

West Dunbartonshire Council

Report by Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development

Community Participation Committee: 17 August 2011

Subject: Scottish Social Housing Charter

1. Purpose

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to advise members of the Community Participation Committee on the forthcoming introduction of the Scottish Social Housing Charter.
- 1.2** The Scottish Government has recently released a discussion paper asking stakeholders to comment on the proposed content of the charter. This will help form the basis of the draft Charter, which will be released for formal consultation later in 2011. The Charter will come into effect, subject to the Scottish Parliament's approval, in April 2012

2. Background

- 2.1** The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 includes the requirement for a Scottish Social Housing Charter which will come into effect in April 2012. The purposes of the Charter are to provide clarity for customers and to clearly define outcomes for landlords to aim to achieve.
- 2.2** The proposed Charter will be flexible, and will allow local standards to be set to reflect what landlords are doing for their tenants, homeless people and other service users in their areas in order to achieve the national outcomes. It will encourage cooperation and collaboration between landlords which operate in a specific area and lead to common standards of customer service.
- 2.3** On an annual basis, The Scottish Housing Regulator will publish reports that assess how well social landlords are doing in achieving the Charter outcomes. The Regulator will be consulting later this year on how it will be carrying out its assessments, and it is likely to include proposals for the role of self assessment by landlords, and how landlords should involve their tenants and other customers in that assessment.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** Consultation on the Scottish Social Housing Charter began in late 2010, and in February 2011, the Scottish Government published a discussion paper outlining the feedback received from consultations so far, and suggestions for what type of outcomes tenants and other stakeholders would like to see included in the Charter. The suggested outcomes are listed in Appendix 1.
- 3.2** The discussion paper called for further views from interested parties to be sent to the Scottish Government by 16th May 2011. This will help inform the content of the draft Charter which will be prepared and distributed for formal consultation later in the year.
- 3.3** On May 10th 2011, a tenant event was facilitated by West Dunbartonshire Council in relation to the discussion paper, and the proposed outcomes it contained. Following this event a submission by the WDTRO was made to the Scottish Government providing feedback on the proposals contained in the discussion paper (Appendix 2).
- 3.4** Once the formal consultation exercise has been launched later in the year, a further report will be presented to the Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee.
- 3.5** The draft Charter will be put to the Scottish Parliament for approval before the end of 2011, and subject to approval, the Charter will come into effect on 1st April 2012.
- 3.6** While it is unclear at this stage what the final specific outcomes in the Charter will be, it is assumed that they will be similar to the suggested outcomes contained in the discussion paper. Though some changes may be required, the general areas covered by the outcomes for example, customer participation, homelessness, tenancy support, rents, anti-social behaviour, repairs and maintenance, are likely to remain. Over the coming months, officers from Housing and Community Safety will therefore take account of the draft Charter outcomes in reviewing service standards and pledges in consultation with tenants and other service users.

4. People Implications

- 4.1** There are no direct personnel issues.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** There are no direct financial issues.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** There is a risk that failure to continue to develop and strengthen our performance monitoring framework in parallel with the development of a Scottish Social Housing Charter could attract an adverse reaction from the Scottish Housing Regulator and may have wider consequences for the Council in the context of Best Value

7. Equalities, Health & Human Rights Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 7.1** No significant issues were identified in a screening for potential equality impact of this report.

8. Strategic Assessment

- 8.1** The development of a West Dunbartonshire approach to the introduction of the Scottish Social Housing Charter will ensure a consistency with the Local Housing Strategy. This approach will place regeneration at the heart of local outcomes contributing greatly to social regeneration within the communities of West Dunbartonshire
- 8.2** The Scottish Social Housing Charter will have at the forefront a commitment that all social housing landlords should ensure that their customers receive good value for rent and other charges they pay, and honest and accurate reporting of how money is spent and the value that it is achieving for them.
- 8.3** A number of the proposed outcomes in the draft Scottish Social Housing Charter will assist in improving the Council's housing stock. It will ensure that Council meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by 2015 at the latest and continues to do so beyond that date.
- 8.4** The development of the Scottish Social Housing Charter will allow staff to operate in a better designed environment with fit for purpose resources to deliver an excellent service to our customers. Our progress in delivering the outcomes contained within the charter will define an approach to meeting customer's expectations and aspirations

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 9.1** As a result of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, Scottish Ministers must produce a Scottish Social Housing Charter. The Charter will list the standards and outcomes that social landlords should be aiming to achieve for their customers. In assessing the performance of social landlords, the Scottish Housing Regulator will consider the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

- 9.2** The Scottish Government has recently released a discussion paper which asked stakeholders to comment on the proposed content of the charter. This will help form the basis of the draft Charter, which will be released for formal consultation later in 2011. The Charter will come into effect, subject to the Scottish Parliament's approval, in April 2012
- 9.3** It is recommended that the Community Participation Committee notes the current position with regard to the development of the Scottish Social Housing Charter

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Date: 26 July 2011

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Appendix: 1 – Scottish Government suggested outcomes
2 – WDTRO Charter Response

Background Papers: The Scottish Social Housing Charter Discussion Paper,
Scottish Government 2011
<http://housingcharter.scotland.gov.uk/media/24148/discussion%20paper.pdf>

Wards Affected: All Wards

Appendix 1

Scottish Government Suggested Outcomes

Customer participation

All types of tenants, their representatives and other customers can participate in decision making about the type and standard of local services that their landlord provides.

Their views and priorities are reflected in the landlord's services.

They can be involved in monitoring, assessing and reporting on the quality of services they receive from their landlord.

Communication

Tenants are aware of developments in their landlord's business that affect them and their neighbourhood.

Tenants and other customers are able to contact staff with suggestions or concerns, or for advice.

Customers are content with the way their landlord deals with enquiries and provides them with feedback.

Customer Service

Individual tenants, homeless people and other customers have access to their landlord's staff and find the staff responsive to their needs.

Customers are treated with respect and without unfair or unlawful discrimination.

Customers are content with the way their complaints are handled.

Housing Quality

After April 2015, all homes that are let, or available for let, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

Homes are clean and tidy at the point of allocation.

Homes meet all legal requirements for their occupants' health and safety.

Access to Housing

People looking for housing understand how landlords prioritise access to social rented housing.

People looking for housing understand the range of tenure and accommodation options available in the area.

People looking for social rented housing can apply easily for the widest choice of housing in the area that would meet their needs.

Allocations are made transparently.

Landlords understand current demand for housing in their area, and this is reflected in a fair, easy-to-understand and accessible allocations policy.

Temporary accommodation meets the needs of those receiving it.

Landlords understand likely future demand for housing in their area, and plan to help meet that demand.

Homelessness

Homeless people receive information about housing options, accommodation and support that reflects their needs.

Tenancy Support

Vulnerable tenants and tenants at risk of losing their tenancy through rent arrears are helped to sustain their tenancies.

Rents

Rent levels are set in consultation with tenants and take account of how far current and prospective tenants could afford them.

Rent structures are consistent and easy to understand, with rent levels reflecting the size and other features of the properties.

Value for Money

In all areas of their operation, landlords use their resources economically, efficiently and effectively to achieve value for money – for tenants, other customers and tax payers – and the value they achieve is improving over time.

Anti-social Behaviour

Residents are content with how their landlord is dealing with anti-social behaviour problems on its estates.

Residents are content with the way their landlord works with others to tackle wider issues of anti-social behaviour.

Repairs and Maintenance

Tenants can access an efficient and effective repairs services that is responsive to their needs and priorities.

Estate Management

Residents are content that estates and common areas within a landlord's responsibility are well maintained and safe places to live.

Transparency/access to information

Customers and other stakeholders are able to obtain information about a landlord's organisation, management, performance and finances, and how it makes and implements decisions, in a way that meets their needs.

Services for Gypsies/Travellers

The council is assessing the accommodation needs of Gypsies/Travellers.

The Council's development plan identifies suitable locations for sites, where there is evidence of need.

Other Customers

Owners and residents receiving factoring and other services are content that they receive a fair, effective, efficient service.