Openness & Accessibility in Scottish Social Housing

A thematic inquiry

September 2016

About Us

We are the independent Regulator of just under 200 social landlords – 159 Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and 32 local authorities. We are led by a Board of non-executive members and directly accountable to the Scottish Parliament.

Our one objective is **to safeguard and promote the interests of:**

- nearly 610,000 **tenants** who live in homes provided by social landlords;
- around 118,000 **owners** who receive services from social landlords;
- around 40,000 **people and their families** who may be homeless and seek help from local authorities; and
- over 2,000 **Gypsy/Travellers** who can use official sites provided by social landlords.

Our role is to gather, monitor, assess and report on social landlords' performance of housing activities and RSLs' financial well-being and standards of governance, and to intervene where appropriate to achieve our objective. We also keep a public register of social landlords.

You can see more on how we regulate social landlords in our published Regulatory Framework available on our website.

The Scottish Government's Social Housing Charter sets out the standards and outcomes which social landlords should aim to achieve. We monitor, assess and report landlords' performance against the Charter, through our regulatory assessments, published analysis and thematic work.

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Overview

Introduction

1. This report assesses how open and accessible social landlords are to their tenants and other service users. When considering openness we looked at whether social landlords are open in giving tenants and other customers information about the landlord, the services it provides, and about how and why it makes decisions. We considered accessibility in its broadest sense, so we looked at how easy it was for tenants and other customers to access social landlords' offices, and information and services, in a way that met their needs. Our inquiry also looked at how social landlords ensure that tenants and other customers can communicate with them.

2. Our inquiry gathered evidence from in-depth case studies of 14 social landlords, mystery shopping by our tenant assessors, views from our National Panel of Tenants and Service Users, and analysis of social landlords' data submitted during 2013-2016 in the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC). Our report includes positive practice highlighted to us by landlords.

Openness and accessibility in Scottish Social Housing

3. The Scottish Government, through the Scottish Social Housing Charter (the Charter), sets outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities. *Charter Outcome 2: Communication* requires social landlords to 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."

4. We require social landlords to report to us annually the level of satisfaction amongst their tenants with how their landlord keeps them informed about its services and decisions.

5. Our Regulatory Framework sets out our Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management which RSLs must comply with. This states that an RSL must be open and accountable for what it does and that it understands and takes account of the needs and priorities of its tenants, service users and stakeholders.

6. Local authorities have separate statutory obligations in the Local Government (access to information) Act 1985 and The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 to publish certain information about how they make decisions.

Main findings

7. Tenant satisfaction with being kept informed about services and decisions is high overall at just over 90%. We found all landlords in our case studies asked tenants and customers about their communication needs and preferences and used this to inform what communication methods they offered. All landlords were innovative and sensitive in offering a range of ways to respond to different communication needs and preferences.

8.	National Panel members told us they valued having multiple communication options and also valued the landlord ensuring that each communication method is equally effective. We found all landlords used various methods to communicate and were flexible in taking account of customers' needs. We also found some landlords were not always ensuring a similar effective quality of response to different communication methods.

9.	While website, phone and other access methods are important, customers sometimes need to go to the landlord's office. Our tenant assessors found that the majority of landlords they visited provided good external access to their offices and many, though not all, had good access within the office.

10.	We found all case study landlords were aware of potential translation and language barriers. They provided support such as access to translation services and information available in community languages. Panel members expressed a generally positive view about landlords' sensitivity to language use and cultural background.

11.	Where landlords did not deliver services directly or this was out-of-hours they were not always aware of whether these services are as easy to access for customers with particular needs. We also found support was not always as quickly available.

12.	We found landlords worked in a variety of ways with tenants to provide information about performance and decision-making. The majority of landlords were involving tenants in the design of their Charter report content.

13.	We saw landlords provided a range of information about their services but the information available varied and sometimes was not always up-to-date. Some did not meet the requirement to use their website to report progress on meeting the Charter.

14.	RSLs provided limited information on their websites about their governing body's membership, activities and decisions. Local authorities routinely published easy-to-access details about their committee arrangements and decisions.

Recommendations

15.	**We recommend that social landlords:**

»	ensure they understand tenants' communications preferences and needs and the potential barriers to communication and accessing services;
»	make sure they deliver similar service standards whatever the communications method used and whether in, or out, of office hours;
»	consider all ways to make reasonable physical alterations externally and internally to improve access to and within their offices;
»	where others deliver services for them, make sure that service users' needs are met to the same standard as their own directly-delivered services;
»	provide good quality, up-to-date information whatever communication method is used;
»	where they have a website, use it to report progress in meeting the Charter as well as using other appropriate ways of providing information;
»	involve tenants in designing the format and content of their Charter report; and
»	(RSLs) make information available about the governing body, how it makes decisions, and what decisions it takes.

About this thematic inquiry

16.   There were five main strands to our inquiry:

Focus groups

Interviews with members of our National Panel of Tenants & Service Users

Desk top information

Information assessments of 11 RSLs & 3 local authorities

Mystery shopping

By our tenant assessors to the case study landlords

Follow up discussions with case study landlords

Analysis of ARCdata 2013/16

17.   We established the National Panel in 2013 as a way to help us understand tenants' and service users' opinions and experiences of using social landlords' services. Using focus groups, individual interviews and surveys we asked the panel to give us views on landlords' openness and accessibility.

18.   We reviewed information about 14 case study landlords. We included a range of different landlords in our thematic for example some rural, some urban, and a mix of large and smaller landlords. We analysed information we held about the landlords and reviewed their websites. We also asked landlords a number of supplementary questions to check our understanding and gather further evidence where necessary.

Our 14 case study landlords

- Aberdeen City Council
- Larkfield Housing Association
- Arklet Housing Association
- Ayrshire Housing
- City of Edinburgh Council
- Forth Housing Association
- Govanhill Housing Association

- Horizon Housing Association
- Moray Council
- Oak Tree Housing Association
- Ochil View Housing Association
- Rural Stirling Housing Association
- Trust Housing Association
- Weslo Housing Management

19.   Our tenant assessors tested accessibility and communication at the case study landlords. This included how easy it was to get to the landlords' offices, how accessible the offices were once inside, and what alterations or adjustments had been made for disability and language use. They also tested how responsive landlords were to requests for information about accessing services where people have different needs. Queries were in person, by telephone and by email.

20.	We have not reported on individual case study landlords. We provided each landlord with feedback following our mystery shopping and inquiry work.

21.	Where a landlord has told us about positive practice we highlight this and name the landlord. We have not directly assessed the reported practice.

Openness and accessibility in Scottish social housing

Context

22.	In this section we provide some statistical data about the profile of the social housing sector's tenants and other customers and the legislative requirements on landlords to be open. We used this contextual information to inform our findings and recommendations.

23.	The Scottish Household Survey 2014 (SHS) reports housing association properties are more likely than any other tenure to be located in the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland. Two-fifths of local authority properties are located in the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland.

24.	Households in the 20% most deprived areas are less likely to have internet access at home compared to the rest of Scotland (69% compared with 83%, respectively). However this still shows nearly seven in every ten households in deprived areas have internet access at home.

25.	The SHS reports that in the social rented sector:
    • 12% of adults are permanently sick or disabled compared to four per cent in Scotland as a whole.
    • social rented households are more likely to contain someone with a long-term condition compared to owner occupier households (58% compared to 35%) or private rented households (22%).

26.	The following table shows the number of existing tenants, new tenants and housing list applicants by ethnicity and disability reported to us in the most recent ARC returns. It shows:

    • Nearly 11% of existing tenants, and nearly 16% of people on housing lists, considered themselves to have a disability;
    • About 2% of existing tenants, and nearly 5% of applicants on housing lists, were from minority ethnic groups;
    • Social landlords do not know the equalities characteristics of 31% of their tenants and almost 19% of housing list applicants, so the number of tenants and applicants from a minority ethnic group could be much higher; and
    • The breakdown of tenants and applicants who identify themselves as white shows the diversity within this category.

Equality characteristics by population type, ethnicity and disability (%) 2015/16

Equality characteristics	Existing tenants % of total	New tenants % of total	Housing list % of total
White – Scottish	56.9%	65.0%	65.5%
White - Other British	5.8%	5.9%	4.9%
White – Irish	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%
White - Gypsy/traveller	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
White – Polish	1.1%	2.5%	2.6%
White - Other background	2.8%	2.4%	3.2%
White	66.9%	76.1%	76.6%
Mixed/multiple ethnicity	0.1%	0.2%	0.4%
Asian	0.7%	1.0%	1.5%
Black	0.7%	1.3%	1.6%
Other ethnicity	0.6%	1.3%	0.9%
Unknown	31.0%	20.1%	18.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total minus unknown	-	-	-
Disabled	10.7%	12.0%	15.9%

Source: ARC submissions 2015/16

27. Scotland's 2011 Census also found that of people aged three and over in Scotland:
    - Just over 1% were unable to speak English well or at all;
    - 93% were reported as only using English at home;
    - 1% used Polish at home; and
    - 0.2% reported using British Sign Language.

28. Given the profile of tenants and other customers of social landlords it is particularly important that social landlords understand and take account of the needs of their tenants and other customers when planning and delivering their services.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter

29. The Scottish Parliament through the Charter has set out outcomes and standards that tenants and other customers can expect from social landlords. The Charter requires that:

> *"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."*
>
> *Scottish Social Housing Charter Outcome 2: Communication*

30.   One of the aims of the Charter is to give tenants access to information about their landlord's performance so that tenants can better understand their landlord's performance and compare it with that of other landlords. We make a range of information available for tenants and others and this helps to empower tenants to scrutinise their own landlord's performance and hold it to account.

Regulation and legislation

31.   Various legislative and regulatory provisions require social landlords to publish or provide certain information. Some requirements apply to all social landlords; some apply only to RSLs or only to local authorities.

32.   RSLs must comply with the Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management. These require RSLs to be open and accountable for what they do, publish information about their activities and wherever possible agree to requests for information about the work of the governing body and the RSL. It is a constitutional requirement for RSLs to make the names of their governing body members publicly accessible.

33.   Local authorities have separate statutory obligations to publish certain information. The Local Government (access to information) Act 1985 requires local authorities to make their council meetings reports and papers publically available.

34.   The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) gives everyone the right to ask for any information held by a Scottish public authority. This includes information about how they make decisions. Local authorities are subject to the Act, RSLs are not.

35.   Our Regulatory Framework requires landlords, when reporting on their performance, to use a style and format that is accessible for tenants and other service users, using plain and jargon-free language, and using appropriate ways of getting performance information to them. It emphasises the importance of tenants being involved in the scrutiny of their landlord's Charter performance and that landlords should agree their approach with tenants.

36.   Every year we publish a report for each landlord with key information from its ARC. We require landlords to make this landlord report available in appropriate ways to all of their tenants. By October each year landlords must also report to their tenants on their progress in achieving the Charter outcomes. If a landlord has a website it should use this to report its performance, as well as using other appropriate ways of getting information to tenants and other service users.

37.   The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires social landlords to consult with tenants when they decide to make changes to their housing management, repairs and maintenance policies that will affect tenants. It also requires landlords to publish their allocations policies.

Our findings

"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."

Scottish Social Housing Charter Outcome 2: Communication

Finding it easy to communicate with their landlord

38. Landlords need to know what their tenants' and customers' communication needs and preferences are. Collecting and analysing good data on this is a key first step in the process. All the case study landlords told us they collected information on communication needs. They updated this regularly to capture changes over time. The sources included:
    - tenant satisfaction surveys and censuses;
    - work to prepare for the introduction of welfare reform;
    - advice agencies and other third parties;
    - tenancy sign-up meetings recording tenants' support needs and communication preferences;
    - day to day contact; and
    - information from carers/advocates and support providers where appropriate.

39. Some landlords analysed and used their data to inform their communication reviews. Landlords were increasingly using technology to communicate with service users as access to smart phones, tablets and computers increases. One landlord had introduced community wardens to provide face to face communication about services to tenants for whom English is a second language. Another landlord now delivers most of its services using phone contact.

40. When we spoke with the case study landlords they were aware of the effect factors such as health and economic circumstances can have on tenants' and other customers' communication preferences.

41. Our National Panel research shows that Panel members value having multiple communication options. Few of the Panel participants told us their disability/condition caused difficulty for them in communicating. The research suggested partly this was because the landlord provided communication options that suited their needs.

42. We found the case study landlords used various ways to communicate. This depended on what they wanted to communicate, and took account of customers' needs. As well as written correspondence and telephone contact this included:
    - face to face conversations during home visits, interviews and support work. This was seen as particularly appropriate in building trust where there were sensitive or complex issues and where there are literacy issues;
    - texting and email;
    - websites providing business information, policies, consultations and newsletters;
    - social media for news updates, complaints and queries;
    - CD format recordings and braille email software; and
    - interactive applications for tablets, smart phones and websites including for reporting repairs.

43. The National Panel research suggests landlords using communications flexibly, for example changing between telephone and face to face, added to Panel members viewing them as responsive. This is important as telephone contact and emails were viewed as less responsive to more complex needs and more difficult for users who required support.

> ✅ **Positive practice**
>
> Trust HA is working with its Customer Panel to improve communication with new residents. One outcome is a proposal to have tenants as a "welcome team" to help provide information about the softer aspects of having a new tenancy for example, in some developments, using the laundry. The aim is to provide support and friendship to improve resilience for new tenants who may be experiencing upheaval and life change when they move in.

44. The methods landlords offer need to be accessible for tenants and other customers with different needs. All the landlords in our case studies had policy statements on their approach to accessibility. This was either a single policy or across policy areas such as equalities or communications.

45. To test the accessibility of offices, our tenant assessors carried out mystery shopping visits to the case study landlords. They found the majority provided good external access to their offices. Landlords made adaptations such as providing ramps and electric doors where necessary to improve access. External access was limited for four landlords. Some landlords with older city centre offices told us they were restricted in the changes they could make as the buildings were less able to be adapted and nearby car-parking was less available.

46. Once inside the offices the tenant assessors found access was good. Again the landlords had made adjustments such as lowered reception desks, different signage formats, hearing loop and translation services and accessible toilets. The tenant assessors reported a number of these modifications missing in four case study landlords.

47. Our National Panel research indicated that those with disabilities are more likely to have problems in getting to their landlord's offices rather than accessibility difficulties once inside. Because of this it was important for those with more restrictive disabilities that their landlord offered home visits.

48. We found case study landlords were responsive, offering home or hospital visits where people have difficulties coming to their offices. For some landlords their service was largely based on personal contact outside the office. One example was a national sheltered housing provider with a decentralised service using local staff wardens as the main contact point.

49. Landlords we spoke to were sensitive to how office opening hours may affect accessibility for service users. The majority of landlords told us they offered home visits or late telephone calls where the opening hours did not suit the customer. Some landlords had offered a mid-week, late-opening evening in response to tenants' comments. For some this was very successful; others told us they had not extended their trial period because it was not well used.

> **✓ Positive practice**
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> **Ayrshire Housing** focuses on personal engagement with the customer. It carries out early evening meetings and home visits. This helps to make its services and communications more accessible to tenants and other customers who prefer not to attend its office or would have difficulty doing so during set office hours.
>
> **Ochil View HA** offers a telephone callback service. This was suggested by tenants. Tenants and other customers can book a specific time for staff to phone that suits them. This ensures the service is flexible to individuals' other commitments.

50. Our tenant assessors found that all the case study landlords could offer private interviews. This provides security and confidentiality for customers to discuss their circumstances without being seen or overheard. The landlords could also arrange for customers to have an interview with someone of the same gender. Though for some the appointment had to be booked in advance rather than having immediate availability.

51. Our tenant assessors found landlords made information available in a range of print size options, languages and formats to meet different needs. This included email, CD and smart technology as well as paper formats.

52. We found all case study landlords were aware of potential translation and language barriers. They provided support such as access to translation services and information available in community languages. Landlords delivered these services differently depending on their assessment of demand. Some had permanent staff members who spoke community languages, others used call-up translators when needed. The majority of landlords were members of "Happy to Translate" or used online technology to enable text to be translated quickly on the websites or in some cases on smart phones. Views from our National Panel were generally positive about the extent to which landlords are sensitive to participants' language use and cultural background.

Positive practice

Weslo Housing Management's website is supported by 'BrowseAloud'. This service adds speech, reading and translation support to its website, facilitating access and participation for people with print disabilities, dyslexia, low literacy, mild visual impairments or with English as a second language.

Govanhill HA has been involved in the development of the Happy to Translate application for smartphones to make it easier and quicker for tenants and other customers to interact and communicate. The application assists in the identification of the language assistance required and provides immediate translation of key sentences to enable communication in many of the community languages spoken in its area of operation. The landlord recognised that many of its tenants and customers had access to smart technology and preferred text communication. The Association's new computer system will ensure tenants and other customers whose preferred communication language is not English can receive the same level of access to service information for example, updates on the progress with repairs requests through translated texts or emails to their phones.

53.   Where landlords use another organisation such as a contractor to deliver services we expect them to make sure that these services are just as easy to access as those delivered directly. We found the case study landlords were not always aware of how well they were meeting needs. We also found support such as translation services was not always as quickly available for requests made outwith office opening hours, or where services were delivered by another agency. Our tenant assessors received a poor response when they tested access for out-of-hours repairs phone lines for someone with hearing difficulties.

✓ **Positive practice**

Trust HA provides its staff with easily accessible guidance to use when providing services to tenants and other customers with different needs such as dyslexia. The guidance was designed jointly with user groups and provides an immediate resource for all staff in the organisation to help them respond appropriately to different needs and help provide consistent customer service standards.

Oak Tree HA uses Inverclyde Common Housing Register. This is a jointly run choice based letting system. It offers a range of support to applicants by providing:
- the ability for applicants to nominate someone to act on their behalf in making bids or enquiries about the application information in accessible formats.
- alternative arrangements where people have difficulty in finding out about the properties which are advertised each week or in registering interest.
- a recorded telephone message of all the available ICHR properties.
- access to support through other services such as Inverclyde Council on Disability, digital support through the Future Skills project, Inverclyde Centre for Independent Living, the Homeless Service and the Inverclyde Community Health & Care Partnership.

✓ **Positive practice**

> **Govanhill HA** makes sure contractors or consultants carrying out work for it are able to provide translation services. It asks whether they can provide "Happy to Translate" as a pre-qualification question when it procures contractor and consultant services.

54. Our National Panel research shows that where a landlord uses a range of communication methods, Panel members value the landlord ensuring each method is equally effective. We asked the tenant assessors to test the speed and quality of landlords' responses by requesting information by email, in person and by telephone. We found there were differences across the different methods:
   - in one case for a telephone query the tenant assessor was told to call back twice and did not have their query answered.
   - tenant assessors emailed eight landlords to ask how to report an emergency out of hours if you are hard of hearing; five landlords did not reply.
   - tenant assessors asked for hard-copy large-print application forms in person at eleven landlords. Four landlords were able to provide it immediately. One landlord asked the tenant to telephone the request. In the remaining six cases the form was to be sent out later.

55. Most landlords confirmed that they did not find it difficult to support their communications either in money or staff time. Where the landlords had consulted their tenants about the resources put into communications the tenants had been supportive. One landlord did tell us that without additional external funding its communication projects would be difficult to sustain.

56. Some RSLs worked together informally in geographic areas or formally within a group to provide resources such as dedicated staff which may be more difficult for one landlord to support. Local authorities in particular used economies of scale across council services to provide a wider range of communications about the housing service.

👍 **We recommend that landlords**

» ensure they understand tenants' communications preferences and needs and the potential barriers to communication and accessing services;
» make sure they deliver similar service standards whatever the communications method used and whether in, or out, of office hours;
» consider all ways to make reasonable physical alterations, externally and internally, to improve access to and within their offices;
» where others deliver services for them, make sure that service users' needs are met to the same standard as their own directly-delivered services.

Getting the information they need about their landlord and its decision making

57.   We reviewed how open the case study landlords were in providing information about their performance in delivering housing services and about how and why they make decisions.

58.   Charter data confirms that overall, just over 90% of tenants are satisfied with how their landlord keeps them informed.   Our analysis confirms that this is the top ranked indicator most closely related to overall tenant satisfaction.

59.   Having a website provides a good way to communicate to tenants, customers and other stakeholders. All the case study landlords used websites in their communication strategies. This is positive given the increase in internet access. The information available varied. Generally the websites gave information about the landlord, services such as repairs, applying for a home and how to make a complaint. Most provided some policies, performance information and newsletters. We found on some websites the information was not always kept up to date, for example older landlord reports.

60.   While we do not tell RSLs how to make governance information available, publishing it on a website is a good way to be open. We found the case study RSLs provided limited information on their websites about their governing bodies and how and why they make decisions.

61.   RSLs are required to make governing body members' names publicly accessible. We tested how easy it was to find these on the eleven case study RSLs' websites. Only six RSLs published governing body member names on their websites. Some were contained in documents such as annual reports or newsletters and were not easily found on the site. The RSL landlords did not publish other information about governing body members' accountability such as registers of interest.

62.   We assessed how easy it was to get information about how and why landlords make decisions. Making minutes of governing body meetings easily available is a good way for a RSL to be open and accountable about decisions, both to its tenants and the wider public. Only two case study RSLs published governing body minutes or summary notes on their websites. Four RSLs make minutes available on request and two others aim to be open but do not specifically reference their minutes. While this is positive, we expect a governing body to be open about what it does and publish information about its activities.

63.   Local authorities have statutory obligations to publish information about how they make decisions. The case study local authorities all routinely published up to date committee meeting agendas and minutes. These were easy to access on their websites. Other information available included committee remits/terms of reference, committee membership, attendance and declarations of interest.

✅ Positive practice

Ochil View HA has created a tenant zone on its website. This contains tenant information in one place and has a search facility for current and previous consultations and minutes of residents' groups. There is also information on completed consultations and an explanation of what the final outcome decision was and why.

64.   We found landlords use different ways to make information available to tenants about their decisions. Some RSLs summarised their governing body's key decisions in other formats such as tenant newsletters. And they asked tenant groups to advise them on what content would be of interest to tenants as well as the appropriate style and language. One landlord used a "tenant approved" standard for its publications.

65.   Two landlords have developed the role of tenants and other customers in more detailed scrutiny of their services. This gave tenants a better understanding of how and why the landlord made decisions about delivering services and the opportunity to influence these.

> **✓ Positive practice**
>
> **Aberdeen City Council** as part of its approach to encouraging tenant participation and scrutiny supported a group of tenants with access to independent guidance, information and funding. Tenants were able to suggest service improvements to ways of communication, for instance having an "open door" policy, consistent opening hours, using a variety of communication methods to contact/inform tenants, and having hearing induction systems available in every office.

66.   Our National Panel results indicate that the majority of Panel members feel reasonably well informed about how their landlord is performing. Most had seen information in the last year on their landlord's performance and 80% found this very or fairly useful.

67.   Every year we publish a report for each landlord with key information from its ARC. We require landlords to make this report available to all of their tenants in appropriate ways including on their website. The majority of the case study landlords' websites provided some information about the landlord report.

68.   By October each year landlords must report their progress in achieving the Charter outcomes and standards to their tenants. The Regulatory Framework states if a landlord has a website it should use this to report its performance, as well as using other appropriate ways. We found the case study landlords did not always meet the requirement to publish the information on their websites. Three landlords did not publish Charter performance information on their website. Of these, two had published the report on the website for 2013/14 but had not yet updated it. They did provide the information in a paper format to tenants.

69.   It is for landlords to decide their performance reporting format in discussion with tenants. We saw varying approaches to this. Almost all the landlords we spoke with asked tenant groups to give them advice and feedback on what is included in their performance report and how it is presented. One landlord told us it asked its tenant groups for advice on other areas but not about its publication content. Some case study landlords asked their tenants whether they preferred to receive the performance report by email or post. We saw website examples where landlords also published the full ARC, which is positive.

We recommend that landlords

»   provide good quality, up-to-date information whatever communication method is used;
»   where they have a website, use it to report progress in meeting the Charter as well as using other appropriate ways of providing information;
»   involve tenants in designing the format and content of their Charter report; and
»   (RSLs) make information available about the governing body, how it makes decisions, and what decisions it takes.

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Terms we use in this report

Annual Return on the Charter (ARC)	Each year all social landlords must provide us with information such as how many houses they own and data about particular performance indicators.
Governing body	The management committee or board of management of an RSL.
Happy to Translate	An initiative to improve the quality of life of people in Scotland who speak or read little English or who use a non-verbal language. Member organisations display a logo to indicate that they will provide language assistance in the form of confidential translation and interpretation.
Inquiry	The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 gives the Scottish Housing Regulator powers to obtain information and carry out inquiries. An inquiry can be used to get assurance about an issue, assess an issue or concern with a landlord, or scrutinise or investigate a landlord's performance.
Social landlord	These are registered social landlords (RSLs) such as housing associations and housing cooperatives, local authority landlords or a local authority which provides homelessness services.
Scottish Government	Housing policy in Scotland is the responsibility of the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government also collects housing and homelessness data.
Scottish Social Housing Charter	The Scottish Government's outcomes that social landlords should be achieving for their tenants, homeless people and other service users.
Tenant assessors	SHR has a group of tenants (now known as tenant advisors) who are a pool of independent, volunteer tenants who speak directly to tenants and test landlords' services.
Tenants and other customers	Tenants are those that currently live in a home owned and managed by a social landlord. Other customers are those that are not tenants but use services provided by social landlords such as Gypsy/Travellers, homeless people and homeowners who receive factoring services.