

Tenant Scrutiny Group Annual Report 2020



West of
Scotland
Housing
Association

Introduction

Welcome to the first Annual Scrutiny Report that we have prepared. As a Group we have been working with West of Scotland Housing Association (WSHA) since 2018 to assess how well they are delivering services to tenants.

In our report you will be able to find out about:

- What tenant scrutiny is and why it is important
- Our work in the last year
- How we have performed against our aims and objectives
- The audit undertaken of our approach to tenant scrutiny
- Our plans for next year
- How you can get involved with us

We hope you enjoy the report and if you have any questions then you can get in touch with us on the details at the end of the report.

Tenant Scrutiny Group Members

- Lynn Clark
- Agnes Docherty
- Janette Oliver
- Margaret Ritchie
- Rose Friel
- Josephine Coghlan
- Gerry Murphy
- Peter Murphy
- Rosemary Murphy
- Margaret Storrie
- Lynne Di Folcos

Background to Tenant Scrutiny

Tenant Scrutiny is an enhanced form of tenant engagement, with more requirements on WSHA as a landlord to support tenants to get involved in assessing services and reviewing performance. The introduction of the Scottish Social Housing Charter in 2012 meant landlords had to allow tenants a meaningful role in self-assessment of performance, and how they review services that are delivered to tenants.

The Tenant Scrutiny Group is made up of a number of volunteers who meet on a monthly basis and undertake various activities to develop their knowledge and understanding of the services WSHA provides.

Our strong relationship with WSHA is founded on the belief that if staff and tenants work together, we can deliver services that work for WSHA and meet tenants needs and priorities.

Tenant Scrutiny is about more than a landlord asking tenants what they think about a policy or a procedure, but about actively involving tenants in reviewing service quality before any changes are made to services. Tenants should be provided a range of information about tenants feedback on services, and have the ability to compare approaches with different landlords to identify the best outcomes for tenants.

With our work with WSHA we feel we have started to achieve successes but acknowledge there is a lot of work ahead.

2019/20 Areas of work

Each year the group agrees our programme of work and prepares a terms of reference for each area of work. It is for us to finalise the area for review not WSHA however we will take on board any area that they may wish us to review. In 2019/20 we wanted to review WSHA's approach to how they handle void, or empty, properties from when they become vacant until a new tenant moves in. We also agreed to undertake a review of WSHA's complaints handling procedures as several members of our Group had had different experiences when making a complaint.

At this stage it is worth highlighting that as a result of staff restructures, the introduction of a new Complaints Handling Procedure from the Public Services Ombudsman, and Covid the activities were not concluded as we would have hoped but we were able to make some initial recommendations.

Void Review

For the void review we agreed to undertake the following activities:

- Visits to empty void properties both pre work starting and after work was complete to assess conditions properties were being returned to WSHA in, and to see properties after the works were complete
- Interviews with staff involved in the void process from both the Property and Housing teams
- A review of the Regulatory standards and Charter outcomes relating to void properties and processes
- A review of the findings from the New Tenant Visits to gather feedback as to how tenants felt about their new homes
- A review of the performance information relating to voids

As we undertook the work above we learned more about the voids process including the range of challenges that WSHA faces when reletting empty properties. We saw for ourselves how some properties can be returned to WSHA in a condition where they require a wide range of work to be undertaken. We also visited properties after all the work had been undertaken and so could see the standard that they are brought up to. We found from the results of the new tenant visits that almost all tenants are satisfied with the quality of their home when they accept it.

We spoke to the Senior Technical Officer who talked through the contract we have with the company who undertakes the void repairs, and how the targets are set for when a property should be returned to WSHA. We also spoke to a Housing Officer and a Housing Assistant about their role in the process, from arranging end of tenancy inspections through to deciding who is offered the new house.

Finally, a review was undertaken of WSHA's performance against their targets, and how this compares with other landlords.

Broadly we found that WSHA was facing a challenge in the fact that homes were being returned in a poor condition, and there were also issues identified relating to meters, which often delayed the process. That said, we identified that WSHA continued to miss their target timescales for relets, and performed poorly when compared to other landlords. We felt that WSHA needed to resolve the perceived conflict between the Property Team and the Housing Team and have a singular approach which we didn't believe existed. However, the appointment of a new Chief Executive led to new job of a Void Officer being created which would resolve this issue. At this stage, we agreed to let this process bed in for a few months to re-examine progress, and then the Covid situation arrived. We will take a further look at the void process in the next year.

Complaints

For the review of the complaints procedure we agreed to review the following areas:

- A review of the existing procedure
- A review of existing best practice
- An examination of the performance from across different teams in handling, and recording of complaints
- A review of how WSHA performs against the Ombudsman best practice guidance

For this area we undertook the work outlined above over the first few months of our work. We reviewed the performance information from each team and noted that some staff seemed to record complaints more frequently than others. We also spoke to other tenants who had made complaints and asked about their experiences. As the work began to reach a conclusion we became aware that WSHA would be adopting a new Complaints Procedure that the Ombudsman was producing. Throughout the exercise the key point that arose was when customers were complaining they want to be communicated with effectively, and not

forgotten about. We reiterated this to WSHA as they adopted their new policy in March 2020. Once the new procedure has been rolled out we will undertake further work in this area including a mystery shopping exercise to assess how well staff are following the new procedure.

Training and Development

To ensure that the Group continues to learn and develop our skills we have undertaken a number of activities this year to help with this. A number of us attended the Tenant Participatory Advisory Service annual conference so that we could hear about changes with regard to tenant scrutiny and engagement. We also undertook a study visit to Aberdeen where we met with staff and tenants from Aberdeen Council, Langstane Housing Association and Castlehill Housing Association. We were able to hear about each groups experience in working with their landlord, what they felt worked well and what particular challenges they faced. We look forward to putting all this learning to good use in the year ahead.

Scrutiny Group Performance

As part of our approach to ensuring that we are delivering for other tenants of WSHA we have agreed that each year we will undertake a review of how we are performing against our aims and objectives from our Tenant Scrutiny Framework. The table below sets out our aims and objectives and how we feel we have performed. Where we feel we need to improve we have set out what we will do to ensure we achieve the specific aim.

Aims and Objectives	How have we performed?	Improvement required?
Monitor the performance of WSHA across a number of service areas	We have reviewed two service areas across WSHA in the past year	Ideally as a Group we would look to annually review an area from each of Corporate, Housing and Property Services.
Agree an annual programme of scrutiny activities based on feedback from WSHA staff and tenants	We have developed our programme of work following discussions with WSHA, and a review of the performance information as set out in our framework	We will work to improve how we gather tenant feedback on areas we scrutinise over and above using complaints and customer satisfaction information
Undertake these activities, using a range of tools	We have made use of a range of tools including surveys, interviews, site visits and reviewing information as part of our work	Continue to assess the activities which best fit the service area being reviewed
Make recommendations to WSHA as to how services could be delivered differently to meet tenants needs and priorities	We made some initial recommendations after our work which we feel will benefit tenants but given the circumstances we did not formalise these	At the end of each activity we must formally report our findings to WSHA and ask for a response for each recommendation
Report these findings to other tenants of WSHA	We have included an update of our work regularly in Westworld but did not produce and share a formal report	We will ensure that for each activity a formal report is prepared, and we will explore how we can better share information with tenants digitally going forward

Aims and Objectives	How have we performed?	Improvement required?
Provide a welcoming environment for new tenants who wish to join our group	We did not have any new members join this year	We will undertake a recruitment exercise in the coming months for new members
Follow best practice from across the sector, and take opportunities to learn from others, through attending conferences and undertaking study visits	We have attended a national conference to enhance our learning, and undertook a study visit to hear what other tenants are doing in their approach to tenant scrutiny	Continue to reach out to other groups to build our knowledge
Work with WSHA to assess the impact of our recommendations, and where required review these recommendations	We have monitored the impact of our recommendations as a group but hope to enhance our approach in this area in the coming months through greater involvement of the staff team at WSHA	Develop an approach where staff can continue to advise on progress against our recommendations

Audit of our approach

As part of WSHA’s approach to continuous improvement, an internal audit review was undertaken by WSHA’s auditors of our approach to tenant scrutiny. This involved the auditors meeting with relevant staff of WSHA and our Group.

The auditors made a number of recommendations, several of which were already planned, to improve both how we as a Group work, and also how WSHA interacts with us as a Group. The overall result of the audit was that there was ‘moderate’ assurance regarding WSHA’s approach to tenant scrutiny.

Looking Forward

Proposed Action Plan 2020/21

The way that we decide on our programme of work for the year ahead is set out in our 'Tenant Scrutiny Framework'. The service areas we look at are determined by the following factors:

- The views of individual group members and their experiences
- Any views from either staff or Board members of WSHA
- Whether the Housing Regulator has expressed any concern about a service area
- Performance information reported by WSHA
- Information drawn from either the complaints procedure or the ongoing customer satisfaction surveys

Taking into account the above the Group is proposing to look at the following areas in the coming year:

- The journey from homelessness to a secure home – we will look at the role that WSHA plays in this and what approach other landlords are adopting
- Development Strategy – we will undertake an exercise with the WSHA's Development Team as they develop their new strategy

Throughout the year we will also look to identify an area of Property Services that we can scrutinise – but we are aware that colleagues in the Tenant Advisory Group are working with the team on procuring a new service so will wait till that activity is complete. We will also continue to review the approach in relation to void properties and complaints and pick up those reviews when appropriate.

Digital Approach

Like many others, 2020 has been a challenging year for the Group. After an initial period where we were unable to meet as a Group we worked with WSHA to ensure that all members had access to appropriate equipment, and began to meet digitally.

It is likely that this will continue for some time, but we are looking at the positives – it means we can meet more frequently, and also that we have the tools to undertake further work in between meetings. It also means that we receive and use less paper as we receive information electronically. We will continue to adapt our digital approach in the coming year, and hope that knowing they can join digitally may encourage other tenants to get involved.

We are also going to improve how we communicate with you our fellow tenants in the year ahead. We will publish more information on WSHA’s website and we will undertake more surveys looking for feedback on a range of areas.

Getting involved

The Tenant Scrutiny Group is made up of a number of volunteers who meet on a monthly basis and undertake various activities in between meetings to develop their knowledge and understanding of the services WSHA provides. Throughout the year we will also undertake appropriate training sessions, and occasionally attend conferences and events that give us the opportunity to meet with other similar groups.

As a Group we are always looking to increase our numbers and would welcome new members at any time. If you think you would be able to spare some time to help the Group carry out their work, or have a particular interest in any aspect of the services that WSHA provides then please get in touch with us. Any new members will be warmly welcomed and provided with any training or information that would help them.

As you will have read we have begun working more digitally, and though we do hope to meet again in person soon, if you have access to a computer and the internet you will be able to take part. If you do not have access to a computer or the internet and are interested in being involved, then please get in touch and we will talk through options.



How to get in touch

You can get in touch with us by contacting:

t: 0141 550 5060

e: haveyoursay@westscot.co.uk

w: westscot.co.uk

 WSHAScotland

 WSHAScotland

Please let us know if you require this information in large print, audio or any other language.



HAPPY TO TRANSLATE



West of
Scotland
Housing
Association