

Scottish Social Housing Charter Consultation

Shelter Scotland Policy Response

August 2016

CONTENTS

Response to Scottish Social Housing Charter Consultation	2
Charter standard 4: Quality of Housing.	5
Charter Outcome 5: Repairs and maintenance.	6
Charter outcomes 7, 8, 9: Housing Options	7
Charter outcome 10: Access to Housing	8
Charter outcome 12: Homelessness	9
Charter outcome 16: Gypsy travellers	10

RESPONSE TO SCOTTISH SOCIAL HOUSING CHARTER CONSULTATION

Shelter Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment and respond to this consultation on the Scottish Social Housing Charter. Shelter Scotland feels that the introduction of the Charter has been generally positive as a way of encouraging better practice and standards in the social housing sector which aligns closely with our overall mission of ending bad housing. However, we are unsure of the tangible impact it has had for tenants and prospective tenants, including homeless households, and therefore would hope that this consultation will form a rounded self-evaluation of the Charter, allowing it to best adapt as required.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter aims to:

- Give tenants, homeless people and other customers a clear understanding of what they should expect from a social landlord
- Give landlords a clear understanding of what they should be delivering through their housing activities
- Provide the basis for the Scottish Housing Regulator to monitor, assess and report on the performance of social landlords, and if necessary to require compliance with the Charter, and through the Regulator's reports, which in turn are designed to:
 - give landlords the information they need to achieve continuous improvements in their performance and in the value for money they provide
 - give tenants and other customers information on how their landlord is performing in relation to other landlords, so that they can hold the landlord to account.”

Generally speaking, we would encourage the Scottish Government to review the accessibility and public awareness of the Charter, to ensure that all current and potential tenants are sufficiently aware of and involved in the Charter's application. This will involve keeping information published online and offline up to date and easy to access in a variety of formats. It is acknowledged that some

groups of tenants are in situations which allow them to contribute more fully to consultations such as this, and particular effort must be given to gauge the views of people who are less consulted with generally, such as prison leavers, young people and the gypsy traveller community. We would also ask the Scottish Government to review how the Scottish Housing Regulator enforces the standards set out in the Charter and in legislation and how it holds social landlords to account in areas of bad practice.

This paper will briefly address a number of specific Charter outcomes and how Shelter Scotland would like to see these develop and improve.

CHARTER STANDARD 4: QUALITY OF HOUSING.

The Charter should encourage landlords to attain the newly introduced Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing (EESH), as well as minimum standards for temporary accommodation. The Charter has done commendable work in encouraging social landlords to reach Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS) and now that this has been mostly achieved we must look ahead and ensure that the quality of Scottish housing continues to improve. In particular, Shelter Scotland would like to see the Scottish Government design and adopt standards for the provision of temporary accommodation in Scotland that would be enforced through the Charter and Regulator. This is especially relevant considering the changes to the funding of temporary accommodation through housing benefit that is facing local authorities and they should be encouraged to explore options around future provision of these services while maintaining good quality properties and services.

CHARTER OUTCOME 5: REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE.

Households in temporary accommodation should have the same rights to repair and maintenance as tenants in Social Housing. Some households who are allocated temporary accommodation may be there for extended period and should be given the same rights to repair and maintenance to ensure that their homes are well maintained and necessary improvements are carried out.

CHARTER OUTCOMES 7, 8, 9: HOUSING OPTIONS

The Charter should encourage landlords to provide suitable and appropriate housing options and ensure individuals are aware of their housing rights, especially in terms of making homeless applications. Consideration should also be given to individuals with complex needs for whom traditional housing options may not be sufficient. Additionally, landlords should be evaluated on their provision or signposting of money and benefits advice and assistance to complement the housing options approach, for example, to ensure that individuals are not deterred from accessing temporary accommodation due to the cost.

CHARTER OUTCOME 10: ACCESS TO HOUSING

The Charter should ensure that no barriers are imposed upon people seeking housing and that the guidance around housing options ensures that the approach is not used improperly to dissuade people from making homelessness applications. The Charter should also encourage social landlords to consider appropriate forward planning solutions such as the pathways approach to prevent homelessness¹ within particular groups such as prison leavers and people leaving institutional care, who are generally more at risk of becoming homeless and who require additional support to sustain accommodation.

¹ Homeless Link: [A positive pathway for young people](#). A copy of the youth homelessness pathway is included in Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) ['Making Every Contact Count: A joint Approach to Preventing Homelessness'](#) London: Department for Communities and Local Government

CHARTER OUTCOME 12: HOMELESSNESS

The Charter should consider assessing temporary accommodation standards not only by condition, but also by the time individuals spend in temporary accommodation and the quality of support that is attached to this period of transition. This is especially important in the cases of clients with complex needs where preventative and joint working is required to find and support sustainable housing solutions for the individual.

CHARTER OUTCOME 16: GYPSY TRAVELLERS

Research carried out by Shelter Scotland has identified the Gypsy traveller community across Scotland as being particularly excluded in terms of digitalisation of services and vulnerable in terms of financial capability². We would encourage the Charter to add particular provision of money and debt advice for this community under Charter outcome 16 so that this inequality can be addressed.

² Shelter Scotland (2015) [Gypsy/Travellers and Financial Exclusion - An examination of Best Practice in the development of financial capability](#)

Shelter Scotland helps over half a million people every year struggling with bad housing or homelessness through our advice, support and legal services. And we campaign to make sure that, one day, no one will have to turn to us for help.

We're here so no one has to fight bad housing or homelessness on their own.

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