



**Scottish Housing
Regulator**

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National Report on the Scottish Social Housing Charter

Headline Findings 2020-21

31 August 2021

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About our National Reports

Each year we provide an analysis of the information reported to us by social landlords on their performance in achieving the standards and outcomes in the [Scottish Social Housing Charter](#). This report outlines our analysis of landlords' Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) for 2020/21.

Normally in these reports we comment on landlords' progress towards achieving the Charter standards and outcomes and the extent to which they have improved the services they provide to tenants and other service users. However, 2020/21 was a year like no other.

2020/21 is defined by the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognise the unique and challenging context this created for social landlords, and so this year's National Report has a different focus and look to those for previous years. The report is intended to help tenants, social landlords, the Scottish Government and others to understand the impact of the public health response to COVID-19 on landlords' performance and the scale of recovery that is required.

We publish [performance data tables and performance data by Charter standard and outcome](#). We also publish a [landlord report](#) for each social landlord.

From April 2020 to March 2021 all social landlords provided us with a monthly return that gave us key information on the impact of the pandemic. We published this information in a [monthly dashboard and in open data format](#). We collected this information to support the Scottish Government and the [Social Housing Resilience Group](#) in their coordination of the national response to the pandemic.

In July we published the [Report on the National Panel of Tenants and Service Users 2020 to 2021](#) which includes insights on how panel members felt the pandemic affected their landlord's services and how it had affected their family and financial circumstances.

The impact of the pandemic

The March 2020 national lockdown in response to the escalating COVID-19 pandemic had an immediate impact on social landlords' ability to deliver services as normal. Landlords had to operate within changing levels of restrictions throughout 2020/21. This had an impact on the performance of landlords, and so on the data they reported to us.

Locally social landlords in Scotland were amongst the first to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 and support their tenants through the public health crisis. That support often included responses that went well beyond the usual core landlord activities, but they were needed to protect the wellbeing of individuals, households and communities. Landlords put in place new services or expanded existing services to respond to the impact of the pandemic on their communities, including tackling loneliness and digital exclusion and to ensure people had access to basic supplies.

At the same time social landlords had to manage the effects of the pandemic on their ability to deliver core services such as repairing homes, letting empty homes, assisting people experiencing homelessness, and a range of other services. Landlords have had to curtail their planned investment programmes, including those to build new homes and to achieve the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and the Energy Efficiency Standard in Social Housing.

So landlords have faced severe difficulties as a result of COVID-19, and have a range of challenges to contend with as they recover out of the pandemic. While it is not possible to be definite that any and every dip in performance is, in whole or in part, a direct consequence of the pandemic, it is unquestionably the most significant contextual factor in assessing performance in the last year.

Landlords are now building back the range of services they provide to tenants and other service users. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact on social landlords and on the services they provide to their tenants and service users. We anticipate that impact will continue to be felt by social landlords during 2021/22 and is likely to be reflected in the performance that landlords will report in the next Annual Return on the Charter.

Key results

The general picture shows:

- Almost 9 out of 10 tenants satisfied with the homes and services their landlord provides.

Areas that matter most to tenants:

- Emergency repairs response time - increased - 4.2 hours
- Tenants satisfied with the quality of their homes - unchanged - 87%
- Tenants satisfied that their rent is good value for money - decreased - 83%
- Average weekly rent - increased - £83.70
- Tenants satisfied with their landlord's contribution to neighbourhood management - decreased - 86%
- Anti-social behaviour cases which were resolved - unchanged - 94%
- First stage complaints responded to in full – down to 96.9%
- Average planned rent increases 2020/21 down to 1.2%

Areas that matter most to tenants and service users

Homes

The early national response to the COVID-19 pandemic had an immediate impact on social landlords' ability to progress and start projects to build new homes.

- **Homes available to rent 607,929** - Local Authorities (LAs) up by 1,339 – Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) up by 525

In 2020/21 Scottish social landlords provided 607,929 homes to rent, up 0.3% (1,864) from the year before. The number of local authority homes increased by 1,339 while the number of RSL homes increased by 525.

Rent

- **Average satisfaction with rent being good value for money – decreased to 83%- LAs 82%, RSLs 83%**

Average tenant satisfaction with rent being good value for money decreased slightly from 84% to 83%, with small decreases for both RSLs and LAs.

The average weekly rent for Scottish social landlords was £83.70 in 2020/21, 2.7% up from £81.47 in the previous year. Average local authority rents were £78.09, 13% lower than average RSL rents of £89.74.

Average planned rent increase:

Year	Percentage
2015	2.7%
2016	1.9%
2017	2.3%
2018	3.2%
2019	3.0%
2020	2.5%
2021	1.2%

The average planned rent increase for 2021 is 1.2%, down by more than half the level in the previous year. Planned rent increases ranged from 0% to just over 5%.

The pandemic, and the resulting economic impact on tenants, have clearly had an influence on landlords' decisions on rent increases. This is an understandable response to the difficulties that a significant number of tenants have faced over the period of the pandemic. A move away from the projected rent increases in longer term business plans may present some risks to some landlords. This heightens the importance of landlords undertaking a comprehensive review of their business plans to ensure they understand and factor in the impacts of the pandemic on their businesses.

Tenant satisfaction

Landlords should carry out a tenant satisfaction survey at least every three years. However, early in 2020/21 we recognised that the impact of the pandemic might affect landlords' ability to undertake a survey, and we advised landlords to tell us about any delay in their survey in the ARC.

Just under a third of landlords carried out a survey during 2020/21. This means that almost all social landlords have completed a survey within the last three years.

Overall tenant satisfaction stayed at 89% - LAs 84%, RSLs 90%

These results are broadly the same as in 2019/20, although the average for LAs increased from 82%.

Year	Percentage
2015/16	89%
2016/17	90%
2017/18	91%
2018/19	90%
2019/20	89%
2020/21	89%

Quality of homes

- **Existing tenants' satisfaction with the quality of their homes remained at 87% - LAs 83.4%, RSLs 88%**
- **Percentage of homes that meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard decreased to 91% from 94% - LAs 90%, RSLs 92%**
- **Percentage of homes compliant with EESSH increased to 89% from 87% in the previous year - LAs 86.4%, RSLs 92%**

Existing tenants' satisfaction with the quality of their homes remains high. Average satisfaction with the quality of homes for RSL tenants remains high at 88% and increased for local authority tenants from 81% to 83% for 2020/21.

Compliance with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) fell to 91%, with around 15,500 fewer homes meeting SHQS in 2020/21 than in 2019/20. The fall in the level of compliance with SHQS is likely to be the result of the slowing, or for some, halting of landlords' investment programmes that was a direct consequence of the public health restrictions brought in to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. You can get more information about SHQS on the Scottish Government's website [here](#).

Landlords had until December 2020 to meet the first milestone for the Energy Efficiency Standard in Social Housing (EESSH). Landlords have reported to us that the total number of homes meeting EESSH increased by nearly 14,500 and that 89% of homes in the scope of EESSH meet the standard, up from 87% in the previous year. The total amount of money invested by landlords in meeting EESSH dropped by more than 52% to around £61 million. It is likely that the impact of the pandemic has constrained landlords' capacity to fully implement investment programmes. You can get more information about EESSH on the Scottish Government's website [here](#).

Repairs and maintenance

The early national response to the COVID-19 pandemic had an immediate impact on social landlords' ability to undertake both responsive repairs and planned maintenance to tenants' homes. As a direct consequence of the pandemic, landlords undertook around 20% fewer repairs during 2020/21 (1,559,531 in total) than in the previous year (1,954,562 in total). So, the performance reported below is based on a relatively smaller number of completed repairs and does not take account of repairs reported by tenants during 2022/21 that remain uncompleted.

- **Non-emergency repairs completed right first time remained at 92% - LAs 93%, RSLs 91%**
- **Percentage of tenants satisfied with their repairs service decreased to 90% - LAs 89%, RSLs 90%**

For repairs that were completed, most landlords responded quickly to emergency repairs and non-emergency repairs, although response times for emergency repairs increased for both RSLs and LAs.

Tenant satisfaction with repairs and maintenance reduced slightly this year to 90%. Satisfaction fell amongst RSL tenants to 90% and for LA tenants to 89%.

Performance on repairs completed right first time remains at 92%.

Emergency repairs response time

Year	Hours
2015/16	5.1
2016/17	4.7
2017/18	4.0
2018/19	3.6
2019/20	3.6
2020/21	4.2

Tenant engagement

The pandemic-related restrictions on open offices, public gatherings and face-to-face meetings have curtailed for landlords the range of traditional ways in which they engage with their tenants. Landlords have developed or expanded alternative ways to engage with their tenants, including using digital tools and platforms.

- **Tenants satisfied with opportunities to participate remains at 87% - LAs 80%, RSLs 88%**
- **Tenants satisfied with being kept informed remains at 92% - LAs 86%, RSL 93%**

Average tenant satisfaction with opportunities to participate has remained steady at 87% for 2020/21. Satisfaction amongst RSL tenants decreased slightly to 88%, while LA tenant satisfaction rose slightly to 80%.

Average levels of tenant satisfaction with being kept informed by their landlord remain at 92%, having improved steadily since 2014/15. Satisfaction stayed at 93% amongst RSL tenants and at 86% amongst local authority tenants.

Other services

Homelessness

- **The number of people not offered temporary accommodation reduced by 87%**
- **Average length of stay in temporary accommodation increased to 199 days**
- **The number of lets to people assessed as homeless fell, but increased significantly as a proportion of all lets**

The pandemic had an immediate and obvious impact on people experiencing homelessness and on homelessness services provided by social landlords. The Scottish Government's publication on homelessness [statistics](#) for 2020/21 highlights the factors that are likely to be driving the changing trends in the data, including:

- people being reluctant to approach homelessness services while COVID-19 guidelines advised remaining at home;
- a reduction in the number of people being evicted;
- restrictions on the ability of landlords to move people in to permanent homes; and
- initiatives to ensure no one was sleeping rough during the pandemic.

The Scottish Government's statistics show:

- the number of homeless applications in 2020/21 decreased by 9% (3,251) from the previous year to 33,792;
- 27,571 households were assessed as homeless, a decrease of 13% (4,010) from 2019/20;
- there was an increase in the number of open homeless applications – applications that are not yet completed – at 31 March 2021 of 10% (2,294) to 25,226;
- there were 605 cases of households not being offered temporary accommodation when they should have been, down 87% from 4,590 in the previous year;
- there were 490 breaches of the unsuitable accommodation order (UAO), down from 500 in the previous year. It is worth noting that temporary changes to the UAO in response to the COVID-19 pandemic will have affected the number of reported breaches. You can find more about the UAO [here](#);
- there were 13,097 households in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2021, an increase of 12% (1,432) on the previous year. Households spent an average of 199 days in temporary accommodation, an increase of 15 days from 2019/20;
- 74% of households assessed as unintentionally homeless secured a tenancy with a social landlord, down from 76% in 2019/20 – 42% by LAs (down from 46%) and 32% from RSLs (up from 30%).

ARC data shows that:

- tenancy sustainment for households who were previously homeless has increased to 90% from 88% in 2019/20;
- overall, social landlords let 18,568 homes to people who LAs had assessed as homeless, down by 5.5% (1,072) on the previous year, although that is in the context of a reduction in all lets of 23%;
- social landlords let 44% of all lets (and 52% of general needs lets) to people assessed as homeless, up from 36% (and 41%) in 2019/20;
- LAs let 9,901 homes to people who they assessed as homeless, down by 12.5% (1,412) on the previous year;
- LAs increased the proportion of lets to people assessed as homeless to 50% of all lets (and 57% of general needs lets), up from 44% (and 48%) in 2019/20;
- RSLs let 8,667 homes to people assessed as homeless and referred by LAs, up by 4% (340) on the previous year; and

- RSLs increased the proportion of lets to people assessed as homeless to 38% of all lets (and 47% of general needs lets), up from 28% (and 35%) in 2019/20.

Gypsy/Travellers

- **Average satisfaction with landlords' management of sites provided for Gypsy/Travellers increased to 76%**

Satisfaction amongst Gypsy/Travellers improved from 73% in 2019/20 to 76% in 2020/21, although it continues to be well behind those for other services provided by social landlords.

The average weekly pitch rent increased by 2.4% to £73.86 in 2020/21, with a range of £50.00 to £93.82.

We continue to engage with landlords that provide Gypsy/Traveller sites about their compliance with the minimum site standards set out by Scottish Government which you can find more about [here](#) and about their obligations in relation to fire safety. Of the 28 sites, 17 currently comply with Scottish Government's minimum standards and with fire safety requirements; eight comply with the minimum standards but have yet to meet fire safety requirements; two sites comply with fire safety requirements but have yet to meet minimum standards and one site, provided by Aberdeen City Council, does not comply with either the minimum standards or fire safety requirements.

Pitch rents

Year	Weekly rent
2015	£66.02
2016	£67.08
2017	£68.15
2018	£69.62
2019	£72.14
2020	£73.86

Factored owners

- **Average satisfaction with factoring fell to 65%, down to 55% for LAs and 66% for RSLs**

Satisfaction amongst factored owners fell in the last year and continues to be well behind those for other services provided by social landlords.

The average factoring fee has increased by around 1.5% to £103.12 in 2020/21. On average factoring fees charged by RSLs at £118.76 are significantly higher than those charged by local authorities at £56.88.

Average satisfaction with factoring service

Year	Percentage of owners satisfied with factoring service
2015	65%
2016	68%
2017	66%
2018	67%
2019	67%
2020	65%

Average factoring fees

Year	Average factoring fee
2015	£80.32
2016	£82.47
2017	£86.49
2018	£93.73
2019	£101.64
2020	£103.12

Scale of recovery

The following provides information on the scale of impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on some important aspects of landlords' performance beyond those reported above and helps to illustrate the scale of recovery work this is required.

Empty homes

Early in the first national lockdown there was a significant reduction in the number of homes that became empty, and the number that became empty over the full year was down on the previous year by nearly 17% to just under 42,000.

	2019/20	2020/21
Number of empty homes	50,200	41,805
% of homes that became empty	8.4%	6.9%
Average days empty	31.5	56
Rent lost through empty homes	£23,369,046	£35,794,607

While fewer homes became empty during 2020/21 than in the previous year, those that did stayed empty for longer: the average days empty increased by nearly 78% to 56 days – 53 days for RSLs and 59 days for LAs. This will almost certainly have been as a direct consequence of the restrictions landlords had to operate within when repairing and letting empty homes. As a result, landlords lost a total of nearly £36 million in rent, an increase of more than 53% on the previous year.

Lettings

At the start of the first national lockdown landlords all but suspended the letting of homes, other than as temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, and for much of 2020/21 they operated under restrictions that affected the letting of homes.

In 2020/21 landlords let a total of 42,387 homes, down 23% (12,933) on the previous year; LAs let 19,660 homes and RSLs let 22,727 homes.

Arrears

Early in the pandemic, many in social housing were concerned about a significant adverse impact on household incomes that would result in substantial numbers of tenants struggling to pay their rent. However, the combination of a number of government initiatives to support people financially, and a clear focus by landlords on working with tenants in financial difficulty, has gone some way to minimise the impact of the pandemic on the level of rent arrears. That said, the imminent closure of the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme may lead to a further increase in the financial pressures on many households that could lead to increasing arrears.

At 31 March 2021 social landlords had total arrears of rent of £160,523,130, an increase of 9.3% (£13.5 million) on the previous year. However, RSLs had a reduction in the level of arrears as a percentage of rent due to 4.3% from 4.4% in 2019/20, while LAs saw this rise to 8.2% from 7.3%.

	2019/20	2020/21
Gross rent arrears - combined	£146,831,890	£160,523,130
As % of rent due	5.8%	6.1%

The number of households for which landlords are paid housing costs directly (through Universal Credit or Housing Benefit) increased by just over 1% to 380,196 in 2020/21, and the value of those payments increased by nearly 7% to £1,303 million.

Gas safety

During 2020/21 landlords did not meet the requirement to carry out an annual gas safety check on gas appliances in their houses on 17,420 occasions, 7,049 for RSLs and 10,371 for LAs. This compared to 496 occasions in the previous year.

It is important to stress that this does not mean that there are over 17,000 homes that have not had relevant gas safety checks. We completed a review of the position in July 2021 and established that of the missed annual safety checks a total of 57 are outstanding across ten landlords. So, most landlords have now completed almost all of the necessary checks.

Landlords told us that the vast majority of the missed or late checks were a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, including tenants refusing to give access to their homes because they were shielding or self-isolating.

Adaptations

The average time to complete adaptations increased by nearly 40% to 58 days; 71 days for RSLs and 46 days for LAs. At 31 March 2021 there were 4,896 households waiting for adaptations; 1,770 for RSLs and 3,126 for LAs.

Want to know more?

You can see the landlord reports, comparison tool and data tables on our [website, here](#). For more analysis, a full dataset of all landlords' performance information is also available.

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