

Report

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Report to:	Housing and Technical Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	8 December 2010
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 on the outcome of the inspection of the Council's Housing and Homelessness Service carried out during 2010 by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR).

2. Recommendation(s)

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

- (1) that the outcome of the Inspection be noted

3. Background

3.1 The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) regulates registered social landlords (RSLs) and the landlord and homelessness functions of local authorities under powers contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. 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 South Lanarkshire 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 to inspect all 32 local authority landlords. Each authority inspected has had a baseline assessment which graded services. In future, following the Crerar Review and Best Value refinements, the inspection regime will be more risk based and targeted.

3.3 The Council was notified that it would receive a full baseline inspection of its services in September 2009 and was required to produce a detailed inspection submission in November 2009.

3.4 This submission set out how well the Council believed it was performing against key standards in housing management, property and asset management and homelessness services. In addition, the submission set out how the Council was meeting its obligations in terms of a range of cross cutting issues including leadership, strategic and operational planning, customer involvement, equalities, and value for money and continuous improvement.

- 3.5 The full inspection of services on site commenced on 22 February 2010 and concluded on 15 March 2010. The final report which was published by the Scottish Housing Regulator in October 2010 set out a detailed assessment of the Council's key housing services and this report summarises the outcomes of the inspection.

4. Focus of the Inspection

- 4.1. The SHR has set out a number of standards in relation to key housing and homelessness services against which it is able to judge the extent to which services meet these and the expectations of service users.

The Inspection assessed:-

- ◆ how good the organisation, services or areas are, and
- ◆ how well the organisation, the services or areas are being managed for improvement

As part of the inspection, the team which included tenant assessors met with tenants and tenants groups, elected members, partner organisations about the services being inspected. The 'on site' inspection reviewed the Council's performance against its own self assessment and included:-

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

- 4.4 The final report set out a grade for the three services inspected – housing management, property and asset management and homelessness based on this assessment.

5. Outcome of Inspection

- 5.1 The final report published in October 2010, assessed the Council's services as follows:-

- ◆ **Housing Management** 'A' grade - excellent performance
- ◆ **Asset Management and Repairs** 'A' grade - excellent performance
- ◆ **Homelessness** 'C' grade - fair performance

- 5.2 The overall assessment outlined that South Lanarkshire Council's housing service has a number of significant strengths in its delivery of services. The SHR concluded that the Council has an excellent approach to managing its tenancies and dealing with anti-social behaviour, it is excellent at managing and delivering its capital programme and at carrying out repairs on target. Its homelessness service offers a range of support and the Council has developed many initiatives for preventing homelessness.

- 5.3 The Council is also recognised for its track record of consistently high levels of performance across its housing services and for its culture and approach to continuous improvement. The report cites the Council's excellent approach to staff training and development and its strong strategic planning processes along with a positive approach to equalities.
- 5.4 The report identifies some areas for improvement. In Housing management, it notes the need for some work to refine its lettings process and local lettings initiatives. In Asset management, it notes the need for a medium term plan for its capital programme and some work to further increase satisfaction with aspects of the response repairs service. In Homelessness, the report identifies a number of areas for improvement including; the Council's continued reliance on Bed and Breakfast accommodation, high number of out of area placements, and it notes that the Council doesn't always meet its duty to provide accommodation, nor is it always consistent in decision making and level of choice it provides to homeless applicants.
- 5.5 The Council identified these areas for improvement and has already submitted plans for improvement to the SHR as part of the process of concluding the report. The inspection will form part of the joint national scrutiny framework and the SHR will assess the Council's progress in achieving improvements in partnership with other scrutiny bodies through the national framework.

6. Summary

- 6.1 The inspection report provides an excellent assessment of the Council's housing services and the grades compare favourably with other local authorities. The report also commended the hard work, commitment and dedication of staff in delivering its services. The result also provides a strong platform to build for continued improvement of the Council's housing services.
- 6.2 The full South Lanarkshire Council report along with other Scottish local authorities inspection reports is available on the Scottish Housing Regulator's website.
- 6.3 The Council will publicise the results of the Inspection to its tenants and other stakeholders through the Housing News, The Reporter and the web site.

7. Employee Implications

- 7.1 None.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 None.

9. Other Implications

- 9.1 There are no implications for sustainability or risk in terms of the information contained within this report.

10. Equalities Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 10.1 This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and, therefore, no impact assessment is required.
- 10.2 No consultation was required in terms of the information contained within this report.

Lindsay Freeland
Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

15 November 2010

Link(s) to Council Values/Improvement Themes/Objectives

- ◆ Objective 1: Improve the quality, access and availability of housing
- ◆ Value 5: Accountable, effective and efficient

Previous References

- ◆ Housing and Technical Resources Committee, 25 November 2009

List of Background Papers

- ◆ SHR Inspection report, October 2010

Contact for Further Information

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

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