

Section 1 - Impact of the current Charter

In this section of the questionnaire we ask for your views on the impact of the current Charter.

1) Do you think the quality of landlord services has improved because of the Charter? Please explain your answer and provide examples.

This could include examples of improvements to a specific service such as higher quality, quicker repairs or increased opportunities for tenants to get involved.

ETF is concerned that tenants have little knowledge or understanding of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. ETF would like to see landlords do more to ensure tenants have an understanding of the Charter. This could include information on the Charter being included in communications with tenants.

ETF believes that there has been progress on landlords encouraging tenants to become involved in tenant scrutiny. ETF has carried out a number of Tenant Led Inspections on City of Edinburgh Council services with a view to improving these services.

ETF has yet to see any concrete evidence that the Charter is encouraging tenants to take part and questions how well it is linked to tenant participation structures.

ETF is concerned that younger tenants are not becoming involved with their landlords, so it is difficult to see if the quality of landlord services have improved for younger tenants.

ETF notes that there is very little in the way of a Human Rights Based Approach in the current Charter. Human Rights monitoring needs to be an underlying theme in the new Charter.

ETF is concerned that a high percentage of tenants do not understand what their rent pays for. Tenants need to be more informed to take part in key decision making with their landlord. It is important that tenants have opportunities to hold their landlords to account, but we have yet to see evidence that this is happening.

Tenants have no consistent method of checking that each service they pay for is delivering *value for money* currently in the Charter. ETF would welcome a *value for money* indicator being introduced which measures the costs of service delivery. Tenants want to see the cost of delivering services linked to performance (tenant satisfaction) and quality. This is more important to tenants than comparing landlords' results. Tenants want to be involved fully in *value for money* discussions with landlords; and to be able to do that effectively; *value for money* must be more prominent in the Charter measures. (Many landlords will be assessing this information through benchmarking networks, but until this information is fully accessible and understandable to tenants, power will continue to rest with landlords and *value for money* assessments will remain inconsistent and underutilised.)

2) Does the way the Charter is reported on help you judge whether landlords are meeting the Charter outcomes and standards? Please explain your answer:

As per our previous answer, ETF is concerned that tenants have little knowledge or understanding of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. Furthermore tenants have very little information on the Annual Return on the Charter and how landlords report the findings to tenants.

ETF believes that some landlords may gloss over negatives and be unwilling to share negative or poor performances with their tenants. Therefore ETF is still unclear about whether the Charter is helping landlords meet the required outcomes and standards.

The Charter could be better at offering opportunities for sharing good practice between landlords where there are high levels of satisfaction with a service, so landlords can learn from each other.

Section 2 - Current outcomes and standards

In this section of the questionnaire we ask for your views on all 16 current charter outcomes and standards and the supporting narratives that describe them. These are listed in 6 sections below:

- The customer/landlord relationship
- Housing quality and maintenance
- Neighbourhood and community
- Access to housing and support
- Getting good value from rents and service charges
- Other customers

THE CUSTOMER/LANDLORD RELATIONSHIP

EQUALITIES (Charter outcome 1)

Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that: **every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.**

Supporting Narrative

This outcome describes what social landlords, by complying with equalities legislation, should achieve for all tenants and other customers regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. It includes landlords' responsibility for finding ways

of understanding the needs of different customers and delivering services that recognise and meet these needs.

3a) Would you

Keep this outcome exactly as it is.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below.

ETF is happy with keeping this outcome as it is. However it is important that landlords produce concrete evidence that they are complying with the equalities legislation.

COMMUNICATION (Charter outcome 2)

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

Supporting Narrative

This outcome covers all aspects of landlords' communication with tenants and other customers. It is not just about how clearly and effectively a landlord gives information to those who want it. It also covers making it easy for tenants and other customers to make complaints and provide feedback on services, using that information to improve services and performance, and letting people know what they have done in response to complaints and feedback. It does not require landlords to provide legally protected, personal or commercial information.

4a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

ETF is happy with this outcome. However landlords must ensure that they communicate with tenants using plain English and no jargon. Landlords must make allowances for tenants that have literacy problems and who don't have access to the internet. Information must be provided in different formats, including braille and in different languages for tenants whose first language is not English.

PARTICIPATION (Charter outcome 3)

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:
tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Supporting Narrative

This outcome describes what landlords should achieve by meeting their statutory duties on tenant participation. It covers how social landlords gather and take account of the views and priorities of their tenants; how they shape their services to reflect these views; and how they help tenants and other customers to become more capable of involvement.

5a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

ETF would keep this outcome as it is, however it is important for landlords to encourage meaningful tenant participation. Although some progress has been made in landlords involving tenants through tenant scrutiny, more could be done on this. Landlords will only be held to account if they enable support to tenants to increase involvement.

5b) Please provide any suggestions below on how we could improve the supporting narrative

ETF would like to see landlords sharing examples of good practice with each other, so tenants are receiving best value for money.

HOUSING QUALITY AND MAINTENANCE

QUALITY OF HOUSING (Charter standard 4)

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:
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.¹

¹ This will be updated in the revised Charter to reflect the introduction of the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH).

Supporting Narrative

This standard describes what landlords should be achieving in all their properties. It covers all properties that social landlords let, unless a particular property does not have to meet part of the standard. Beyond SHQS, landlords should be looking for cost-effective ways of achieving higher energy-efficiency standards for their properties, to provide warmer homes for their tenants and help to meet climate change targets. During this Charter's lifetime, the Scottish Government will consult on higher standards. If adopted, these new standards will form part of the next Charter.

6a) Would you:

Change this standard.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

The right to adequate housing is an international human right. ETF has experienced, through research carried out by tenants in an area of Leith, that there is a disconnection between tenants' real experiences of the quality of their home and how this is reported in the Charter and through the SHQS. We do not know whether this is a national issue or not.

This outcome must link to international human rights standards. Tenants and landlords should be enabled to use a human rights based approach to support tenants to claim this right.

The charter should use Human Rights monitoring to connect outcomes to the international standards that will show indicators are linked to the progressive realisation of rights.

6b) Please provide any suggestions below on how we could improve the supporting narrative

The right to adequate housing is an international right. Landlords must have a continual participatory process with tenants to enable tenant influence in housing standards.

REPAIRS, MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENTS (Charter outcome 5)

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

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

Supporting Narrative

This outcome describes how landlords should meet their statutory duties on repairs and provide repairs, maintenance and improvement services that safeguard the value of their assets and take account of the wishes and preferences of their tenants. This could include setting repair priorities and timescales; setting repair standards such as getting repairs done right, on time, first time; and assessing tenant satisfaction with the quality of the services they receive.

7a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

ETF believes that this is a very sensitive issue for tenants. Landlords need to have meaningful dialogue and proper communication with tenants regarding repairs appointments and tenants' priorities. Training and refresher training should be provided to landlord staff, where appropriate, to ensure the highest possible service for tenants. ETF believes that landlords could share good practice with each other in this topic, so they can learn from each other and deliver the highest possible service for tenants.

NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY

ESTATE MANAGEMENT, ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR, NEIGHBOUR NUISANCE AND TENANCY DISPUTES (Charter outcome 6)

Social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure that: **tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.**

Supporting Narrative

This outcome covers a range of actions that social landlords can take on their own and in partnership with others. It covers action to enforce tenancy conditions on estate management and neighbour nuisance, to resolve neighbour disputes, and to arrange or provide tenancy support where this is needed. It also covers the role of landlords in working with others to tackle anti-social behaviour.

8a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

ETF would keep this outcome as it is, however it is important that tenants have an understanding of the agencies which work with landlords. Therefore there needs to be more tenant involvement with their landlords. ETF is concerned that budget cuts to landlords especially Councils are preventing them dealing with antisocial behaviour and this is affecting the morale of communities.

8b) Please provide any suggestions below on how we could improve the supporting narrative

It is important that children are educated at school age, so they are aware of the dangers of antisocial behaviour and neighbour nuisance.

HOUSING OPTIONS (Charter outcomes 7, 8 and 9)

Social landlords work together to ensure that:

people looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them. Tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options.

Social landlords ensure that:

people at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness.

Supporting Narrative

These outcomes cover landlords' duties to provide information to people looking for housing and advice for those at risk of becoming homeless. These duties include helping tenants and people on housing lists to review their options to move within the social housing sector or to another sector.

9a) Would you:

Keep these outcomes exactly as they are.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

It is important for landlords to remember that not all tenants have access to the internet, so information should be available in paper format and braille. Landlords must have a clear and coherent policy on preventing homelessness.

9b) Please provide any suggestions below on how we could improve the supporting narrative

It is important for landlords to make contact with tenants affected by homelessness as early as possible to mitigate the problems. It is important for landlords to also liaise with the appropriate agencies.

ACCESS TO HOUSING (Charter outcome 10)

Social landlords ensure that:

people looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and their prospects of being housed.

Supporting Narrative

This outcome covers what social landlords can do to make it easy for people to apply for the widest choice of social housing that is available and suitable and that meets their needs. It includes actions that social landlords can take on their own and in partnership with others, for example through Common Housing Registers or mutual exchange schemes, or through local information and advice schemes.

10a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

ETF would keep this outcome as it is, however it is important that tenants' have the widest possible choice for housing and in many cases this is not happening. For example tenants should not be housed in properties and areas that are unsuitable for them. Landlords need to listen more to tenants' personal circumstances to ensure they have access to appropriate housing.

TENANCY SUSTAINMENT (Charter outcome 11)

Social landlords ensure that:

tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.

Supporting Narrative

This outcome covers how landlords can help tenants who may need support to maintain their tenancy. This includes tenants who may be at risk of falling into arrears with their rent, and tenants who may need their home adapted to cope with age, disability, or caring responsibilities.

11a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

ETF would keep this outcome as it is, however landlords must liaise much better with other organisations concerning tenants falling into rent arrears and what benefits are available to them. ETF would like to see landlords use more face to face communication rather than sending letters and making phone calls. Landlords could arrange surgeries for tenants that have any queries regarding their tenancy.

HOMELESS PEOPLE (Charter outcome 12)

Local councils perform their duties on homelessness so that:

homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice; are provided with suitable, good-quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed; and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.

Supporting Narrative

This outcome describes what councils should achieve by meeting their statutory duties to homeless people.

12a) Would you:

Keep this outcome exactly as it is.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

Landlords need to carry out the appropriate background checks to determine whether someone is actually homeless. There have been examples of forged homelessness in different parts of Scotland. Landlords should provide translators for those whose first language is not English. Landlords need more funds to enable them to build more social housing.

GETTING GOOD VALUE FROM RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGES

VALUE FOR MONEY (Charter standard 13)

Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that: **tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.**

Supporting Narrative

This standard covers the efficient and effective management of services. It includes minimising the time houses are empty; managing arrears and all resources effectively; controlling costs; getting value out of contracts; and giving better value for money by increasing the quality of services with minimum extra cost to tenants, owners and other customers.

13a) Would you:

Keep this standard exactly as it is.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

ETF is happy with this outcome, however it is important for landlords to produce evidence on how they are effectively managing services. ETF believes that these topics could be addressed through tenant scrutiny and would like to see landlords encourage tenants to become more involved in the value for money agenda.

13b) Please provide any suggestions below on how we could improve the supporting narrative

There needs to be a definition of the term *value for money*. How can tenants hold landlords to account? Landlords should look at introducing a Human Rights Based Approach towards budgeting for housing, focussing on those elements which affect tenants' human rights.

RENTS AND SERVICE CHARGES (Charter outcomes 14 and 15)

Social landlords set rents and service charges in consultation with their tenants and other customers so that:

a balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services, and how far current and prospective tenants and other customers can afford them.

Tenants get clear information on how rent and other money is spent, including any details of individual items of expenditure above thresholds agreed between landlords and tenants.

Supporting Narrative

These outcomes reflect a landlord's legal duty to consult tenants about rent setting; the importance of taking account of what current and prospective tenants and other customers are likely to be able to afford; and the importance that many tenants place on being able to find out how their money is spent. Each landlord must decide, in discussion with tenants and other customers, whether to publish information about expenditure above a particular level, and in what form and detail. What matters is that discussions take place and the decisions made reflect the views of tenants and other customers.

14a) Would you:

Keep these outcomes exactly as they are.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

ETF would keep this outcome as it is. However ETF is concerned that many tenants don't know what their rent money is being spent on. Landlords need to give a better breakdown on what tenants' rent money is being spent on, so they can gain more knowledge. ETF would like to see landlords involving tenants in Housing Revenue Account (HRA) discussions and rent scrutiny, as rents is perhaps the most important aspect for tenants and many do not fully understand how their rent money is spent.

14b) Please provide any suggestions below on how we could improve the supporting narrative

Tenants need to see evidence that their views are being listened to. ETF would like to see tenants being given the opportunity to hold landlords to account with regards to rent and HRA scrutiny.

OTHER CUSTOMERS

GYPSIES/TRAVELLERS (Charter outcome 16)

Local councils and social landlords with responsibility for managing sites for Gypsies/Travellers should manage the sites so that:
sites are well maintained and managed.

Supporting Narrative

This outcome applies only to those councils and other social landlords that are responsible for managing these sites.

15a) Would you:

Keep this outcome.

Please tick only one box and explain your answer below

ETF would keep this outcome as it works really well in Edinburgh.

Section 3 - Adding anything to the Charter

In this section we ask you to provide details of anything else the Charter should cover.

16) Is there anything else you think the Charter should cover? If so please tell us what and why you think it should be included?

Landlords must demonstrate that tenants have a good understanding of the outcomes in the Charter and how they are reporting the findings of the Annual Return on the Charter to tenants.

It is very important that there is a Human Rights Based Approach in the Charter that links reporting to the progressive realisation of rights in international standards.

ETF would like to see landlords encouraging tenants to take part through tenant scrutiny.

The Charter could be better at sharing good practice between landlords where there are high levels of satisfaction with a service to enable landlords to learn from each other.

Tenants have no consistent method of checking that each service they pay for is delivering *value for money* currently in the Charter. ETF would welcome a *value*

for money indicator being introduced which measures the costs of service delivery. Tenants want to be fully involved in *value for money* discussions with landlords; and to be able to do that effectively; *value for money* must be more prominent in the Charter measures.