



West of
Scotland
Housing
Association

Tenant Scrutiny Group
Annual Report 2023

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1. Introduction

This is our first Annual Scrutiny Report in a number of years so thank you for taking the time to read it. In the report you will be able to read about the background to tenant scrutiny, what has happened at West of Scotland HA, the activities we have undertaken in the last 12 months and our plans for the year ahead.

We engage with tenants in a number of ways as part of our approach to scrutiny, but we are always keen to encourage tenants to become more involved. If after reading the report you would like to speak to members of the group, or attend a meeting, please do get in touch with us on the details at the end of the report.

We hope you find the below interesting and informative.

2. What is Tenant Scrutiny?

Tenant Scrutiny aims to give tenants more power in holding their landlord to account for their decisions, performance and conduct.

Changes to regulation in Scotland following the introduction of the Scottish Social Housing Charter and the independent Scottish Housing Regulator require landlords to be more proactive in self-regulation and to involve tenants in the scrutiny process.

There is now increased focus on housing organisations carrying out self-assessment and reviewing their housing services in order to evaluate how well they are doing and to plan improvements.

Tenant Scrutiny expands on traditional tenant participation activities by encouraging tenants to become more actively involved in assessing the quality of services provided by landlords. A range of different activities can be used by tenants to do this including:

- Mystery shopping
- Reviewing complaints and customer satisfaction results
- Reviewing performance data
- Interviewing staff and tenants
- Reviewing legislation, regulatory guidance and best practice
- Comparing policy and procedural documents with other landlords

By utilising the tasks above tenants are in a position to make recommendations as to how service delivery can be changed to benefit tenants, staff and the organisation overall.

At West of Scotland Housing Association we think we make better decisions when we make them with tenants and are fully supportive of the focus on tenant scrutiny.

3. Tenant Scrutiny at WSHA

Prior to the Covid pandemic there was a functioning Scrutiny group at West of Scotland Housing Association who undertook a number of activities to review different service areas including the following:

- Grounds Maintenance Service
- Complaints Procedure
- Void process
- Customer Services

During the pandemic, Scrutiny activities were halted to allow a focus on engaging with the Tenant Advisory Group about service delivery issues. As we came out of the pandemic there was a clear focus from the Association on the need to reconvene the Scrutiny group. Early in 2022 all tenants were notified of the intention to relaunch the group, and were invited to attend refresher training on Tenant Scrutiny. These training sessions focused on:

- What is Tenant Scrutiny?
- Why Scrutiny is good for both the landlord and tenants
- The different activities that can be used to scrutinise services
- The Scrutiny framework at WSHA

Following the training sessions the group, which contained a number of members from pre-covid as well as a number of new members, came together to discuss which service areas they wanted to scrutinise. As the framework sets out, activities can be directed from the Association where there is a business need. As the Association's Values and Customer Care Standards had recently been adopted, the Scrutiny group were asked to undertake a mystery shopping exercise to assess how well Association staff were meeting the Values and the Standards.

Following completion of the activity in relation to Customer Care, the Group agreed to undertake two further activities:

- A review of the Association's approach to tackling damp and mould in tenant's homes
- A review of how the Association manage their estates

The first activity was suggested by Management at WSHA, as they were in the process of introducing a new procedure in this area. The second was an area that tenants were keen to review. You can read more about each activity in the reports below.

For each tenant scrutiny activity identified, the Group work with the Association to agree a 'terms of reference' which sets out:

- Purpose of the activity
- Scope of the activity
- Key contacts
- Links to charter and regulatory framework
- Timescales

Current members of the Tenant Scrutiny Group:

Peter Murphy

Lynn Clark

Margaret Storrie

Lynne Di Folco

Agnes Docherty

Margaret Ritchie

Rosemary Murphy

Rose Friel

Ena Hutchinson

4. Customer Care Standards

During the pandemic WSHA reviewed their customer care standards in partnership with tenants.

These standards set out the values that staff should display in their interactions with tenants and other customers, and also set out specific standards that should be met in the majority of customer interactions. There were standards for each service area agreed.

We undertook an activity to review how well embedded the new values were across different teams and how well staff did in meeting the specific standards. The main tool we used in this activity was mystery shopping. This involved group members contacting the Association by phone, email and via social media with different scenarios to assess how staff performed in responding. Group members kept a record of each contact and at the end of the exercise came together to discuss their findings. The key outcomes were:

1. On almost every occasion the service request was answered promptly over the phone, via email or through social media with the staff member introducing themselves and in a polite manner
2. On almost every occasion the staff member was able to assist with the enquiry, and if they were not they passed on to a colleague who was able to assist with the enquiry
3. On every interaction with a member of staff, even those where they were unable to specifically help – each staff member behaved in line with the values and actions set out above

Based on the above, the Group had no specific recommendations as a result of this activity. It was agreed between the Group and WSHA that they would periodically revisit mystery shopping to ensure Customer Care Standards remained high.

5. Damp and Mould

As a result of the tragic case in England where a young child lost his life after long exposure to damp and mould in their home, WSHA, along with many other housing Associations, has undertaken to introduce a new policy to tackle damp and mould in tenants' homes.

The Scrutiny Group agreed to undertake an activity to review the damp policy and the wider approach WSHA would follow. This aligned with a survey that WSHA had undertaken which received nearly 100 responses from tenants indicating they had damp and mould in their homes.

The Group received a presentation from the CEO about the new policy and had the opportunity to ask a series of questions about the policy and how it would be implemented. They also reviewed the best practice guidance that had been developed to support the social housing sector in Scotland, and reviewed the guidance that the Regulator had released following the case referred to above.

The Group discussed the above and have made a series of recommendations to WSHA to consider, which the Group feel will deliver better outcomes for tenants. These relate to gathering feedback from tenants about the new approach, about assessing the quality of communication of the quality of work, and finally about how WSHA can proactively identify tenants whose homes may be more likely to experience damp and mould.

6. Estate Management

The Scrutiny Group were keen to assess how WSHA managed their estates, as several members had differing personal experiences both positive and negative.

The Group were aware that managing estates was a challenge for WSHA, and that in many instances the lines of responsibility between WSHA and local councils was not always clear.

The Group received a detailed presentation from Pamela Forrest, Housing Services Manager which outlined the approach that WSHA took to managing estates, and outlined the resources available to do so. The Group also reviewed complaints information, customer satisfaction returns, other landlords procedures in this area, and undertook a visit to the Charing Cross area to assess the quality of the estate. Finally the group also distributed a survey to all staff involved in Estate Management to gather their views about what was working well for them.

The Group made a number of recommendations after considering the above, including:

- Additional guidance for staff around managing car parking, the different roles and responsibilities around mixed tenure blocks and how to manage fly tipping
- Removing the paper-based estate inspection process and replacing with a digital tool
- Ensuring all staff who are in estates have the responsibility to report concerns
- Considering reviewing the current target for block inspections to allow staff to work more efficiently
- Consider how information is shared with tenants around usage of bin areas, especially in instances where English may not be the first language

7. What next

The Group have already identified activities that they wish to undertake in the coming months. These are:

- Reviewing the repairs service at WSHA
- Reviewing the staff Performance Management framework

Terms of reference for each will be agreed shortly.

The Group will also seek to review the Scrutiny Framework which sets out their relationship with WSHA and other tenants.

Membership of the Scrutiny group currently consists of a core group of tenants who have been involved with WSHA for a number of years. The Group will work with WSHA to raise their profile and seek new members in the coming months before beginning the activities outlined above.

The Group will review the progress made by WSHA in implementing any recommendations made as part of the Scrutiny activities covered above.