



EDINBURGH TENANTS
FEDERATION

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Edinburgh's Federation of Tenants' and Residents' Associations

Review of Scottish Social Housing Charter

ETF Response – September 2021

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 (RTO). 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 23rd June 2021 to find out their views on the Scottish Government's review of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. This response represents the ETF members' views on the questions most relevant to attendees at the event and has been shared with the Federation's Executive Committee. ETF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this discussion paper.

2.0 Impact of the current Charter

2.1 Over the last 5 years, do you think the Charter has contributed to improvements in landlord services? Please explain your answer and provide examples

- The Charter is a good idea, but landlords and the Scottish Government do not seem to provide enough evidence or information to tenants on the successes of the Charter or positive outcomes for tenants
- The Charter is trying to put tenants at the forefront of discussions. There are now different ways to hold landlords to account, through tenant scrutiny. However, there are inconsistencies in regards to approaches to tenant scrutiny
- It has improved landlord's performance to a certain extent with regards to some of the outcomes. However, for many landlords, there haven't been many improvements at all
- The COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic has seen services to tenants reduce, for example a focus on emergency repairs only, rather than day to day / urgent repairs
- There are issues with City of Edinburgh Council's (CEC's) performance with regards to tackling dampness in homes
- In Edinburgh there seems to be a lot of emphasis on building mid-market rented rather than social housing, which many tenants can't afford to live in
- Members are concerned that CEC rents continue to rise, as well as having the highest local authority rents in Scotland, whilst services do not seem to be improving. CEC performance is lower than the national average in some service areas

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- Some questions asked in CEC's Tenant Satisfaction Surveys do not always provide the feedback ETF and wider tenants will be interested in i.e. asking if tenants are happy with the rent levels will depend on whether tenants are in receipt of housing benefit or not.

2.2 What outcomes and standards work well and why?

Access to housing

- In the sense of new builds, there are more eco-friendly and Passivhaus developments.

Participation

- Is trying to make a difference for tenants, at a local and Edinburgh wide level as well as through ETF involvement in national housing consultations.

2.3 Do any need to be improved and why?

Access to housing

- New houses built on green belt will have a massive impact on the pressures of infrastructures. This will need to include doctor's surgery, schools, shops etc...
- More emphasis is needed on social rented homes, not mid-market rent, homes for sale or student accommodation across Edinburgh
- More effort is required to reduce length of time homes are empty, whilst ensuring they are of a high standard
- The local Edindex Common Housing Register is not as open to all as it should be and some people find it hard to use, therefore may be homeless, in temporary accommodation / B and B's for too long
- Use of Private rented sector to house people who should get social housing needs to be reduced – this is not affordable and increases wealth of individual rather than providing good quality homes to people who need them
- CEC needs to increase number of empty homes brought back into use to provide homes for people in need
- Accommodation offered to homeless people is not always in a good condition.

Communication

- There is an assumption that people have access to and can use a computer, with advice to refer to website and some surveys online. This means some people will not be able to access information and good communications
- Some telephone options advise tenants to see website, this is not helpful to people who do not have access to or are able to use computer
- Sometimes there is a limited response to emails
- Trying to get in touch with relevant Housing Officer has been very difficult both pre and post pandemic
- In some areas there has been limited support from CEC to develop Tenant Group / community projects.

Participation

- The Charter and Tenant Participation (TP) gives tenants a voice – but it not always listened to
- CEC performance is lower than other landlords as per the Annual Return on the Charter and Annual Report to Tenants – this is a concern.

Equalities

- The size and location of Edinburgh and its locality offices, means some tenants feel left out or forgotten about.

Estate Management, Anti-Social Behaviour, Neighbour Nuisance and Tenancy Disputes

- Timescales to address issues, make improvements, and provide facilities locally are often too long and can lead to instances of Anti Social Behaviour, particularly among young children
- There has been poor estate management in Edinburgh, especially recently with regard to grass cutting and bin uplifts.

Other Customers

- In some areas throughout Scotland, the travelling community still face ongoing discrimination.

2.4 How do you think the Charter has led to improvements with tenant involvement, participation or scrutiny?

- There is increased TP throughout Scotland with more tenants becoming involved in decisions that affect them
- TP and influence at local levels has improved in some areas such as through locality meetings, joint tenant / staff walkabouts
- TP with ETF subgroups such as High Flats Group and Stair Cleaning Project Board has led to service improvements
- There have been a number of brilliant examples of tenant scrutiny in Edinburgh. This includes the Tenant Led Inspection (TLI) Groups, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Scrutiny Group and Housing Service Improvement Plan (HSIP) Group
- What about tenants that don't have an RTO in their area or who know about ETF? How can they be represented?
- There is uncertainty if the recommendations made in TLIs and scrutiny exercises have been acted upon
- The pandemic means there have been less meetings, therefore less opportunities to influence services and landlord activities.

2.5 How do you think the Charter has led to improvements in repairs, maintenance and improvements?

- There have been some improvements, such as new kitchens, bathrooms / fire doors etc
- Some improvements have been made in repairs responses, timescales and component replacements, however the pandemic has recently slowed down this progress

- The Right to Repair is in place. When used appropriately, it's very effective. However more information is needed on who is eligible for this service and how can it be better advertised?
- Some ETF members consider that wider CEC issues and activities such as the trams and roads has led to housing "taken a bit of a back seat"
- Repairs to render and cladding have not improved
- Repairs are still not being completed to an acceptable standard
- There has been an increased use of contractors/sub contractors to carry out the work within Edinburgh without seeing any overall improvements
- There is a poor customer service from Repairs Direct
- Many tenants don't know if CEC's current Repairs Policy is up to date and if not when will it be updated?
- There is a lack of communication between departments within CEC, i.e Call Centre and Housing Property.

2.6 How do you think the Charter has led to improvements in value for money, rents and service charges – including how tenants are involved in decisions about this?

- Rent freeze for CEC tenants for one year and evictions temporarily ceased gave those struggling to pay their rent a bit of respite
- Inconsistent involvement of tenants in helping with budget consultations. Works well in some areas but not in others
- Some landlords are charging Consumer Price Index for rents, whereas others are charging Retail Price Index. This creates a sense of confusion
- Tenants on housing benefit feel they are discriminated against, compared to a tenant who pays full rent
- Inconsistences on rents between landlords, still not affordable for many tenants across Scotland
- Many tenants living in Edinburgh don't feel they are getting value for money in terms of the rent they pay
- CEC needs to provide more information and seek tenants' views more re:
 - Rents and service charge decisions, expenditure, increases etc.
 - How tenants know and understand if their rent money is being spent correctly.

2.7 Is there anything you think should be added to the Charter to continue to improve landlord services to tenants and other customers?

- More tenant involvement in designing the Charter and evaluating standards and results as well
- Improvements to how landlords should advise tenants of feedback and its impact is needed
- Customer satisfaction should be the focus
- First time fix needs further clarification as some repairs are not fully completed on the first visit.

Respondent Information Form

Please note this form must be completed and returned with your response.

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<https://beta.gov.scot/privacy/>

Are you responding as an individual or organisation?

- Individual
- Organisation

Full name or organisation's name

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