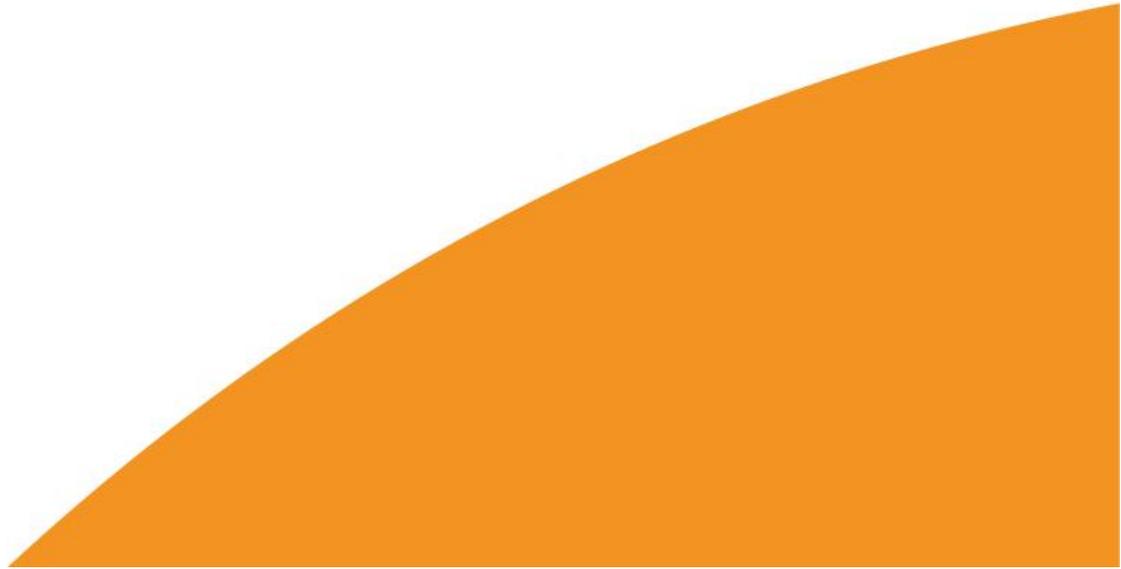




Muirhouse Housing Association Tenant Improvement Group

February 2017

“The Tenants Information Service is the leading organisation in Scotland promoting and inspiring innovative tenant participation practice. We achieve this by providing independent advice, support and training for tenants and landlords”.



Contents

- 1 Foreword**
- 2 Introducing the Tenant Improvement Group**
- 3 The Letting Standard Inspection Process**
- 4 Findings and recommendations**
- 5 Next Steps**

1 Foreword

Welcome to Muirhouse Tenant Improvement Groups (TIG) first scrutiny report. Over the last eight months the group have been reviewing the Letting Standard used by Muirhouse Housing Association (MHA).

TIG was launched in July 2016 and we have been working with MHA to make a difference to our housing services. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of MHA for participating in this worthwhile scrutiny review. Also to thank Ainan Groat (Housing Services Team Leader MHA) who has supported our group throughout this process. Last but not least we would like to thank the TIG members for all their voluntary time and commitment throughout this process.

2 Introducing the Tenant Improvement Group

In planning for the Scottish Social Housing Charter MHA formed a working group of tenant representatives to look at the role of tenants and service users in the scrutiny of housing services. The working group consisted of tenants who had expressed an interest in being involved in tenant scrutiny.

The working group undertook a number of training sessions on tenant scrutiny provided by the Tenants Information Service. The scrutiny programme provided a bespoke training and support programme to increase tenants understanding and knowledge of the following areas:

- The Scottish Social Housing Charter and the new regulatory arrangements;
- The role of tenants in the self-assessment of housing services;
- The role and remit of a Tenants Scrutiny Group;

- Practice examples of how tenants are involved in tenant scrutiny in Scotland and the wider UK;
- How to develop a Terms of Reference;
- How to develop a Code of Conduct.

TIG has eight members and has an agreed Terms of Reference which sets out what the group will do and how they will be supported by MHA.

The main role of TIG is:

- To independently review and scrutinise the performance of MHAs housing services to support service improvements
- To commission and review scrutiny activities through an agreed work programme and development of actions and improvement plans
- To make recommendations and report progress on actions to MHAs Senior Management Team and Board of Management
- To report to tenants and other service users of progress being made
- To review the Tenants Charter Report

The work of TIG is based on the following core values:

- Being accountable to tenants and service users
- Being transparent
- Reflecting the needs and aspirations of tenants and service users
- Respecting the decision making role of the board
- Making recommendations based on robust evidence and consideration of financial impact of these

Selecting our first task

Following completion of the training programme outlined above the group agreed that they would like to review MHAs Letting Standard and Void processes. This was based on feedback from group members, and the high level of performance currently being achieved by MHA in this area.

3 The Letting Standard Inspection Process

As part of the scrutiny activity we developed an action plan which outlined the work we would undertake to effectively scrutinise the service area. We worked with Alistair from the Tenants Information Service to do this. We agreed to carry out the following activities:

- Identify relevant legislation covering the service area
- Reviewing the existing letting standard used by MHA
- Reviewing lettings standards from other social landlords across Scotland to identify good practice
- Reviewing performance information in this area
- Reviewing costs associated with the service

- Reviewing complaints that have been received by MHA in relation to this service area
- Reviewing customer satisfaction figures relating to this service area
- Discussions with relevant officers who facilitate the service
- Visits to properties which were vacant and ready to be let

The group undertook each of these actions in turn and regularly reviewed the action plan to determine if each task was still relevant. Due to the small nature of complaints received in this area the group were only able to review one complaint that was loosely related to the service area in question.

4 Findings and recommendations

The TIG was clear that a key part of their role was taking into account the financial impact that any recommendations they may make would have. They considered this aspect throughout the process and the recommendations below are in the view of TIG all achievable within available budgets.

Based on the work undertaken the TIG would like to make the following recommendations to MHA for consideration.

Area impacted	Recommendation	Reason
Letting Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop leaflet with appropriate introduction that can be shared with potential tenants, and online. • Amend the wording to include 'we will ensure that' when talking about relevant standards. • Consider the use of pictures to show relevant standards. • Ensure the leaflet is prepared in easy to read language. 	This would help prospective tenants understand the standard of property to expect when they move into a MHA property. The group are keen to see pictures included but are happy to discuss this further with MHA.
Void Timescales	No recommendations in this area due to high performance.	TIG would like to see MHA maintain this performance and continue to monitor new tenant satisfaction to make sure high

		standards are being achieved. TIG would be concerned if MHA were to join Edindex that it may lead to a worsening performance in this area.
Void costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the value of the decoration allowance to ensure it is enough for a new tenant to do what it is intended for • Continue to monitor the volume of decorating done by MHA at the void stage • Enhance systems to ensure that cleaning work is carried out effectively at the void stage 	<p>The group were aware that the existing decoration allowance has remained the same for some time. They believe this may need to be updated to reflect existing costs.</p> <p>The group noted that decoration costs were a large part the void costs where it was required, and noted that a decoration allowance, while inconveniencing the incoming tenant, would be more cost effective for MHA. The group would like to discuss further the opportunities to develop this service.</p> <p>On the site visits group members noted along with the housing officer that the cleaning was not done to the standard expected.</p>
Minor repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve communication with tenants about future work to be undertaken 	The group felt this would assist with increasing tenant satisfaction as it improves the communication between MHA and new tenants.
New tenant information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an information sheet for new tenants which identifies how key features of the property work (heating system) • This could also incorporate a review of the energy supplier and available tariffs. 	<p>Group members felt that an information sheet would be helpful for tenants who were not used to different types of heating systems.</p> <p>The group noted comments from MHA officers that some tenants move into a property and do not assess whether the tariff they are on is the most cost effective. This could potentially save tenants a large sum of money.</p>

<p>Tenant satisfaction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review how tenant satisfaction information is gathered to ensure it accurately reflects tenants views 	<p>The group noted comments from officers that they were in effect asking tenants to comment on how the officer performed, and noted answers may be different if asked in a different way</p>
----------------------------	---	---

5 Next Steps

The TIG would welcome the opportunity to discuss this report with senior management and the board of management. We would like to work with MHA to develop an action plan which sets out when MHA intends to implement our recommendations, or where applicable, come back to us with options for discussion.

The TIG will shortly be carrying out a review of our first activity, to identify what worked well and what we will do differently in our next task. We will also be looking to identify our next service area for scrutiny and look forward to presenting our findings in due course.