

**To: Housing and Community Safety Policy Board**

**On: 23 August 2016**

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**Report by: Director of Development and Housing Services**

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**Heading: Review of the Scottish Social Housing Charter- A Consultation**

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 The Scottish Social Housing Charter was introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 and requires Ministers to set standards and outcomes that social landlords should be achieving for tenants and customers through their housing activities. Ministers are also required to review these standards and outcomes regularly.
  - 1.2 The Scottish Government issued a consultation paper on the Charter in June 2016 and invited responses by 24 August 2016. The current Charter remains in force until 31 March 2017 and it is anticipated that an updated Charter will be introduced from April 2017.
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## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that;
    - (i) The Board authorises the Director of Development and Housing Services to submit the response attached at Appendix 1 to the Scottish Government in relation to the Consultation on the Review of the Scottish Social Housing Charter.
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### **3. Background**

- 3.1. The Scottish Social Housing Charter was introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, which requires Ministers to set standards and outcomes that social landlords should be achieving for tenants and customers through their housing activities.
- 3.2. The Charter consists of 16 outcomes and standards that are based around the following:
- The customer/landlord relationship
  - Housing quality and maintenance
  - Neighbourhood and community
  - Access to housing and support
  - Getting good value from rents and service charges
  - Other customers
- 3.3. The Scottish Government has asked for views on the current Scottish Social Housing Charter. On completion of the consultation an updated version of the Charter will be developed and presented to the Scottish Parliament for approval from April 2017.
- 3.4. The proposed response from the Council, (Appendix 1) offers only minor amendments and suggests that the Charter remains broadly the same as its current form.
- 3.5. All Councils and Registered Social Landlords have been required since 2013 to report annually to the Scottish Housing Regulator on performance indicators which are linked to Charter outcomes and standards. Renfrewshire Council's Annual Return on the Charter for 2015/16 is the subject of a separate report to this Policy Board.
- 3.6. Members may wish to note that tenants and tenants groups have been invited by the Scottish Government to respond to this consultation. It is proposed that the draft response attached to this report (Appendix 1) is submitted as the response from Renfrewshire Council.
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## **Implications of the Report**

1. **Financial** - None
  2. **HR & Organisational Development** - None
  3. **Community Planning** – None.
  4. **Legal** - None.
  5. **Property/Assets** – None.
  6. **Information Technology** – None
  7. **Equality & Human Rights** - The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because it is for noting only. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
  8. **Health & Safety** – None
  9. **Procurement** – None
  10. **Risk** – None
  11. **Privacy Impact** - None
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## **List of Background Papers**

- (a) Reports to the Housing and Community Safety Policy Board on:
- 26 April 2011, 'Scottish Social Housing Charter'
  - 4 October 2011, 'Draft Scottish Social Housing Charter'
  - 28 February 2012, 'Scottish Social Housing Charter'
  - 28 August 2012, 'Scottish Social Housing Charter'
  - 12 March 2013, 'Scottish Social Housing Charter'

The foregoing background papers will be retained within Development and Housing Services for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting. The contact officer within the service is Paul McLean, Performance Review Officer, 0141 618 6264, paul.mclean@renfrewshire.gov.uk

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# **Review of the Scottish Social Housing Charter - A Consultation**

**June 2016**

## **REVIEW OF THE SCOTTISH SOCIAL HOUSING CHARTER 2016**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

This consultation seeks your views on the Scottish Social Housing Charter which remains in force until 31 March 2017. Following this consultation we will develop an updated version of the Charter and ask the Scottish Parliament to consider the changes and approve a new Charter from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017.

The Charter applies to Scottish social landlords. It does not cover private-sector landlords. The standards and outcomes do not add any new duties to social landlords; rather they describe what a good social landlord should be achieving for its tenants and other customers.

### **RESPONDING TO THIS CONSULTATION PAPER**

We are inviting written responses to this consultation paper by 24<sup>th</sup> August 2016. We would be grateful if you would use the consultation questionnaire provided and it would be helpful if you could respond to the consultation online by going to:

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

### **NEXT STEPS IN THE PROCESS**

Where respondents have given permission for their response to be made public and after we have checked that they contain no potentially defamatory material, responses will be made available to the public in the Scottish Government Library and on the Scottish Government consultation web pages within 25 days of the Consultation closing. Copies of responses can be viewed by visiting the library or can also be provided by post. Charges for photocopies are made on a cost-recovery basis. To request copies by post and enquire about charges or make an appointment to view responses at the library, contact the Library on 0131 244 4565.

### **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?**

Following the closing date, all responses will be analysed and considered along with any other available evidence to help us produce a revised Charter. We aim to issue a report on this consultation process by Autumn 2016.

## THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

This consultation is set out in three parts;

**Section 1** asks you about the impact of the current Charter.

**Section 2** asks you about the current standards and outcomes. The 16 standards, outcomes and the supporting narrative that describe them are included in the consultation document to help you complete the questionnaire.

**Section 3** asks whether you think anything should be added to the Charter and why.

### **Section 1 – Impact of the current Charter**

In this section we ask for your views on the impact of the current Charter.

**1) Do you think the quality of landlord services has improved because of the Charter? Please explain your answer and provide examples.**

This could include examples of improvements to a specific service such as higher quality, quicker repairs or increased opportunities for tenants to get involved.

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *The Council has recorded improvement in service performance over the past three years across most of the Charter indicators. The indicators aligned to the Charter has enabled the Council to benchmark performance with other landlords.*

**2) Does the way the Charter is reported on help you judge whether landlords are meeting the Charter outcomes and standards? Please explain your answer.**

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *The Council has reported the Annual Return on the Charter in accordance with Guidance over the last two years and has involved tenants in the preparation of the annual report to tenants. While the Tenant Report focuses mainly on performance against the Charter indicators, it is also used as an opportunity to report on activity and service improvements more generally and to demonstrate how the Charter outcomes and standards are being met by the Council as a landlord.*

## **Section 2 – Current outcomes and standards**

In this section of the questionnaire we ask for your views on all 16 current charter outcomes and standards and the supporting narratives that describe them. These are listed in 6 sections below;

### **THE CUSTOMER/ LANDLORD RELATIONSHIP**

#### **EQUALITIES (Charter outcome 1)**

**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.**

#### **Supporting Narrative**

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.

#### **3a) Would you:**

Keep this outcome exactly as it is ☒

Change this outcome ☐

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *The current wording is appropriate. It focuses on recognising and meeting the needs of individual tenants and customers as well as complying with legislative duties with respect to people in the protected characteristics groups.*

#### **COMMUNICATION (Charter Outcome 2)**

**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.**

#### **Supporting Narrative**

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.



4a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is ☒

Change this outcome ☐

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *The Council does not recommend any change to this outcome and agrees with its focus on tenant and customer access to information and decisions about services.*

**PARTICIPATION (Charter outcome 3)**

**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.**

**Supporting Narrative**

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.

5a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is ☒

Change this outcome ☐

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** No change to this outcome is needed. While it emphasises the importance of enabling tenants and other customers to participate and the supporting narrative makes reference to statutory duties on tenant participation, the wording is sufficiently flexible to enable landlords to shape methods of participation and engagement in response to local circumstances.

**HOUSING QUALITY AND MAINTENANCE**

**QUALITY OF HOUSING (Charter standard 4)**

**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<sup>i</sup>.**

### Supporting Narrative

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.

#### 6a) Would you:

Keep this standard exactly as it is ☐

Change this standard ☒

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *The Council notes the intention to update the standard to take reflect the introduction of the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH).*

<sup>1</sup> This will be updated in the revised Charter to reflect the introduction of the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH).

### **REPAIRS, MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS (Charter outcome 5)**

**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.**

### Supporting Narrative

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.

#### 7a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is ☒

Change this outcome ☐

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *No change to this outcome is sought.*

## NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

### **ESTATE MANAGEMENT, ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, NEIGHBOUR NUISANCE AND TENANCY DISPUTES (Charter outcome 6)**

**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.**

#### **Supporting Narrative**

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.

8a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is ☐

Change this outcome ☒

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *The supporting narrative could be amended to incorporate a positive statement about activity in relation to estate management (ie in addition to the current focus on enforcement action and responding to nuisance and anti-social behaviour).*

## ACCESS TO HOUSING AND SUPPORT

### **HOUSING OPTIONS (Charter outcomes 7,8 and 9)**

**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.**

#### **Supporting Narrative**

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.

9a) Would you:

Keep these outcomes exactly as they are ☐

Change this outcome ☒

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *The format of this section differs from other parts of the Charter in that three outcomes (7,8 and 9) are grouped together with a shared supporting narrative. The covering narrative is clear, however the fact that the three outcomes are grouped together detracts for the consistent approach elsewhere in the Charter and creates a degree of confusion.*

#### **ACCESS TO HOUSING (Charter outcome 10)**

**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.**

#### **Supporting Narrative**

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.

10a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is ☐

Change this outcome ☒

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *This outcome overlaps with 7,8 and 9 and should be reviewed alongside these outcomes. Please see previous comments above.*

#### **TENANCY SUSTAINMENT (Charter outcome 11)**

**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.**

### Supporting Narrative

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.

#### 11a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is ☒

Change this outcome ☐

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** No change to this outcome is sought.

### HOMELESS PEOPLE (Charter outcome 12)

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.

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

#### 12a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is ☒

Change this outcome ☐

Don't know ☐

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

**Renfrewshire Council's response** No change to this outcome is sought.

## GETTING GOOD VALUE FROM RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGES

### VALUE FOR MONEY (Charter standard 13)

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.

### Supporting Narrative

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.

#### 13a) Would you:

Keep this standard exactly as it is ☒

Change this standard ☐

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *No change to this outcome is sought.*

### **RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGES** (Charter outcomes 14 and 15)

**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.**

### Supporting Narrative

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.

#### 14a) Would you:

Keep these outcomes exactly as they are ☒

Change these outcomes ☐

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *No change to this outcome is sought.*

## OTHER CUSTOMERS

### **GYPSIES/TRAVELLERS (Charter outcome 16)**

*Local councils and social landlords with responsibility for managing sites for Gypsies/Travellers should ensure sites are well maintained and managed.*

#### **Supporting Narrative**

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

#### **15a) Would you:**

Keep this outcome exactly as it is ☒

Change this outcome ☐

Don't know ☐

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *No change to this indicator is sought..*

## **Section 3 – Adding anything to the Charter**

In this section we ask you to provide details of anything else the Charter should cover.

**16) Is there anything else you think the Charter should cover? If so please tell us what and why you think it should be included?**

**Renfrewshire Council's response** *As it stands the Charter covers the key services provided to tenants and other customers and the Council suggests that it should remain broadly the same. However, there is scope for reviewing the relationship between the Charter outcomes, Charter indicators and other methods of assessing / demonstrating progress in meeting Charter outcomes.*

## ASSESSMENTS

An Equality Impact Assessment was prepared for the development of the Scottish Social Housing Charter in 2011. A Partial Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment on the Charter was also prepared in 2011 before the Charter was introduced to the Scottish Parliament for approval. These examined both the Charters likely impact on equalities and the costs and benefits to social landlords of the changes.