



THE SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR

Guidance on post-inspection improvement plans

Guidance on Post-Inspection Improvement Plans

April 2008

Introduction

1. This guidance on post-inspection improvement plans replaces previous guidance. The guidance has been issued to reflect our current approach.
2. This guidance describes:
 - the purpose of an improvement plan;
 - the circumstances in which we will ask organisations to agree their improvement plan with us;
 - the contents of an improvement plan;
 - timescales for submitting a plan and agreeing it with us;
 - how we will monitor progress against improvement plans;
 - how we will work with other relevant agencies, for example, the Care Commission and also with Audit Scotland following inspections of local authority housing and homelessness services.

Purpose of an Improvement Plan

3. We expect all inspected organisations to take action on our findings within their inspection report and our recommendations for improvement. We expect these to be covered by an improvement plan, but not all improvement plans have to be agreed with us.
4. Our published reports state if an organisation is required to produce all or part of its improvement plan for agreement with us. The Improvement plan should show the process and timescales for addressing our recommendations. We will consider and agree the improvement plan to ensure it properly addresses the issues raised in the report.

When we will ask for an Improvement Plan

5. We will want to agree improvement plans for:
 - areas in local authority reports that are graded C or D;
 - C and D graded Registered Social Landlords (RSLs); and
 - small RSLs (who own or manage less than 500 units) for any service or individual areas where there are significant weaknesses.
6. We will not ask to agree improvement plans for:
 - A and B graded areas in local authority reports; and
 - A and B graded RSL reports.

Contents of an Improvement Plan

7. We expect organisations to address weaknesses identified during the inspection within a two year period from the date on which the improvement plan is agreed. There may be specific circumstances where organisations require longer than two years. Where this is the case, this should be clearly explained when submitting the improvement plan.
8. Improvement plans should :
 - provide a concise and specific response ensuring that all areas highlighted in the **Key Recommendations** part of the inspection report are covered;
 - respond to points of criticism contained in the report but not highlighted as individual recommendations;
 - provide a strategic overview of improvement proposals, rather than a detailed operational plan;
 - outline the actions the organisation intends to take to achieve the desired outcomes;
 - show who is responsible for ensuring that the actions are carried out;
 - detail the associated target timescales, with milestones if necessary;
 - show the priority attached to each improvement action;
 - show how the improvement process will be managed, for example, the monitoring arrangements that will be used to measure progress and the effect of any new or changed resources;
 - be designed to allow progress to be clearly audited;
 - reflect the organisation's commitment to continuous improvement; and
 - ensure that where performance objectives are set, that these are framed in accordance with S.M.A.R.T principles; and
 - have received Council or governing body approval prior to submission.
9. The Scottish Housing Regulator does not intend to prescribe any particular format for improvement plans. Options for presenting an improvement plan could include:
 - a tabular format, showing proposed actions in response to the areas identified for improvement; or
 - an annotated version of the inspection report, with proposed actions presented alongside the areas identified for improvement. The inspection report will be written in a way that helps the organisation to prioritise improvement activities.

Improvement actions might include:

- revising policies;
- reviewing methods of service delivery;
- undertaking further consultation with service users;
- improving information for service users;
- increasing the use of performance information and management; and

- introducing new working procedures or training for staff and governing body members.
10. Inspected organisations' proposals for improvement should be subject to consultation with tenants and any other key stakeholders. We do not expect this process of consultation to have taken place before an improvement plan is submitted, nor do we intend to be prescriptive about how consultation should be conducted. Instead, we will ask the inspected organisation to confirm when it submits its improvement plan what form of consultation and public monitoring process is proposed, and the associated timescales.
 11. We recommend that inspected organisations publish or otherwise make their improvement plans available to tenants and other stakeholders.
 12. We will post on our website, within inspection reports, contact details for the inspected organisation. This will let anyone wishing to know how the organisation is responding to the inspection report, to contact the organisation directly.

Timescales for submitting an Improvement Plan and the "Signing Off" Process

13. Inspected organisations required to submit improvement plans should do so within eight weeks of publication of the final inspection report. We will consider agreeing a longer timescale if the cycle of Council/governing body meetings does not allow the 8 week timescale to be achieved.
14. We will examine improvement plans, to ensure that all the priority improvement areas and recommendations are fully and appropriately addressed. We will either agree the plan or respond with comments usually within two weeks of receipt, or on an earlier or later date agreed in advance with the organisation.
15. If amendments are required the organisation should respond to the comments within two weeks. We should respond to any subsequent revision of the improvement plan within a further two weeks.
16. If there are difficulties or delays beyond these timescales in agreeing the improvement plan, we will write to the inspected organisation giving a final date, within two weeks, for the receipt of an acceptable plan.
17. Should an organisation not submit an appropriate improvement plan the inspection process will be concluded without an improvement plan being agreed and a support strategy will be required. This could ultimately lead to action being taken in line with our Intervention Strategy.
18. The inspection end date is the date on which the improvement plan is agreed. If no plan applies it will be the date of publication of the report.

19. Where a pre-publication inspection report is subject to a formal review, the publication of the report will be delayed. The timescale for submitting an improvement plan will remain eight weeks after the date of publication, unless an alternative timescale has been mutually agreed.
20. Our assessment of the improvement plan is not intended to provide an endorsement of the effectiveness of the improvement proposals. Responsibility for planning and delivering improvements rests with each local authority and RSL. Accordingly, the detailed methods for making improvements are a matter for each organisation's own performance management and planning processes, and for the way in which the organisation engages with its stakeholders.

Audit of Improvement Plans

21. We will monitor the implementation of all submitted improvement plans and the effectiveness of actions taken to address our recommendations through:
 - progress reports supplied to us by the inspected organisation;
 - liaison meetings;
 - ongoing monitoring of relevant performance information; and
 - inspection.
22. For RSLs awarded a D grade, small RSLs with significant weaknesses and D-graded local authority service areas we will ask for an interim progress report one year after the improvement plan is agreed. We will consider the progress report against the improvement plan. We will review performance information where it directly relates to identified areas for improvement and assess progress made. We will advise in writing, within four weeks whether or not progress appears satisfactory.
23. At the time of the interim progress report, we will raise any concerns about lack of progress. Where progress is unsatisfactory we will ask the inspected organisation to take action to address this as a matter of priority. If there are serious concerns about failure to implement the improvement plan then action may be considered in line with our Intervention Strategy or a re-inspection may be brought forward.
24. For D graded RSLs and local authority services we will aim to re-inspect around two years following the end of the last inspection. If the RSL or local authority service area is upgraded, further monitoring will be in accordance with any new improvement plan, where required. If the organisation is not upgraded, action may be taken in line with our Intervention Strategy.
25. For C-graded RSLs or Local Authority service areas, we will ask for a report on progress with the improvement plan two years after its is agreed. We will consider the progress report against the improvement plan and advise, in writing, whether or not progress appears satisfactory.

Where progress is unsatisfactory we will ask the inspected organisation to take action to address this, and we may ask for further progress reports.

26. In all cases, inspected bodies will be expected to keep their tenants' groups and stakeholders advised of their progress in implementing the improvement plan and to share with them any feedback from us.

Joint working between The Scottish Housing Regulator and other Agencies

27. The arrangements described in this guidance apply to both local authorities and RSLs. For local authorities follow-up activity after inspections also involves discussions between The Scottish Housing Regulator and Audit Scotland.
28. To achieve a consistent and co-ordinated response between the two bodies, we will work closely with local authorities' external auditors and with Audit Scotland, during and after inspections.
29. Post-inspection liaison may also be required with the Care Commission and the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator (OSCR). Joint working arrangements between The Scottish Housing Regulator and other agencies aims to ensure an integrated approach to post-inspection work.
30. Further guidance on the inspection process is provided in our Guide to Inspection. Where an inspection and improvement plan lead ultimately to statutory intervention by The Scottish Housing Regulator, our [Intervention Strategy](#) describes the action we may take.

Annex - Follow-up to Local Authority Inspections

Arrangements for Joint Working between The Scottish Housing Regulator and Audit Scotland (on behalf of the Accounts Commission)

- (a) The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) will raise with the lead auditor any issues arising from the inspection and to be featured in the inspection report which fall outside the remit of The SHR e.g. in relation to corporate matters or issues of probity.
- (b) The SHR will invite the lead auditor to the presentation of inspection findings to the local authority, if there are corporate or other matters to be raised which would require the lead auditor's presence.
- (c) The SHR will provide a draft of the inspection report to the lead auditor for comment at the same time as it is provided to the local authority.
- (d) The SHR will liaise with the lead auditor where the local authority requests substantive changes to the inspection report involving cross-cutting or corporate issues.
- (e) The SHR will provide the lead auditor with copies of:
 - The final inspection report.
 - The improvement plan submitted by the local authority in response to the inspection report.
 - Our response to the improvement plan.
 - A copy of the final, agreed improvement plan (where amendments to the original plan have taken place).
 - The agreed arrangements for future follow-up.
- (f) The SHR will lead on any follow-up action required as a result of an inspection, as it relates to a local authority's housing and homelessness functions. The lead auditor will ensure that planned audit work monitors the improvement action agreed by the Council in corporate or other service areas outwith housing, homelessness and factoring functions.
- (g) The SHR will keep Audit Scotland informed of any proposals for follow-up inspection work to assess the implementation of improvement plans, or to monitor progress in addressing performance problems relating to housing and homelessness services. We will also keep the external auditor and Audit Scotland informed about the outcome of any such follow-up work.
- (h) Improvement plans may result in more formal supervision arrangements, where an inspection has identified serious performance issues. Where The SHR or Audit Scotland have significant concerns about a local authority's performance in housing and related services, the two bodies will convene periodic case conference meetings. These concerns may arise from audits or inspections, or from follow-up work completed after audits or inspections.
- (i) Case conference meetings will be used for the following purposes:
 - To exchange information.
 - To "diagnose" whether the performance problems present in the housing service are service-related and/or corporate issues.

- (j) On the basis of these discussions, the two bodies will agree roles and responsibilities for working with the local authority to support it in making improvements.
- (k) The local authority's external auditor will lead on following up any issues which lie beyond The SHR's remit, and will keep The SHR advised of any action or issues arising from this follow-up.

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Government