

Report

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Report to:	Housing and Technical Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	16 September 2009
Report by:	Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

Subject:	Inspection of South Lanarkshire Council's Housing and Homelessness Services by the Scottish Housing Regulator
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ advise Committee of the forthcoming inspection of the Council's Housing and Homelessness Service by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) anticipated in November 2010.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the forthcoming Inspection and provisional date be noted.
- (2) that a briefing session be arranged for elected members when the date for inspection is known.
- (3) that the outcome of the inspection and any subsequent improvement actions required will be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee for consideration.

3. Background

- 3.1. Under powers contained within the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) regulates registered social landlords (RSLs) and the landlord and homelessness functions of local authorities. The main purpose of the regulator is to ensure that the interests of tenants and other service users are protected and that housing stock and services are of good quality and provide value for money. The Scottish Housing Regulator was established in April 2008 to perform the regulatory functions previously carried out by Communities Scotland.
- 3.2. The Council was one of the first local authorities to pilot local authority inspections in 2001 and following that inspection was advised that it would be re-inspected at the end of the cycle. The Council has now been advised that a full baseline inspection will be carried out with a provisional date of November 2009.
- 3.3. In light of experience and a focus on reducing the burdens on authorities, the nature of regulation has changed over the last five years and this will continue to evolve under the emerging Best Value 2 proposals for more streamlined and risk based joint scrutiny by all bodies involved in regulating and inspecting local authority services. In future this will involve a more targeted and risk based approach, replacing baseline inspections and scrutiny of all aspects of the service.

- 3.4. In advance of these likely changes, the Scottish Housing Regulator published a report at the end of July 2009, "Social Landlords in Scotland: Shaping up for Improvement" which set out the outcome of inspections of Council and RSL landlords over the previous five years. The report notes that whilst just over half of housing services inspected were good or excellent, just under half (serving 320,000 households) were either poor or adequate, reflecting on the need for standards to be enhanced and the important role of scrutiny in helping to achieve this. The report contains valuable information for authorities seeking to improve housing services, and indeed for those preparing for inspection like ourselves. The report will be helpful to the Council in the pre-inspection process and not only as a checklist against which our own services can be assessed, but as background information for the members' briefing sessions which will precede the SHR inspection. A copy of the report is available from the SHR website or on request. Hard copies have been placed in the members' areas.
- 3.5. This inspection of the Council's housing and homelessness service will be the last of the baseline inspections carried out before the new arrangements come into place in 2010. The report on the draft Housing Bill on the Committee's agenda sets out some of the specific proposals for modernising the role of the Scottish Housing Regulator.
- 3.6. This report sets out what is likely to be involved in the forthcoming inspection and outline arrangements for briefing members of the Committee.

4. Nature of the Inspection

- 4.1. The SHR has set out a number of standards in relation to key housing and homelessness targets against which it is able to judge the extent to which services meet these and the expectations of service users.
- 4.2. In preparation for the inspection, the Council must complete a submission which sets out a profile of the organisation and an assessment of how well the Council believes it is performing against key standards in housing management, property and asset management and homelessness services. In addition, the submission sets out how the Council is meeting its obligations in terms of a range of cross cutting issues including leadership, strategic and operational planning, customer involvement, equalities, value for money and continuous improvement.
- 4.3. The Council has not yet received formal notification, but will have 4 weeks from then to complete the submission and, thereafter, the SHR will discuss the need for any further information or clarification and will arrange an 'on site' inspection around 6 weeks after the submission is received.
- 4.4. The Inspection will assess:-
 - ◆ how good the organisation, services or areas are; and
 - ◆ how well the organisation, the services or areas are being managed for improvement
- 4.5. The on site inspection focuses on assessing the services and usually takes place over a 3 week period. The Inspection Team which includes tenant assessors also meet with or seek views from tenants and tenants groups, elected members and partner organisations about the services being inspected. The on site inspection aims to assess the Council against its own self assessment contained in the submission document and as part of the process includes:-

- ◆ inspection mostly on site in all offices
- ◆ reality checking/discussion with (service users, staff, elected member)
- ◆ file/case checks – accuracy, consistency, follows procedures
- ◆ visiting estates
- ◆ checking the letting standard of void properties
- ◆ checking performance and verifying this
- ◆ checking how we do things and how well
- ◆ checking accessibility and equality across services
- ◆ checking outcomes for service users

4.6. Following this the SHR normally prepares a draft inspection report within 6 weeks from the end of the on site inspection. The report should be finalised a further 4 weeks after this to allow for time to discuss any issues raised by the Council. The final report will set out a grade for the three services inspected – housing management, property and asset management and homelessness. The report will include any recommendations for improvement and requirement for an improvement plan.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1. Housing and Technical Resources is continuing with preparations for inspection and is currently compiling the submission document and supporting evidence. As part of the inspection, the SHR will want to meet with staff at all levels, elected members, tenants and partner organisations. Some work has already begun to brief staff, and tenants through the Central Liaison Group. Further briefing sessions with key stakeholders, including elected members, will be arranged over the coming weeks and months to ensure familiarity with the inspection process.
- 5.2. A further report on the outcome of the Inspection including any recommendations for improvement will be presented to this Committee for consideration.

6. Employee Implications

- 6.1. None.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. None.

8. Other Implications

- 8.1. None.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 9.1. There is no requirement to carry out an impact assessment in terms of the proposals contained within this report.
- 9.2. Consultation has taken place with Council tenants and residents on the Central Liaison Group.

Jim Hayton
Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

18 August 2009

Link(s) to Council Objectives and Values

- ◆ Improve the quality, access and availability of housing
- ◆ Accountable, effective and efficient

Previous References

None

List of Background Papers

Social Landlords in Scotland: Shaping up for improvement, July 2009

[Published report](#)

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

Mike Wood, Strategy and Development Manager

Ext: 4034 (Tel: 01698 454034)

E-mail: mike.wood@southlanarkshire.gov.uk

Cameron Mitchell, Policy Manager

Ext: 2256 (Tel: 01698 452256)

E-mail: cameron.mitchell@southlanarkshire.gov.uk