

Feedback & Proposed Actions from last Consultations

Thank you very much to everyone who took the time to return the last Tenant Participation Questionnaire. This section will give you summary of what we asked you, what you told us in your replies, and what we will do next. If you require any further information, or have any queries relating to this feedback, please contact Anne Mackay on 01349 855976

Equalities and Diversity

- ***We asked you***

In our last Bulletin we explained that we are reviewing our equalities and diversity policy. This policy statement sets out how we will make sure that we recognise and value the different groups that make up our communities; and that we prevent, challenge and remove discrimination wherever we can.

- ***You told us***

We asked you if there is anything else we need to consider or any particular actions we need to take. Any actions you thought were needed were generally related to particular nuisance incidents that some of you have experienced, and these will be picked up by our Officers on an individual basis.

- ***What we will do next***

Some of you also told us that you want to see improvements in how we respond to complaints. A new complaints process was introduced in the last few months, and a summary of the complaints we receive each quarter and the main outcomes are now included on our website every few months. We hope that you are now seeing an improvement in complaints handling as a result of our more streamlined ways of managing them.

Access for Contracts

- ***We asked you***

We let you know in our last bulletin the approach we plan to take for getting access to properties owned by us. We explained that we plan to take a similar approach to the one we already use for get access where we need it for gas and other safety checks. This is to make sure that we can get into as many homes as we can when we are doing substantial investment works to our homes to make sure we get best value from contracts and make sure our homes continue to meet high standards.

We explained that if we send out an appointment and a reminder for access and get no response, our tenancy sustainment staff will make contact to see if there are any particular issues that a tenant may need help with, or to arrange an alternative access time. If access can't be agreed at that stage we will take steps to make forced entry so that the contractor can carry out their work.

- ***You told us***

Over 100 of you had some comments to make about things we needed to consider as part of this approach. The vast majority of you thought the approach was very fair and reasonable. Quite a few of you wanted to make sure that we make sure that our contractors first provide plenty of notice, and then turn up when they say they will.

You also want us to build in checks to make sure tenants are not in hospital and to provide additional support and assistance to tenants who are more vulnerable or who have mental health conditions, for example. Some of you also commented that it can be difficult for you to provide access if our contractor only works during normal working hours and you are working full time yourself. There are usually additional costs if we need to get contractors to work on site at evenings and weekends as they have to pay their workforce higher rates. And so we will avoid out of hours call outs unless absolutely necessary to keep the costs we have to meet from your rents as low as possible.

- ***What we will do next***

Your concerns about vulnerable tenants fit with our existing approach of checking circumstances and providing support where it is needed, and we will make sure that these points are included in the checklists and guidance we issue to contractors and staff before we reach the stage of forcing entry.

We will make a minor change to all tenancy agreements signed from 1st April 2014 onwards to make sure this obligation for tenants to provide access for contracts is clear. We will also look at again as contracts are awarded or come up for review to see if scope for out of hours visits can be provided in exceptional circumstances. We may need to look at any additional costs being passed on to individual tenants in some circumstances.

Assisted Garden Maintenance

We have been running a limited garden maintenance assistance scheme for a number of years now. About 80 tenants each year get very limited help with a monthly grass cut over the summer. But the criteria for help are quite complicated for tenants to

understand and difficult for us to manage fairly.

• ***We asked you***

In our September policy bulletin we asked you:

- Whether we should provide the scheme at all
- Whether the current conditions are fair or should be changed
- In what circumstances, if any, tenants should be expected to pay
- Whether the scheme would be more widely used if it was available to all tenants at cost price

• ***You told us***

This subject got a good response – around 180 replies - with a higher than usual rate of comments on all questions. A high percentage (86% of those responding) thought the scheme should continue to be provided for our most vulnerable tenants. Most of you thought it should be restricted to the oldest of our tenants who are frail or infirm and / or to disabled people who live alone and unable to manage on their own. There was a mix of differing views about whether other neighbours or relatives should be expected to assist.

The general criteria we had suggested for a revised scheme of assistance were generally thought to be broadly fair and reasonable. Almost all of you thought that in some circumstances it would be reasonable for tenants to have to pay towards any assistance, and most thought this should be means tested in some way based on available income

What we will do next

We intend to simplify the criteria so that the scheme is limited to tenants who are most vulnerable and who are in financial hardship. We therefore propose to restrict eligibility to the following

tenants:

- Single tenants or couples aged 75 or over and in receipt of pension credit (income based)
- or
- The tenant is younger than 75 but has a disability that means they are unable to maintain the garden themselves, and they are in receipt of higher rate Disability Living Allowance (DLA), higher rate Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or higher rate Attendance Allowance
- In either case we will want to check that there are no younger or able bodied people living in the household. But we will no longer expect neighbours or relatives living nearby to be able to help, as we recognise that this can be difficult to prove and also that other family members are not always able to help out on a regular basis.
- Tenants who meet the new criteria will continue to have a garden maintenance service provided by us with no charge. The costs of

running the scheme will be met from our general rent funds and availability will be limited within the budget set each year. We intend this to continue to be at current budget levels – we will review this again within the next three years to see if it is still sufficient to meet demand or whether the criteria for the scheme need to be reviewed again.

- Over the next few months, we will also be starting to review our overall factoring and landscape maintenance contracts. As part of that work we will start to explore whether there is potential for us to work with our contractors or other local voluntary organisations who could provide the service at cost price for other tenants who may want to buy into it

Calendar

In December 2012 we sent you a calendar which included pictures done by schoolchildren across our communities and included handy contact numbers. We asked if we should do this again. 180 of you expressed a view on this, with around two thirds saying we should do it again, and one third who generally liked the calendar but did not think the cost was worthwhile.

On balance, we have decided not to provide a calendar for 2014, especially as many of you already receive them from other people. But we will continue to look at other ways that we can get important information out to you through our website, newsletters and social media channels when we need to.

Annual Report

Thank you very much to all the tenants (nearly 400 of you!) who took the time to respond to our questionnaire about our Annual Report.

Your told us

- Nearly all of you thought that the Annual Report summary that we circulated last year was the right size
- Nearly all of you thought that the Annual Report summary contained the information that you needed
- 264 of you (versus 79 who disagreed) thought that the summary was interesting / relevant to you
- 202 of you (versus 167 who disagreed) thought that only having an online version of the full report was acceptable
- 203 of you (versus 176 who disagreed) said that you didn't want the full report printed and posted out to you
- 266 of you (versus 103 who disagreed) said that you didn't need the full Annual Report as well as the summary

What we will do next

We are now holding discussions with you about what information you want to receive from the Scottish Social Housing Charter. It is probably the case that much of our annual report information is similar to the Charter's requirements.

We will therefore feed your responses from this annual report consultation into those discussions about the Charter. This will make sure that we are not duplicating any work and that the information we provide you is as concise and relevant as possible.