

**Horizon Housing Association
Resident Improvement Group
Scrutiny Report**

Letting Standard

June 2018



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Acknowledgements

“The members of the Resident Improvement Group would like to thank Horizon Housing Association Staff who assisted them throughout the Scrutiny Project, through the provision of support, information and for organising and taking part in research activities and meetings”

1.0. Introduction

1.1 Tenant Scrutiny in Context

Tenant scrutiny is about tenants being actively involved in reviewing how housing services are being delivered, and even more importantly, how they can be improved. Since 2013, the concept and emphasis on tenant scrutiny and self-assessment has become embedded in the tenant participation and customer involvement in self - assessment frameworks of the social housing sector in Scotland and represents a very significant opportunity to develop partnership working between tenants and landlords to deliver excellent housing services.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) focuses on outcomes as a basis for assessing landlord performance and requires landlords to involve their customers (tenants, applicants, sharing owners and those who receive a factoring service) in the self-assessment of housing services.

1.2 Horizon Housing Association Customer Scrutiny

Horizon Housing Association (the Association) has an established relationship with the Resident Improvement Group (RIG) which was established in 2016.

RIG forms the central point for scrutiny within the Horizon Housing Association which empowers customers to:

- Oversee a range of scrutiny activities
- Integrate these activities with the wider self-assessment activities of the Association
- Make recommendations to challenge and improve the activities of senior officers and members of the governing body.

The commitment to scrutiny is embedded in the Association's Strategic Scrutiny Framework which also clearly defines the opportunities and benefits of tenant led inspections as an approach to customer involvement in self-assessment and scrutiny.

1.3. Independent Tenant Advice and Development Support

In June 2016, the Association commissioned the services of the Tenant Information Service (TIS) to provide Independent Tenant Advice (ITA) and Development Support to the staff and customers involved in the Customer and Tenant Led Inspection Project (TLI Project). Lynda Johnstone, Development Director, TIS was assigned to this project.

TIS Mission Statement: *“The Tenants Information Service is the leading organisation in Scotland promoting and inspiring innovative tenant participation practice. We achieve this by providing independent advice, support and training for tenants and landlords”*. Further information on TIS can be found at www.tis.org.uk

2.0. The Horizon Housing Association Resident Improvement Group

2.1 Membership, Role and Remit of the Resident Improvement Group

The Resident Improvement Group was formed in the summer of 2016 and undertook a pilot project to review Repairs Communication in 2017.

The initial membership of 6 tenants has grown to 8 active members. The names of RIG members and the area where they live is detailed in Appendix 1. Each member was required to consider and agree to the Code of Conduct for remit and behaviour within the Project. It should be noted that this document also clearly states the Horizon Housing Association commitment to scrutiny and the Scrutiny Project.

2.3. Agreeing a Topic for Scrutiny

RIG members heard presentation and received information on performance management and the Horizon Housing Association Landlord Report to tenants. A review of the information provided, as well as consideration of customer experiences led the group to agree a scrutiny project to review **Horizon Housing Association Letting Standard**.

3.0. Resident Improvement Group Letting Standard Scrutiny Project

3.1. Resident Improvement Group Meetings

RIG members met from November 2017 to March 2018, a total of four times. Meetings were facilitated by Lynda Johnstone, Development Director, TIS and were also attended by Association staff.

3.2. Workplan

The Letting Standard Scrutiny Project followed an agreed detailed work plan. RIG members undertook a robust process to understand the Letting Standard and its impact on tenant and the Association.

Members:

- **Completed a desk top audit** to understand:
 - the Association's Letting Standard
 - comparisons with other RSL Letting Standards including Hillcrest Housing Association and Port of Leith Housing Association
 - how the Association communicates information on the Letting Standard to tenants and applicants
 - what paperwork is used as part of implementing the Letting Standard
 - void inspection sheet
 - tenancy sustainment form
- **Received Informative Presentations from Association staff to understand:**
 - The Scottish Social Housing Charter in relation to Letting Standards
 - The Association approach void management including the reason for voids, set targets and how the Association meets the targets
 - Letting Standard – Customer Comments, Complaints and Compliments
 - Customer Satisfaction Information
 - The reasons for offer refusals
- **Tenant Led Inspections**
 - Visits to 4 void properties
 - Telephone interviews with 6 tenants who have signed a tenancy agreement since November 2017

- **Held discussions with Association staff including:**

- Housing Officers
- Asset Management Officer
- Customer Service Officers

The staff interviews / discussions were designed to determine staff role and understanding of the Letting Standard and how it impacts on the operations and business of the Association.

With reference to the Scottish Social Housing Charter and outcomes on housing standards. It states that Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

4: Quality of Housing

“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”

5: Repairs, maintenance and improvements

“tenants’ homes are well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done”

The main focus of the scrutiny activity was on the Letting Standard. Costs associated with repair work and rechargeable repairs were not specifically assessed and reviewed.

4.0. Scrutiny of the Letting Standard Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. What the RIG Liked

Throughout the scrutiny project and associated research, RIG members identified good practice and information relating to the Letting Standard including:

- 4.1.1 On paper the existing Letting Standard covers a good level of detail and there is general satisfaction with the standard however some additional detail is suggested as detailed in the recommendations.
- 4.1.2 Where possible all letting standard repair work is completed by the Association before a property is let giving the tenant access to a much deserved home and reducing disruption to the tenant.
- 4.1.3 RIG acknowledged effective administration and recording procedures of the notes and actions relating to a property during or after property visits. The Void Inspection Sheet acts as a thorough checklist for identifying issues throughout the whole property.
- 4.1.4 The Association has an approach in place for communicating with tenants regarding what is expected of them before they vacate the property. Association staff provide clear explanations to the outgoing tenants regarding tenant responsibility to return the property or its components to the necessary standard at the end of the tenancy. It was noted however that some tenant do not heed or adhere to this information and meet their responsibilities.
- 4.1.5 The incoming tenant was informed of any outstanding repairs and any plans for maintenance work e.g. installation of new kitchen.

- 4.1.6 Association Staff who are familiar with the Letting Standard are generally satisfied with the standard it presents to both the Association and customers.
- 4.1.7 The Association has an approach in place for communicating with tenants regarding what is expected of them before they vacate the property. Association staff provide clear explanations to the outgoing tenants regarding tenant responsibility to return the property or its components to the necessary standard at the end of the tenancy. It was noted however that some tenant do not heed or adhere to this information and meet their responsibilities.

4.2. Findings and Recommendations

The RIG research and field work raised a number of issues which this report highlights and suggests recommendations for change. These recommendations were agreed by RIG when all the field work information was collected, considered and analysed.

Findings	Resident Improvement Group Recommendations
The Letting Standard	
<p>The Letting standard makes no reference to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and Energy Efficiency in Scottish Social Housing (ESSH). • Provision of a clothes drier. • Leaving garden sheds etc. if in good condition • Issuing of keys for window locks. • Change of locks to the front and back door • Efficient, effective lighting in communal areas. • Provision of a safety lock in on the bathroom door allowing it to be opened on the outside. • Floors are even and ready for coverings. • Provision of an extractor fan in the kitchen or bathroom where required. • Provision of a shower curtain the bathroom. • Spy holes in the front door are fitted at a standard height. Adaptations will be made if required eg for wheelchair users. • Door entry system needs to be checked. • Livingroom and kitchen doors having door closers if required by building regulations. • Provide as built bedroom wardrobes or cupboards, hall cupboards where provided i.e. shelving, clothes rail etc. • The removal of redundant electrical / TV points • Provision of CO, smoke and heat detectors. • Reference to the Association’s responsibility for the maintenance of the water supply in the property. • Communal lighting is in good working order. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At the next review of the Letting Standard, the Association gives consideration to the observations and findings of RIG as noted and changes to the standard are made.
Information to tenants	
<p>Incoming tenants are not always provided with information about the Letting Standard.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Incoming tenants are provided with a full or summary version of the Letting Standard at the time of viewing to raise awareness and knowledge of the Association’s commitment to the standard.
<p>RIG members were unable to determine if the Right to Repair is explained to tenants.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Right to Repair information is provided to the tenant at sign up.

Findings	Resident Improvement Group Recommendations
RIG feel that there is low tenant awareness about the Letting Standard.	4. The Association develop a communications plan to raise awareness of the standard with new and existing tenants and identify the ways in which Letting Standard information can be shared including provision of a paper copy, downloadable on website, newsletter articles etc.
Outstanding Work or Repairs Required	
It is tenant preference that where possible all repair work is completed by the Association before a property is let reducing disruption to the tenant. However an additional observation is noted below.	5. This area of good practice is maintained.
Tenants are often eager to take receipt of the keys for their new home and small repairs causing minimum disruption and other information is a lower priority to them. By letting a property with small scale repairs this would reduce void rent loss time and giving the tenant access to a much deserved home.	6. By issuing the Summary Version of the Letting Standard, tenants will be informed of repairs and standard expectations. 7. When properties are let with outstanding repairs tenants to be provided with a repair reference number and a timescale for completion by the Housing Officer. This should be reviewed and monitored by the Housing Officer through information available on the voids sheet which should be updated weekly. 8. Any outstanding repairs are followed up at the tenant settling in visit.
The aim of the Association is to ensure properties are let quickly, within target and within budget. Properties which are returned in a bad or poor condition, presents a challenge to the Association and takes additional time to clear up or repair. These circumstances can slow the voids targets however these bad properties are taken into consideration when reporting on performance.	9. Void performance reporting continues to reflect the difficulties for the Association when voids returned in poor condition.
Other reasons or challenges in delivering the letting standard were identified: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenants leaving a property in a state of serious disrepair and recharge repairs where the Association are unable to reclaim costs. • Tenant welfare and income challenges and the inability to maintain a property e.g. decoration. • Managing tenant aspirations. 	10. The Association considers these additional challenges and gives feedback to the RIG how staff action can reduce the associated risk.

Findings	Resident Improvement Group Recommendations
Horizon Housing Association Administration	
The RIG collected photographic evidence of properties before and after any work was done.	11. This practice is continued by staff for monitoring purposes.
A review of the Letting Standard based on this scrutiny report will require changes to internal paperwork and staff understanding.	12. All paperwork is changed and amended to reflect the revised standard. 13. Relevant staff are provided training on the standard.
As part of the research the RIG did not check how the New Tenant Visits Feedback was collated, processed and used.	14. As part of the review of this scrutiny project this information may be useful in determining further opinion and satisfaction regarding the Associations Letting Standard.
From the research, the RIG was not made aware of any formal complaints to the Association regarding the Letting Standard. However the telephone interview research did identify concern by an incoming tenant. These concerns are being addressed by the Association.	15. Any future complaints are logged and brought to the attention of the RIG who will take into account as this scrutiny project action plan is reviewed.
Other	
<p>The Scottish Government are strengthening the current standards for fire and smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors to ensure all homes have the highest level of protection by the end of 2020.</p> <p>One of the new improvements for owner occupiers and tenants in the social housing sector is the increased alarm coverage. The new guidance specifies the following requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One smoke alarm installed in the room most frequently used for general daytime living purposes. • One smoke alarm in every circulation space on each storey, such as hallways and landings. • One heat alarm installed in every kitchen • All alarms should be ceiling mounted, and • All alarms should be interlinked. <p>RIG members showed inconsistency in their awareness and understanding of Care and Repair Services offered in local authority areas.</p>	<p>16. The review of the Horizon Housing Association Letting Standard reflects the changes from the Scottish Government.</p> <p>17. Promote care and repair services to tenants.</p>

5.0. Next Steps

RIG members made a final consideration of this report in June 2018. The final agreed report will be submitted to Horizon Housing Association. Thereafter a meeting will take place to allow:

- Staff and tenants who were involved in the scrutiny project to evaluate the process.
- Horizon Housing Association to meet with RIG to discuss responses and agree specific actions to the recommendations.
- RIG to present the report to the Horizon Housing Association Board in June 2018.
- RIG to agree the actions required to publicise the work of the Project and attract new members.

6.0. Monitoring and Evaluation

It is essential that this scrutiny project is monitored and evaluated to find out if agreed objectives have been met, to recognise what works well and what may need to be adapted to meet the changing needs and priorities of the Association and its customers. This is about evaluating the effectiveness of the scrutiny project itself but also monitoring that the implementation of the agreed action plan has been carried out.

RIG recommend that an exercise to review the action plan takes place no later than December 2018.

APPENDIX ONE

The Horizon Housing Association tenants and customers involved in this Scrutiny Project were:

Ina Bright	Erskine
Margaret Croal	Dunfermline
Mary Dickson	Whitburn
William Durham	Carntyne
Edith Harrow	Erskine
Gina Healy	Coatbridge
Agnes O'Brien	Blantyre
Andrew Perry	Dunfermline