we will build on our approach to empowering tenants, and we will continue to give tenants a voice. For social landlords, effective ways for tenants and service users to have their voices heard are critical."

SHR wants to build on the strengths of the existing framework, respond to new challenges and learn from the experiences of the last five years. The discussion paper sets out three priorities that will shape the focus of regulation.



Tenant and resident safety is where there is the potential for greatest harm to tenants and residents if something goes wrong. Landlords need to understand and meet all of

their responsibilities to keep tenants and residents safe. Landlords also need to support effective ways for tenants and others to have their voices heard and to raise any concerns with them.

There is growing pressure on the homelessness system. SHR will continue to focus on local authorities' approaches to assessing the needs of people who approach them for help. It will also look at how quickly local authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are finding people a home that meets their needs.

RSLs that have **strong governance and financial health** are best placed to deliver good services. SHR's Regulatory Standards will be central to its assurance work with RSLs.

The discussion paper suggests four themes that SHR will use to help it deliver its priorities. Some highlights:

1. Empowering tenants by gathering and publishing data in useful, accessible ways

This builds on the current approach to Charter reporting. The discussion paper asks for views on how SHR can do more to help tenants take an active role with their landlords and how it can make its information more accessible.

2. Getting assurance

The discussion paper proposes each landlord submits an "annual assurance statement" to tell SHR

that it complies with Regulatory Standards. SHR would use this statement to help it consider whether it needs further assurance from each landlord.

3. Responding where things go wrong

SHR proposes to continue with a range of ways for raising concerns, including whistle-blowing and significant performance failures. Where a landlord can't assure the SHR that it is able or willing to address its problems. The SHR will continue to be ready to use its powers to safeguard.

4. Thematic work

SHR uses thematic work to examine issues across groups of landlords. This work has an impact and is particularly well-suited to some areas of work. SHR intends to use this tool in future to focus in particular on homelessness and tenant safety.

You can read the discussion paper and find out how to give your views on SHR's website: www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/

You can contact SHR on 0141 242 5642.

The closing date for feedback is 30 March 2018.



Scottish Government response to fire safety in high-rise buildings

In the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy in June 2017, where it is believed that a recently installed external cladding system Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) contributed to the rapid spread of the fire, the Scottish Government immediately established a Ministerial Working Group on Building and Fire Safety.

Chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, the group's remit was to review building and fire safety regulatory frameworks and other relevant matters and help ensure that people were safe in Scotland's buildings. The Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, Annabelle Ewing, and the Minister for Local Government and Housing, Kevin Stewart, are members of the group, along with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and supported by Scottish Government officials.

The immediate focus of the group was on high-rise domestic buildings, and on reassuring tenants and residents in these properties. Close and intensive engagement with councils showed that there were no council or housing association high rise domestic buildings clad in ACM. Similar cladding however was identified in privately owned high-rise domestic buildings in Glasgow. Work is on-going with the owners of

these buildings to agree any actions required to ensure the fire safety of the buildings.

The group's examination of the use of ACM also included the NHS and school estates and other non-domestic buildings where people sleep, such as prisons, care homes, hostels and hotels.

The Ministerial Working Group has developed a strategic work plan, including consulting on consolidated and strengthened fire safety guidance for buildings where people sleep, and on a minimum safe standard for fire and smoke alarms in Scottish homes.

The consultation on fire and smoke alarms, which ran between September and December 2017, included a proposal that the same standard should apply for everyone in Scotland, whether they rent from a social or private landlord or own their home. A series of events took place across the country to hear first-hand from tenants and residents

on the proposals, and analysis of the consultation responses is now underway. More than 100 responses were received, and a consultation report is expected for publication in Spring 2018, with recommendations on the next steps to follow thereafter.

Working with the Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO) Regional Network committees, a Fire and Building Safety Tenant and Residents Panel has also been established to inform the work of the Ministerial Working Group. The panel met for the first time in November, and will help ensure that tenants and residents are fully involved in the work of the group and that their views and ideas are taken into account on fire and building safety.

Over the past 20 years, significant progress has been made in fire safety in Scotland. The number of fires has nearly halved and the number of fire fatalities has fallen by over 60%. Nevertheless, the awful tragedy at Grenfell Tower provided a stark and terrible reminder that no one can

ever afford to become complacent. It is vital that lessons are learned from Grenfell.

Dame Judith Hackitt's interim report 'Building a Safer Future – Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety' was published in December and sets out a comprehensive analysis of the current system of building regulations and fire safety in England and Wales and recommendations for how it can be improved.

In Scotland, work is already underway to review Building Standards on Fire Safety and also Compliance and Enforcement. The Ministerial Working Group will study the recommendations within the interim report to ensure the scope of the work is, where appropriate, consistent with the issues being considered by Dame Judith.

The Ministerial Working Group will continue its programme of work, engaging with stakeholders, experts and the UK Government and taking the appropriate actions to help ensure people are safe in Scotland's buildings.

For more information visit:

Link to MWG: <https://beta.gov.scot/groups/building-and-fire-safety-working-group/>

Link to SFRS: <http://www.firescotland.gov.uk/>

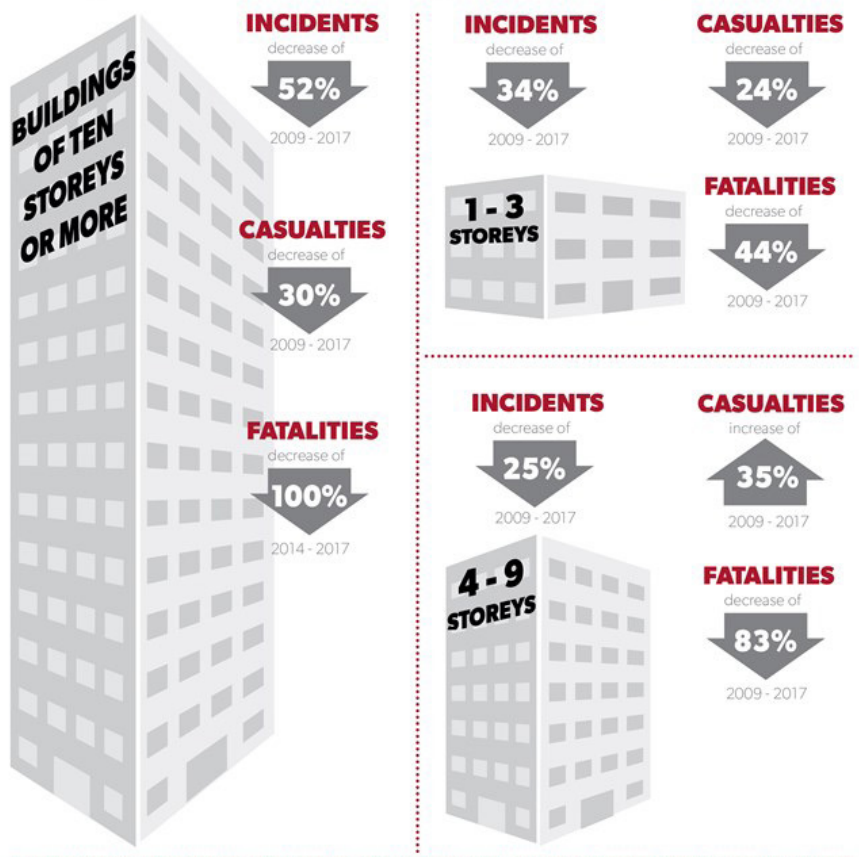
Link to Building a Safer Future – Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/668831/Independent_Review_of_Building_Regulations_and_Fire_Safety_web_accessible.pdf

SFRS Info graphic: <http://www.firescotland.gov.uk/news-campaigns/news/2017/07/high-rise-fire-hit-eight-year-low.aspx>

**FIRE SAFETY STATISTICS
PURPOSE BUILT FLATS**



* Casualty numbers include those treated as a precautionary measure





Minister for Social Security, Jeane Freeman MSP, explains the new Scottish Universal Credit Choices and what they mean for tenants.

In October of last year, the Scottish Government, using our new devolved powers, started to offer people living in Scotland and in receipt of the UK Government Universal Credit (UC) the choice to:

- Be paid either monthly or twice monthly; and
- have the housing costs in their award of Universal Credit paid direct to their landlord.

These choices are being delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on behalf of the Scottish Government.

Our main focus has been on the positive effect these new choices can have for tenants in helping them manage their money in the way that best suits them.

For the Scottish Government, interest not only lies with the impact on tenants and landlords but with a housing system that works for everyone. The Scottish UC choices we can deliver within the limited powers we have will help in working towards that.

Since October, people making a new claim or transferring to the full service of UC have been offered the new Scottish UC choices through their UC online account following the first payment.

By the second assessment period, people will know what their UC award is and be in a better position to make an

informed choice. This also allows those with complex needs or rent arrears to be assessed by DWP and get support through an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA). The APA process and operation has not changed as a result of the Scottish UC choices.

I am pleased to say that just under half of the 5,800 new applicants in full service areas, who were offered the Scottish UC choices between 4 October and 31 December 2017, chose to take up either one of the two available options, or both.

I think this provides us with good initial evidence that people do want more flexibility and adaptability in how they receive the support they are entitled to, adding weight to the argument that further welfare changes are needed. We are planning to utilise our Experience Panels, made up of over 2,400 volunteers from across Scotland who have personal experience of the current UK benefit system, to get the views of individuals who have been offered the Scottish UC choices. This crucial involvement from people with direct experience of benefits will help make sure that we get it right.

Unfortunately, we have no powers to deal with either the worst aspects of UC including delayed payments, cuts to the work allowances, and the appalling “rape clause” applied to the child element within Universal Credit or make improvements to the delivery system. But we are using the limited powers available to us to do

what we can to tailor some aspects of UC to better suit the needs of people in Scotland. Regulations have been laid in the Scottish Parliament on 15 December 2017 that will allow us to extend the UC choices to existing claimants from 31 January 2018.

Between 650,000 and 700,000 households will be able to benefit from the UC choices by the end of the planned UC rollout by the UK Government in 2022.

An information leaflet for people applying for, or in receipt of UC, is on our Scottish Government website and has been provided to libraries, advice agencies and local authorities to help people make an informed choice.

We have encouraged landlords to publicise the new Scottish UC choices widely in order to give tenants more choice and control around managing their household budgets, including preventing the build-up of rent arrears – as we have seen in areas where UC is already active – and helping tenants to stay in their homes.

Although clearly these Scottish choices cannot deal with the fundamental flaws in the system, I hope they make lives a bit easier for people living in Scotland.

For more information visit:
<https://beta.gov.scot/publications/universal-credit-applicant-information/Universal%20Credit%20Online%20Question%20and%20Answer.pdf?inline=true>

Update on the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 Guidance

It seems no time since the last article on the Housing (Scotland) Act 2014 in our last newsletter. We are pleased to report that we're now in the final stages of bringing the new legislation on social housing into force.

For this to happen, a Commencement Order needs to be signed by a Minister and laid in the Scottish Parliament. The Commencement Order will include the date that the provisions will come into force, which we expect will be from early 2019

In the meantime, the Scottish Government and landlords are working hard to make sure that everything is ready for the new provisions to come into force. The final two draft guidance documents, on short Scottish Secure Tenancies and suspensions, were made available on the Scottish Government website in December 2017, completing the suite of guidance.

Training packs covering all the new provisions have also now been put on the website. The training packs, which are available to everyone, are in the form of PowerPoint presentations, with notes. These are a resource for landlords and others to use and adapt according to their needs.

In addition, the Scottish Government provided funding to Tenant Information Service (TIS) and Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) to hold more

sessions on the changes being introduced by the 2014 Act. The sessions, which helped tenants understand how the Act's changes will affect them, took place earlier this year in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Perth.

Among the changes which will most affect tenants are new rules on succession, assignation, sub-letting and joint tenancies. When the rules come in, tenants will need to ensure their landlord knows who is living in their household before they have certain rights, for example the right to succeed. There is now a minimum residency requirement and a notification requirement for succession to a tenancy, assigning a tenancy, joint tenancies and sub-tenancies.

In due course, landlords will be providing their tenants with information about changes to their tenancies and about any new procedures they are introducing,

for example on how tenants should notify them about who is living in their household. The aim of all the changes is to give social landlords increased flexibility in the allocation and management of social housing, so they can make the best use of the social housing available and ensure that social housing goes to those who need it most.

You can access the statutory guidance via: <https://beta.gov.scot/policies/social-housing/>

You can access the practice guidance via: <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/social-housing-allocations-a-practice-guide/>

For more information please contact: socialhousing@gov.scot.



Digital Participation Charter



Graeme Hamilton is a housing professional with over 30 years' experience and now works for Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) as their Digital Participation Charter Manager.

The Scottish digital participation charter is a signed collaborative commitment by organisations from all sectors in Scotland to work together to develop the basic digital skills of their staff and their customers. Each year organisations reflect on their achievements and renew their commitments driving forward support and encouragement to those citizens who feel digitally excluded or isolated.

Going digital

Do you use the internet? Do you pay your rent online or check the progress of repairs in an evening from the comfort of your chair? Do you buy and sell on sites like eBay or replay your favourite football team's match-winning goals on YouTube? If you do then you are like many across the world.

But did you know that in 2018 about four in ten Scottish families who live in council or housing association

properties don't have access to the internet and don't see the value of it? Many can't afford the connection charges or the monthly fees; and many don't have the digital skills to do so as no one has taught them.

What can we do?

SCVO supports organisations from all sectors to sign up to the Scottish Digital Participation Charter and to commit to help develop the digital skills of the nation. 37 housing associations in Scotland have already signed up and we also have 18 councils. We also have two resident and tenant federations as well as the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS).

Commitments range from providing internet access in offices, supporting local digital learning centres to encouraging staff to volunteer to help tenants to explore this exciting, but sometimes intimidating, online world.

Changing world

More and more housing associations and councils are increasing their services online and reducing what's offered over the phone or in offices. In some cases they are closing offices and centralising services and we are seeing many banks and businesses shutting their doors across the country as they respond to the change in the way many of us conduct our business. We only need to look back to Christmas to

see how many people bought gifts online without visiting a physical shop. That approach is alien to the 4 in 10 social housing tenants who don't have internet access, and who face difficulties when provisions are removed and they don't have skills or access to get online.

Here's our collective challenge: to pledge to do something about that in 2018; to work with others in the community to highlight the gaps, to offer training, to volunteer and help our neighbours, to do something positive in our community centres, village halls and facilities so that by 2020 everyone has safe and secure access to the internet, and has accessed training or coaching to be confident in using it.

It starts with three clicks. Have a look at the charter website today www.digitalparticipation.scot, sign up and make a commitment for your community. There's plenty of help and support and I'd be happy to come and meet you if you would like. Oh and there's also an 'offers and wants' button too, so do shout and maybe someone will be able to offer to help you too.

In memory of...

Last year the tenants' movement in Scotland lost three tenant representatives.



Sandra Gault

Sandra Gault, treasurer of the former West Strathclyde Regional Network, and more recently South West Scotland, passed away in September 2017. Sandra was part of Bardrainey Tenants and Residents Association and FITRA (Federation of Inverclyde Tenants and Residents Association) for many years.

Sandra was treasurer of the West Strathclyde Regional Network and joined the Regional Network Committee at the earliest stages of its development. Sandra believed that being part of the networks helped tenants influence national policy and rarely missed a meeting – she especially loved her role as treasurer.

She was dedicated, committed and kind and she will be sorely missed.



Ronald Ritchie

Ronald Ritchie, Chair of the former South West Scotland regional networks and more recently Chair of South West Scotland, died suddenly at the start of December. Ronald, of Lockerbie, was also secretary of Lochmaben TARA and a member of the Federation of Tenants and Residents Association locally.

Due to Ronald's role with the regional networks, he met regularly with representatives of the Scottish Government and always fed local information to them in this capacity.

Ronald was committed to ensuring tenants and residents views were taken into account in delivering high quality service and his legacy will be long remembered.



Danny Mullen

Danny Mullen, former Secretary of Central Regional Network, passed away in early February. Hugh McClung, MBE, and former Chair of Central Regional Network, paid tribute to Danny: 'Danny Mullen was an inspiration to us all. His incisive mind was clear to how tenants across the land should be regarded and in particular their representation. A founder member of Central Regional Network he was the inspiration of sound guidance and advice both in terms of tenants roles/responsibilities and actions for the furtherance of Housing Policy & Strategy. His role with the Tenants Information Service (TIS) led to him being elected as their convenor. Often he guided me into some of the more strategic aspects on Housing Policy. Where he thought some things were wrong, he took no prisoners. He was gentle with a wry sense of humour and a gentleman to boot. I will miss him terribly and are extremely saddened by the news of his passing. The tenant's movement has lost a great ambassador - RIP Danny. Your job is done'

Dates for your diary



TIS Annual Conference 2018 –

More than Housing

Date: 8th - 10th June 2018

Venue: Westerwood Hotel and Resort, Glasgow

Contact: www.tis.org.uk

or contact us on 0141 248 1242

for more information



**TPAS Scotland Annual Conference &
AGM 2018**

Date: 16 - 18 November 2018

Venue: MacDonald Aviemore Resort

Contact:

Elaine.Scouler@tpasscotland.org.uk or

0141 552 3633