



The Voice of Scotland's Housing Associations

# Social Housing in Scotland:

An Introduction for MPs and Staff



# Contents

- 3 About SFHA
- 4 What is Social Housing?
- 5 SFHA and our members
- 6 SFHA and our members continued
- 7 How do people get a social home?
- 8 How can I help my constituents with housing issues?
- 10 How can I work with a housing association in my area?
- 11 Contact us

**Around a quarter of Scotland's population lives in a social home. However 250,000 more are on a waiting list for one.**



# About SFHA

SFHA is the voice of Scotland's housing associations and co-operatives.

We work to strengthen the social housing sector in Scotland by influencing change and supporting our members.

We know that housing is one of the most common issues raised with MPs, so we have created this short guide to help you and your staff in assisting your constituents.



If you have any questions or we can help you in any way, please don't hesitate to **get in touch**.

# What is Social Housing?

Social housing is, essentially, rental accommodation which is owned and managed either by local authorities (LAs) or by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), i.e. housing associations and co-operatives.

Around a quarter of people in Scotland live in social housing, split evenly between local authorities and RSLs.<sup>1</sup> Some local authorities do not have any social housing of their own so depending on where your constituency is, RSLs may provide all the social housing in your area.

Housing associations are charities and not-for-profit organisations, some small and locally focused, others with homes right across Scotland. All surpluses are reinvested into maintaining affordable rents, offering services and wider support to tenants, and funding the affordable, high-quality housebuilding that Scotland desperately needs. The co-operative housing model is much the same except the governing board is made up exclusively of tenants.

Social housing offers affordable rents and secure, long-term tenancies, as well as other support for people with specialist, specific needs. Housing associations do all they can to support tenants experiencing challenges in their lives, whether it is difficulties in paying rent, being able to find a job, turning the heating on, or just having someone to chat and have a cup of tea with. You can find out more about the work they do to support their wider communities in our Thriving Places report.<sup>2</sup>




1. [www.gov.scot/publications/housing-statistics-2022-2023-key-trends-summary/pages/social-housing-stock](http://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-statistics-2022-2023-key-trends-summary/pages/social-housing-stock)
2. 115109.pdf

# SFHA and our members

We believe that everyone should have access to a good home in a thriving community, with a range of high quality, affordable, safe and accessible homes that meet people's changing needs and aspirations throughout their lives.

As social purpose organisations, housing associations and co-operatives are central to achieving this vision. Not only do they provide great homes, but our members act as community anchors with social justice built into their operating model. Our members serve some 600,000 tenants in every part of Scotland, from our urban centres to our most rural island communities.

Our members offer general accommodation and a whole range of specialist options, including accessible homes, homes for older people, and homes with embedded care support for people with additional support needs. Some housing associations specialise in particular forms of accommodation, while others offer a range of services to meet the needs of different people. Some of our members also act as factor for privately let properties or provide homes for Mid-Market Rent. These are homes aimed at low to middle income households, with rents slightly higher than those paid by social housing tenants but lower than the private rented sector.



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# SFHA and our members continued

Many housing associations seek to expand the number of homes they provide through new housing developments. These are usually funded through a roughly 50/50 blend of Scottish Government grants and private finance borrowed from lenders. Delivering more safe, warm and affordable homes drives down poverty and inequality, builds stronger communities, contributes to inclusive economic growth, and improves educational and health outcomes for people in every corner of the country. 40,000 to 60,000 people in Scotland's social homes are kept out of poverty due to not having to rent privately, and around 10,000 to 20,000 of these are children.<sup>3</sup>

Tenant engagement and involvement is a key principle for housing associations. Rents in Scotland are set in collaboration with tenants through annual consultation, and tenants are embedded in the decision-making processes of organisations through representation on governing boards. There are differences in the model of rent-setting and regulation in Scotland compared to other UK nations.

Rents are set independently from the government by each housing association or co-operative and we are proud that rents in the social sector are consistently at least half the level seen in the private rented sector. For larger family homes this gap only increases. Our members' homes are also the most energy efficient of any tenure in Scotland and perform best of all tenures on the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

3. Tipping the scales: The social and economic harm of poverty in Scotland | IPPR

# How do people get a social home?

Anyone over the age of 16 is eligible to apply for social housing. However, the limited supply available means there is often a waiting list for suitable properties.

To ensure those who need a suitable home the most get one as quickly as possible, applicants' priority level on the waiting list is determined by a points system. Essentially, the more points an applicant has, the higher their priority on the waiting list. For example, points might be awarded to applicants with particular medical conditions or applicants who are currently homeless or living in unsuitable accommodation.<sup>5</sup> Housing associations can also advise people on other housing options.

Some housing associations accept applications directly from members of the public, and some offer Choice Based Letting Schemes, in which the applicant can apply for a specific property. However, it is more common to apply through a Common Housing Register - a joint waiting list for housing associations and the local authority. The specific system used varies by area and the type of housing in question. Local authority websites will specify how applicants can apply in each region, and housing associations' websites will explain how each organisation receives applications and allocates its homes.

Most social tenants have a Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST) which give a range of rights such as security of tenure and succession of tenancy. In some cases, social tenants will be offered a short SST or a private residential tenancy if they rent a Mid-Market Rent home.

**Currently, around 250,000 people in Scotland are on a waiting list for a social home.<sup>4</sup>**

4. [solace.org.uk/housing-in-scotland/](https://solace.org.uk/housing-in-scotland/)

5. [spice-spotlight.scot/2019/04/29/allocation-of-social-housing-in-scotland-policy-and-practice/](https://spice-spotlight.scot/2019/04/29/allocation-of-social-housing-in-scotland-policy-and-practice/)

# How can I help my constituents with housing issues?

You may receive queries about how to get a tenancy or about an issue with an existing tenancy. As housing is devolved, queries from constituents will often be more relevant for Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). However, some housing related issues are of course reserved – such as Universal Credit.

In many cases, the most effective thing you can do is communicate with the housing association in question. Any of our members will be happy to hear from you. Housing associations exist to serve their tenants, and they can only do so with meaningful engagement from the tenant or, if appropriate, their representative. It is important to note that housing associations will never seek to evict a tenant who is engaging with them and trying to pay their rent, except in cases of domestic abuse or antisocial behaviour.

Housing association staff – like workers across countless other sectors – have been hit hard by the pandemic and cost of living crisis, and many find themselves busier and facing more stressful situations than ever before. They're at the frontline of the cost-of-living crisis, which is increasingly difficult. However, they all share a genuine desire to help their tenants and support their communities, and will always seek to communicate clearly, calmly and with empathy.

RSLs must adhere to the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC), which sets out the standards social tenants can expect from their landlords in terms of the quality and value of the services they receive, the standard of their homes, and tenant engagement. The Charter requires that homeless people should expect a reasonable level of support and advice from social landlords, appropriate temporary accommodation, and ongoing support to access and maintain a home. The SSHC also lays out standards for factoring services offered by social landlords, and the standard of site management and maintenance to which Gypsy/ Traveller communities are entitled.

Housing associations and other RSLs are regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR), which can provide useful information about social housing and housing providers but does not deal with individual complaints. If a housing association is unable to resolve an issue after receiving a complaint, or if the tenant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, tenants can go to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO), using a form available on their website. The SPSO accepts complaints from third parties on behalf of tenants, including from elected representatives.





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# How can I work with a housing association in my area?

All our members are more than willing to work with our elected representatives, whether they are Members of the UK or Scottish Parliaments. We will always be on hand to assist you in engaging with any of our members.

One great way to get to know the housing association(s) or co-operative(s) in your area is to get out and visit them. We regularly arrange visits for MPs to our members and these are often held in their offices, but also at local development sites or community spaces managed by our members. These visits are especially useful in building relationships with an important organisation in your constituency, discussing issues that the housing association or tenants might be having at a local level, and finding common areas where you might be able to work together in the future.

Other ways in which MPs have previously worked together with housing associations and co-operatives include; holding surgeries in the community, attending community events or advice sessions, creating a network of similar organisations, as well as all means of other ad hoc activities and support. The best way to find out how you can work together is to have an initial visit.



# Contact us

We hope this guide has been helpful. If you would like to learn more about the SFHA or any of our members, please do get in touch with us.



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## Useful contacts

### Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

Complaint Form:  
[sps.o.org.uk/complain/form](https://sps.o.org.uk/complain/form)  
0800 377 7330

### Scottish Housing Regulator

[shr@shr.gov.scot](mailto:shr@shr.gov.scot)  
0141 242 5642

Your local **Citizens Advice Bureaux**  
can be found at: [www.cas.org.uk/bureaux](http://www.cas.org.uk/bureaux)

### Home Energy Scotland

Email Contact Form:  
[www.homeenergyscotland.org/contact-advice-support-funding](https://www.homeenergyscotland.org/contact-advice-support-funding)  
0808 808 2282





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