Edition 1
Spring 2022

# Regional Network Newsletter

The Regional Networks were established following extensive tenant-led consultation in 2008. Originally, there were 9 Networks; in 2018 we consolidated this to 4 Networks – North of Scotland, South East Scotland, South West Scotland and Central Scotland Regional Networks, representing some 600,000 plus tenants across the country. All of our members are part of Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) or other landlord-recognised groups.

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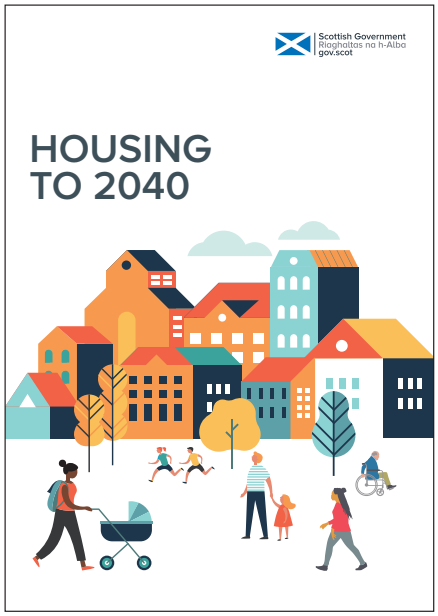
National Regional
Networks Event 2017
Bruce
Cuthbertson

# The Regional Networks

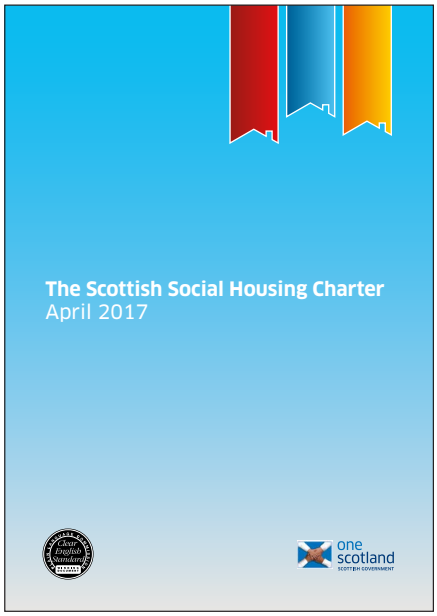
**The primary aim of the Regional Networks is to ensure developments in national housing policy reflect the priorities and interests of tenants and service users throughout Scotland. Since the Regional Networks were established, they have brought a tenant and resident perspective to several key policy areas, with a number of significant accomplishments. They are well respected by colleagues within the Scottish tenants movement, Scottish Government and the social housing sector.**

**Working in partnership with the Scottish Government and other representative bodies on policy advisory groups is one key means by which the networks influence national housing policy.**

Regional Network representatives recently met the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, Shona Robison MSP, and Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights, Patrick Harvie MSP, to discuss issues such as COVID recovery support for tenants, Housing to 2040: www.gov.scot/publications/housing-2040-2/ and the review of the Scottish Social Housing Charter: www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-housing-charter-april-2017/. This edition will provide an overview of each Region and some of the activities we have been involved with recently to show the diverse challenges and range of work we have undertaken since the pandemic began.




Housing to 2040




Scottish Social Housing Charter

# How we are working

During the pandemic, the Regional Networks have been embracing new ways of working, finding our feet with virtual meetings and digital tools, to continue to represent the views and experiences of tenants and residents in national policy development.

We have been able to maintain the same strong links and good working relationships as ever with Scottish Government Ministers and officials, and we were pleased to be able to resume our regular schedule of committee meetings and working groups from mid-2020.

Over the last two years we have also established new working groups including our Rents Focus group and Communications sub-group, both looking at areas which are particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Our achievements

## The Regional Networks have had many achievements over the years, and despite the challenges and new ways of working during the pandemic, we have been involved with several areas of work:

- Completing a number of Scottish Government and Scottish Housing Regulator consultations, and in the process, bringing a tenant and resident viewpoint to a vast range of areas of work, including homelessness, energy efficiency and heat in buildings;

- Meeting virtually with Shona Robison MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government and Patrick Harvie MSP, Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights.

- Contributing our views and lived experiences on issues of national housing policy which are important to tenantsand residents, including:

  - The temporary ban on the enforcement of evictions orders in the private and social housing sectors;
  - Housing to 2040 (which sets out a vision for housing in Scotland to the year 2040);
  - The 2021 consultation on the Scottish Social Housing Charter;
  - Current work on the New Deal for Tenants: draft Rented Sector Strategy.

- Contributing to development work for the Regional Networks' new website, which was launched in 2020, and to communications for the Networks, through the establishment of our new Communications sub-group;

- Representing tenants and residents on short-term working groups on areas of key interest to tenantsand residents, including rent setting, affordability and use of local authority Housing Revenue Accounts, as well as the Zero Emissions in Social Housing Taskforce (ZEST). Members of the Regional Networks have also been involved with a range of Scottish Government-led working groups including the Scottish Housing Regulator Liaison Group, the Housing Policy Circle, the Joint Housing Delivery Policy group and the Age, Home and Community group.

# Annual General Meetings (AGMs)

**One of our great regrets of 2020 was that our AGMs had to be cancelled as a result of the pandemic. We were delighted to be able to hold our 2021 AGMs on a virtual platform last summer, with the assistance of Tenants Information Service (TIS) and Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS). These were successful online events and we thank everyone who joined us via Zoom and took part.**

We are in the early stages of planning for our 2022 Annual General Meetings. Information on the AGMs will be published on our website shortly, so please watch this space for details.

We will now spotlight each individual network, then take a closer look at some of the work Regional Network members have been involved with recently.

## North of Scotland Regional Network

Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Argyll and Bute, Dundee City, Highland, Moray, The Western Isles, Orkney Islands, Perth and Kinross, Shetland Islands.

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### Office Bearers

- Colin Stewart – Chairperson – Aberdeen City
- Alasdair Mackenzie – Vice Chair – Western Isles
- Leonora Montgomery – Secretary/Treasurer – Aberdeen City

### Committee Members

- Thomas O'Brien – Angus
- Cameron Grant – Argyll & Bute
- Steve Byrne – Argyll & Bute
- Elizabeth Richardson – Highlands
- Sue Mcaleaney – Highlands
- Gerald Low – Perth and Kinross
- Derek Wilkie – Perth and Kinross

https://www.regionalnetworks.org.uk/region/north-scotland-network-region-1.

## South East Scotland Regional Network

City of Edinburgh, East Lothian,
Fife, Midlothian, Scottish Borders,
West Lothian.

### Office Bearers

- Alan David Frank – Scottish Borders – Chair
- Bill Campbell – Fife – Vice Chair
- Isabella Vint – Midlothian – Secretary
- Cathie McArthur – East Lothian – Treasurer

### Committee Members

- Penelope Ciancanelli – City of Edinburgh
- Terry Kirby – City of Edinburgh
- Irina Lazarenko – City of Edinburgh
- Alan Dunton – East Lothian
- Lillias Reid – Midlothian

https://www.regionalnetworks.org.uk/region/south-east-scotland-network-region-2.

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## South West Regional Network

Dumfries and Galloway, East Ayrshire,
East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire,
Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire.

### Office Bearers

- Anne Cameron – Chairperson – South Ayrshire
- Margaret Anderson – Vice Chair – South Ayrshire
- Bruce Cuthbertson – Secretary – East Ayrshire
- Margaret Dymond – Treasurer – Renfrewshire

### Committee Members

- Mary Logan – Renfrewshire
- John (Mac) McKenzie – East Ayrshire
- Helen Westwater – East Renfrewshire
- Norma Ferguson – North Ayrshire

https://www.regionalnetworks.org.uk/region/south-west-scotland-network-region-3.

## Central Scotland Regional Network

Clackmannanshire, East Dunbartonshire, Falkirk, Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Stirling, West Dunbartonshire.

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### Office Bearers

- Hugh McClung MBE – Chairperson – Stirling
- Shona Gorman – Secretary – Link Housing Association
- Geoff Morgan – Treasurer – Falkirk

### Committee Members

- June Anderson – Clackmannanshire
- Susan Robertson – Clackmannanshire
- John Duffy – North Lanarkshire
- Peter Winnie – North Lanarkshire
- Jeanette Arneil – South Lanarkshire
- Philomena McClung – Stirling
- Georgia McCambley – West Dunbartonshire
- Frances McGonagle – West Dunbartonshire

https://www.regionalnetworks.org.uk/region/central-scotland-network-region-4.

# Our recent work

### Regional Networks/SHR Liaison Group

Leonora Montgomery is the Regional Networks' current co-ordinator on the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) Liaison group. Leonora gives an overview of the group and its achievements:

"This Group was formed in 2015, following a request from the Regional Networks for regular meetings with the Regulator. The SHR felt that this was another positive way to engage with Tenants and Service Users to achieve a meaningful dialogue on their processes, strategy and regulatory duties and plans.

Meetings are held quarterly and have continued virtually during the pandemic and are attended by 2 of the 4 representatives from each of the Regions together with at least 2 from the SHR and the 2 SHR tenant Board Members also attending every second meeting. These meetings have gone from strength to strength as there is always open and honest discussion on all items raised.

Once a year the Group meets with George Walker (Chair) and Michael Cameron (Chief Executive) for an in-depth Question and Answer session on the issues concerning Tenants and Service Users at that time. These have proved very beneficial to all concerned and we look forward to enhancing this even further going forward."

### Rent Affordability

Last year, Terry Kirby of the South East Scotland Regional Network raised concerns amongst tenants at high rent costs in the City of Edinburgh with Regional Network colleagues. Terry coordinated a survey questionnaire of Regional Network members to identify issues of concern in relation to rents and affordability and in conjunction with Regional Network and Scottish Government colleagues, led on establishing a new Rent Focus working group with representatives drawn from all four Networks.

The working group meets monthly on a virtual basis to consider a number of key areas of interest for tenants, including affordability of rents, how rent consultations are carried out in the sector and how tenants are involved in rent setting. Moving forward, the group will also be looking at the affordability of whole housing costs – including running costs such as energy – and the lived experiences of tenants in relation to the affordability of rent.

## The Zero Emissions in Social Housing Taskforce

Bruce Cuthbertson of the South West Scotland Regional Network, was recently involved in the ZEST (Zero Emissions in Social Housing Taskforce) working group. Bruce gave us an overview of ZEST:

"I was going to start a new job in a new country, southern France. I came in from work and what did I see on the evening news, residential caravans being washed away on a torrent of water – unheard of then, no new job.

Today that is almost a monthly occurrence, so something has to change, someone or something has to take the first step to start the journey, why not housing?

The Taskforce was set up to report back to the Scottish Government for the beginning of the new Parliamentary session. Similar surveys and forums were running alongside ours; some of you may have participated in them. Our Taskforce consisted of leaders in the housing sector who brought expertise and skill to the group and maybe more importantly common sense. We had representatives from all over Scotland who quickly realised there was no silver bullet and there was no single solution that could be applied nationally. I will briefly outline some of the problems and move on to some of our solutions.

- Tax - a severe imbalance between gas and electricity, electricity being taxed higher.
- The lack of a single database where actual verified facts can be accessed.
- The severe shortage of low interest finance; leaving the EU also closed one major source.
- VAT – we are paying it for all retrofit work – should we?
- A lack of skilled trades and a shortage of training courses.
- Are the best systems actually available at this time? More trials of systems are needed, independently assessed and data shared.

The Taskforce accepts solutions to the above must be actioned but we must take the steps available at present if we are to adhere to the timelines set down, so we advocate the following:

- Everyone in the sector including the Scottish Government and all other public bodies etc. need to share data and experience – there's a lot out there.
- A fabric first approach must be taken, reduce power usage and reduce bills.
- EPCs should reflect power usage, not just tick boxes.

Although this report was focused on social housing, there has to be a coming together of all housing markets to share technologies and retrofit programmes to hopefully lower costs. Tenants and residents must also be trained to use the systems fitted, they will be no use otherwise.

All this must be done in an affordable manner to prevent further increases in all forms of poverty. Scotland should also grab all the chances to create jobs in this market because 1,000,000 houses have to be retrofitted by 2030 in this country alone."

You can access the full Zest report here: https://www.gov.scot/publications/achieving-net-zero-social-housing-zero-emissions-social-housing-taskforce-report/pages/8/.

# How the Regional Networks represent tenants and residents

## Hugh McClung MBE shares his experiences as part of the Regional Networks, and reflects on how the Networks represent tenants and residents:

"I am delighted to be able to tell you about the Networks and the role that they play listening to and representing the interests of tenants and residents across Scotland.

We work directly with Scottish Government Ministers and Staff dealing with Housing Policy, giving advice and the views of tenants and residents towards the development of those policies and strategies which affect Housing. Over the years there have been various working groups working on different projects, some of those still active are listed above.

We have also fed in views in areas of key importance to tenants and residents including evictions, fire safety and on several Scottish Government and Scottish Housing Regulator consultations. A number of major policy developments occurred because of the input of tenants' and residents' views, these include:

- Housing Act (Scotland) 2010 and Housing Act (Scotland) 2014.
- Guidance for Local Authorities on Housing Revenue Accounts (2014).
- Scottish Housing Regulator (2012), Annual Returns on the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

These policies and groups are just a flavour of the influence that tenants and residents now have, working together with Scottish Ministers and Staff. As well as the groups and work my colleagues have written about in this Newsletter, we have also recently re-established our Housing Revenue Account (HRA) working group in order to represent the interests of tenants on the subject of the use of HRA accounts in local authorities to ensure these funds are used in the interests of tenants.

Before 2008, who would have thought that tenant and resident representatives would be sitting down with the policy makers to represent the voices of thousands of tenants and residents like themselves? Something that had never been done before, and I'm proud to be a part of it all.

We also have been talking and listening to tenants and residents and their groups throughout the pandemic, and soon we hope to be coming to introduce the Networks to you in your own areas. I look forward to doing that and hope that you will take part in the opportunity to share your opinions with the Networks so that your voice can influence the Housing Policies and Strategies of the future."

# Website and subscription service

As Regional Network members, we have found that good communication has been vital during the period of the pandemic. We set up a Communications working group in 2020 which includes members of all four Regional Networks working collaboratively to improve and enhance the way the Regional Networks communicate with the tenants and residents we represent and our stakeholders, and the information we provide on our work. The group is currently leading on work to review and update the Regional Networks Communication Strategy and to develop promotional information. Last year, Colin Stewart of North of Scotland Regional Network began work with the Scottish Government Tenant Priorities team and developers on the new Regional Networks website to ensure information on our work is easily available and accessible. A subscription service will be launched in the near future which will give you the opportunity to never miss any of the interesting work the Regional Networks are doing on behalf of tenants, residents, RTOs and other groups.

# Want to know more?

You can find out more about who we are and what we do on our website at:

www.regionalnetworks.org.uk/

We also have some vacant spaces on some of our committees at present. If you are interested in becoming a Regional Network member or would like to know more about the Regional Networks, please contact the Tenant Priorities Team at: TPAdminsupport@gov.scot.

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