



## **EDINBURGH TENANTS FEDERATION**

*Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations*

### **Scottish Housing Regulator - consultation on our future regulatory approach in response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

#### **1.0 Background**

Edinburgh Tenants Federation (ETF) is the umbrella organisation for tenants' and residents' groups in the city of Edinburgh and a Registered Tenant Organisation. Our purpose is to represent tenants at a citywide policy level and we aim to promote the improvement of the quality of life of residents and the housing conditions of all tenants.

ETF held a Focus Group for members on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> August 2020 to find out their views on the Scottish Housing Regulator's (SHR's) approach in response to the COVID-19 epidemic. This response represents the ETF members' views on the questions and has been shared with the Federation's Executive Committee. ETF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this discussion paper.

#### **2.0 Proposed changes to the Regulatory Framework for consultation**

##### **2.1 Are our proposals for the Annual Assurance statement right?**

ETF is concerned that the proposals and timescales are particularly tight. As we are already in August, some landlords may struggle to complete the tasks therefore the extension until October will not be long enough. Housebuilding and allocations have only just started again after being suspended during the pandemic and these are hugely important factors in landlords Annual Assurance Statements.

Many landlord staff are and continue to be furloughed. Therefore, many organisations will have a greatly reduced workforce and are under even more pressure to deliver services on behalf of tenants. We propose extending the deadline until the end of January 2021.

ETF is unsure whether the SHR will have the capacity to cope with the increased demands from landlords who are struggling as a result of the

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pandemic and who are unable to meet the proposals and deadlines. The SHR knows which landlords have been struggling prior to the epidemic and may continue to struggle. The following should be prioritised

- Tenant and customer interests need to be protected;
- Landlords should report to SHR on what specific services they are struggling to deliver i.e. some allocations have been suspended, therefore SHR, tenants et al should expect to see performance in this area dip for this year.

Scotland may experience another spike in COVID-19 which will further affect services. This needs to be taken into account by the SHR and all landlords when future planning.

## **2.2 Should we publish advisory guidance to assist landlords to adapt their approach to the submission of the Annual Assurance Statement?**

ETF is in favour of this approach.

## **2.3 Would you like to make any other comments or suggestions about our approach to getting Annual Assurance statements?**

ETF would like to know how SHR will monitor whether landlords have continued to use tenant participation and engagement methods during the pandemic, including any changes in methodology. Many tenants do not have internet access and are not skilled in digital technology. Landlords should ensure that all tenants have been able to participate in meetings/consultations and training should be provided to those who are not skilled in digital technology.

We understand many landlords have varied services to tenants to support them during the pandemic. ETF believes that the SHR should ask for information on this to demonstrate and share good practice, including the more humanitarian approaches taken by landlords during this time.

## **3.0 Publication of Scottish Social Housing Charter performance reports by landlords**

### **3.1 Are our proposals for the publication of Charter performance right?**

ETF considers that the end of December 2020 is not the right time to do this, as information will get lost in the festive post. Furthermore, people will be busy with family/other commitments and we propose that the timescales be extended until March 2021.

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ETF is concerned that it may prove difficult for landlords to provide up to date statistics on the Charter as many staff are currently furloughed. ETF considers that landlords and SHR need to be prepared for a potential second wave of COVID 19 between November 2020 and February 2021.

### **3.2 Would you like to make any other comments or suggestions about the proposed approach to the publication of Charter performance?**

ETF would like to know how landlords have been reporting to and involving tenants during the pandemic particularly any new innovative methods used.

ETF would also like to know what plans landlords have to continue these innovative methods and skill up tenants if office-based work and face to face meetings do not happen for some considerable time due to the epidemic.

## **4.0 Publication of Engagement Plans and Regulatory status**

### **4.1 Are our proposals for the publication of Engagement Plans and regulatory status right?**

ETF believes that the SHR needs to allow greater flexibility and support to assist landlords who may struggle in sending the relevant documentation to them. These measures will allow the struggling landlords to complete the engagement plans.

The SHR should know which landlords were experiencing difficulties in higher engagement pre pandemic. Therefore, we consider these landlords should be a priority for SHR support.

### **4.2 Would you like to make any other comments or suggestions about the proposed approach to the publication of Engagement Plans and regulatory status**

ETF considers that the proposed timescales are too ambitious as we are currently in August. Landlords should be providing regular performance updates to tenants / service users and SHR (where there are issues or concerns).

We note that landlords in areas throughout Scotland may not have the same underlying issues i.e. 'one size does not fit all'. As a result, the SHR needs to be adaptable and flexible to different issues.

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ETF would like to see evidence of how each landlord engagement plans are protecting tenants and service users. ETF is particularly interested to know how much it costs to produce the engagement plans and whether tenants' rent money funds this. It is important to know how the SHR is ensuring tenants are consulted and involved in all aspects of landlord performance monitoring and reporting.

Tenants organisations like the Federation are diversifying their communication and involvement methods. ETF recognises the challenges of virtual involvement in terms of cost and access to equipment, broadband, training and confidence building needs etc. This is something ETF is trying to address, however there are concerns that some people will continue to be excluded from digital engagement. ETF wants the SHR to ask landlords how and what they are doing about diversifying communication and involvement methods whilst ensuring no one is excluded. Tenants can play a vital role through methods such as tenant scrutiny to help improve landlord's services. However there needs to be proper dialogue between SHR, landlords and tenants about safe tenant scrutiny methods as a result of COVID-19. It is important that all tenants are able to contribute to digital engagement regardless of their circumstances.

## 5.0 Conclusion

ETF will continue to monitor the progress of the consultation and will work with the City of Edinburgh Council to address any issues that arise.

Edinburgh Tenants Federation  
August 2020

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