

Communities Scotland  
**Inspection report**

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**Forgewood Housing Co-operative**

January 2006

# Contents

	<b>Pages</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Context</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. How good are the services?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4. Is the service managed for improvement?</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>5. Governance and financial management</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>6. Areas for improvement action</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>7. Next steps</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Appendix 1 Sources of evidence</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Appendix 2 Examples of Positive Practice</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>16</b>

# 1. Introduction

## About this inspection

- 1.1 This inspection was carried out by Communities Scotland under section 69 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Our purpose in inspection is to provide an independent external assessment of the effectiveness of housing service delivery and make recommendations to help improvement. Inspections are conducted within a published framework of Performance Standards\*.

## How we assessed performance

- 1.2 Our inspectors asked two key questions:
- How good are the services we have inspected?
  - How well are these services being managed for improvement?
- 1.3 In order to answer these questions the inspectors:
- spoke to staff, tenants and members of the governing body;
  - asked other partner organisations for their views;
  - saw and tested first hand how well services were being delivered;
  - examined key policies, publications, information and the organisation's self-assessment submitted for this inspection; and
  - analysed published performance and financial information.

## The inspection team

- 1.4 The Forgewood Housing Co-operative inspection was carried out by Jonathan Grant (Inspector), supported by Josephine McAloon (Inspection Officer) and Luise Seikman (Financial Analyst). We were on site on 6 October 2005. We would like to thank everyone involved in the inspection, particularly the Management Committee, staff and tenants for their time and co-operation.

## Responding to this inspection

- 1.5 We expect all inspected bodies to make this report available to anyone that wants it, report our findings to tenants and other stakeholders and respond to the issues raised in this report. We require that the summary of this report is issued to all tenants.

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\* see glossary

## 2. Context

### About the organisation

- 2.1 Forgewood Housing Co-operative was registered with Scottish Homes as a non-fully mutual housing co-operative\* in 1993. The Co-operative owns 219 properties in Forgewood, Motherwell. This includes 139 refurbished tenement flats acquired from the local Council in 1994 and 80 new houses, completed in 2001. The Forgewood area has seen a general reduction in demand for some of the existing social housing for a number of years. The Co-operative is currently working in partnership with North Lanarkshire Council to develop plans for the future regeneration of the Forgewood neighbourhood. The Co-operative has 15 committee members, 13 of whom are tenants of the Co-operative.
- 2.2 Forgewood operates a formal staff sharing arrangement with Garrion Peoples Housing Co-operative. Six staff members divide their time between the two organisations. Forgewood also have a joint share with Garrion in Bridges Housing Association, an unregistered subsidiary organisation that provides management services to other housing organisations. Bridges is an Industrial and Provident Society\* and its management committee is made up of four members from each of the two Co-operatives. The table below shows some key facts about Forgewood.

<b>Key Facts</b>	<b>2002-2003</b>	<b>2003-2004</b>	<b>2004-2005</b>
Houses owned	218	219	219
Employees	6	6	6
Annual turnover (£000's)	504	531	496
Total possible rental income (£000's)	454	473	496
Total Arrears (£'s)	20,659	23,649	27,703
Average weekly rent (£'s)	N/A	43.19	45.25
Houses re-let*	35	32	34
Average days to re-let	7	15	18

Source: Annual performance and statistical return (APSR)\*/ Inspection submission\*

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\* see glossary

### 3. How Good are the services?

#### Accessible services

*Social landlords should provide open, fair and equal access to their services.*

- 3.1 We found that the Co-operative operates an open housing list\*and people aged 16 or over can apply at any time. Forgewood assesses applications in three days on average but has not set a target for putting applicants onto its housing list. Forgewood does not exclude applicants and reviews its housing list annually.
- 3.2 Forgewood recognises that demand for some of its housing is reducing. The number of applicants on its housing list has dropped from 244 in 2003/04 to 92 in 2004/05. The Co-operative is working well to increase awareness of its housing list. It advertises in local newspapers, service directories and local colleges. It is also developing links with the Lanarkshire Ethnic Minority Action Group and working with North Lanarkshire Council and other local Registered Social Landlords\* (RSL) to develop a Common Housing Register\* (CHR).
- 3.3 The Co-operative prioritises allocations based on a range of housing needs which clearly reflect the statutory reasonable preference categories\*. The cases we reviewed were all to people with one or more of these needs. Forgewood also promotes applicant choice well and does not place limits on the number of offers that can be made to an applicant.
- 3.4 Forgewood let 85% of its houses to applicants from its housing list in 2004/05. The Co-operative operates a nominations agreement with North Lanarkshire Council but receives few referrals. The Co-operative and the Council have agreed to suspend the agreement in response to both organisations having difficulties in finding applicants for flatted properties in the area. Forgewood agreed a protocol with the Council to manage referrals under Section 5\* of the Housing Scotland Act 2001 and has housed all the referrals it received. It also receives a number of referrals from other local RSLs. Forgewood collects equalities information from its housing applicants and reports this to the management committee.
- 3.5 The Co-operative minimises the number of people it suspends from receiving an offer of housing: three people were suspended at the time of our inspection. It also

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\* see glossary

regularly reviews suspensions and gives clear advice to tenants on how to have the suspension removed.

- 3.6 Two members of staff check each application and allocation and the Co-operative verifies each applicants circumstances before making an offer. Cases we reviewed were all assessed in accordance with Forgewood's policy.
- 3.7 Forgewood provides an accessible repairs service. Tenants can report repairs during office hours by telephone, in person, or by writing and Forgewood provides an out of hours service for emergency repairs. All repairs are arranged through individual appointments, although the Co-operative does not record whether these appointments have been kept.
- 3.8 Forgewood provides good information to tenants on its services. It issues a regularly updated tenants handbook, a quarterly newsletter and information leaflets. Information is available in other formats on request and a translation service is available. In the Co-operative's most recent tenant survey 86% of respondents were satisfied with the information provided. The Co-operative is also developing an interactive website which it plans to have in place in early 2006.
- 3.9 The Co-operative's office is within walking distance of all of its houses, is fully accessible for wheelchair users and has private interview space. The accessibility of Forgewood's services are a key strength.

### Service quality

*Social landlords should deliver high quality services and maintain high quality houses.*

### Housing management

- 3.10 The provision of good information and access to appropriate support are important ways in which landlords can help people sustain their tenancies. Forgewood has a relatively high turnover rate of 16%, although the number of houses which are abandoned is below the national average. The Co-operative does good work to help tenants remain in their home. It provides all of its tenants with a Scottish Secure Tenancy\* (SST), gives good information at the start of new tenancies, conducts early new tenant visits, directs tenants to debt advice agencies and co-ordinates support packages for the homeless people it houses. The Co-operative does not actively

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\* see glossary

identify other vulnerable tenants, for example young people, and target support services where they are most needed.

- 3.11 Forgewood evicted one tenant for rent arrears in 2004/05. It seeks to recover vacant possession only as a last resort and does some good work to support tenants with rent arrears. The Co-operative refers individual cases to advice agencies and North Lanarkshire Council's Social Work and Tenancy Support Services. However, we saw that Forgewood makes repayment agreements with some tenants in arrears without satisfying itself that the agreements are realistic. The Co-operative does not routinely assess tenant's financial situation as part of its arrears management work and this is another weakness in sustaining tenancies.
- 3.12 Forgewood's most recent tenants survey showed a relatively low 66% of respondents to be satisfied with the condition of their neighbourhood. Forgewood took action, including introducing an estate caretaker and providing a regular skip delivery. The Co-operative now manages its neighbourhoods well. During our inspection we found no graffiti, vandalism or litter in the neighbourhood. Tenants that we spoke to on the tenants panel were also very satisfied with the condition of their neighbourhood.
- 3.13 The Co-operative recorded 41 incidents of anti-social behaviour in 2004/05, although it does not yet have a clear definition of what it considers to be antisocial behaviour. The Co-operative has taken good action on anti-social behaviour, including installing Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), training a staff member as a mediator and working with North Lanarkshire Council's specialist neighbour disputes team. The Co-operative could improve its management of antisocial behaviour, as it does not gather tenant satisfaction information, performance reports contain only limited information and performance against its targets is not monitored.

### Property maintenance

- 3.14 Forgewood sets itself challenging targets to complete responsive repairs. Its target for Urgent repairs of 2 working days is more challenging than the national average\* of 3 working days and its Routine target of 5 working days is more challenging than the national average of 10 working days. The target for completing repairs it categorises as emergency is in line with the national average of 6 hours.

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\* see glossary

- 3.15 The Co-operative reported completing 99% of its repairs on target, against a national average of 95% in 2003/04. Its most recent survey showed that 80% of respondents were satisfied with the speed of the repairs service. However, we found that Forgewood's measurement and reporting of repairs performance is weak. Reports do not include the amount of time taken to pre-inspect repairs works and responsive gas repairs are not included in the calculations. Also, Forgewood is not recording the time when repairs are completed so it cannot be sure that its emergency repairs are being completed in its target time of 6 hours.
- 3.16 Pre and post inspections are important tools for ensuring repairs are targeted accurately and carried out to a high standard. Forgewood has agreed targets for inspections and reports regularly to the management committee, although targets are not always achieved and reports include only limited detail.
- 3.17 The Co-operative provides a good right to repair service: good information on the scheme is provided to tenants and performance is monitored and reported well.
- 3.18 Scottish Ministers have set a target that all landlords' houses should meet the new Scottish Housing Quality Standard\* (SHQS) by 2015. Landlords were required to prepare a plan showing how they will achieve this, by April 2005. Forgewood has submitted a self assessment plan to the Scottish Executive and expects that all of its houses will meet the standard by 2015.
- 3.19 The Co-operative completed a 15% sample survey of the physical condition of its houses in 2003, which concluded that the stock is in good condition with no major repair or improvement works necessary. Forgewood is aware that it needs information on all of its stock and has plans in place to achieve this in 3 years. It may have to review its SHQS delivery plan as it gets new information from this survey work. The Co-operative also delivers planned maintenance programmes supported by 30 year life cycle costing\* information.
- 3.20 Forgewood is required to carry out safety checks every 12 months on all gas appliances and flues which it provides for its tenants' use. The Co-operative reviewed and changed its gas maintenance procedures in 2004 in response to weaknesses it had identified in its performance. It now operates a 10 month inspection cycle and reports its performance to the management committee. All houses have a

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\* see glossary

valid gas safety certificate in place but we found weaknesses in the Co-operative's monitoring of performance. Forgewood has not addressed weaknesses in how it monitors its contractor's performance and is not aware of its performance in completing gas safety checks within one year of the previous service: we found four cases where this had not been achieved.

- 3.21 From May 2004 social landlords have had a statutory duty to manage asbestos in the common areas of their properties. Forgewood has an excellent approach to the management of asbestos. It has an asbestos management plan in place, has surveyed all of the common areas of its houses and has an asbestos register. Plans are also in place to further develop the register by surveying empty houses.
- 3.22 Forgewood has an excellent approach to home safety. All of its houses have hard wired smoke alarms and sprinkler systems have been installed into some newer houses. The Co-operative has installed door entry systems in all of its houses with common entrances and none of its houses have lead pipes.

### Service user focus

*Social landlords should place the people they serve at the heart of their work, treat them with respect and be responsive to their views and priorities.*

- 3.23 The Co-operatives most recent tenants survey found that 93% of respondents were satisfied with Forgewood as a landlord. Forgewood supports a tenants panel and members that we spoke to during the inspection confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the Co-operative's services and also with how well it listens to their views. Forgewood also collects other satisfaction information, for example through a sample repairs satisfaction survey, although the collection rate is variable. The Co-operative has a good complaints policy and has received no formal complaints in 2004/05.
- 3.24 Forgewood is excellent at responding to feedback from members of its tenants panel and tenants on the management committee. The Co-operative introduced many service improvements including estate caretakers, close cleaning services and CCTV systems in response to this feedback.
- 3.25 While Forgewood is committed to involving tenants in improving its services, it could improve how it consults with tenants who are not members of the tenants panel or

the management committee. Newsletter articles are used to request views from tenants but these achieve a limited response.

## 4. Is the service managed for improvement?

### Performance and resource management

*Social landlords should have clear objectives, standards and targets, manage costs effectively and should work to continuously improve services.*

- 4.1 Forgewood's performance in collecting rent compares well against its peers\* and the national average, although its performance is declining. Between 2002 and 2005 total rent arrears as a percentage of its total rental income rose from 4.55% to 5.57%, and current non-technical arrears have risen from 2% to 2.59%. The Co-operative is taking action to improve performance, for example it is dedicating staff resources to prioritise arrears recovery, has set a target for improvement, and is reviewing its policies and procedures, although it is too early to assess the outcomes of these measures.
- 4.2 Forgewood's performance in how quickly it re-lets its houses compares well against its peers and the national average, although its performance is declining. The time it takes the Co-operative to re-let its houses has increased from 7 days in 2002/03 to 17 days in 2004/05, against a national average in 2003/04 of 34 days and a peer average in 2003/04 of 31 days. Forgewood's rent loss has also increased from 0.4% in 2002/03 to 0.67% in 2004/05. The Co-operative has taken action to improve performance, for example permitting under-occupancy in its lower demand properties. Forgewood reports its re-let performance to the management committee but the report could be improved as it does not contain sufficient detail to fully manage improvement in empty house performance.
- 4.3 Forgewood's costs for delivering its housing management services is £409 for each of its houses for 2003/04 which is less expensive than the average for its peer group and nationally. The costs for delivering the maintenance services is £366 for each of its houses for 2003/04 which is significantly higher than the peer average of £156.39 and the national average of £191.29.
- 4.4 Forgewood sets objectives for its services in its Internal Management Plan (IMP) and holds an annual service planning day for staff and management committee members

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\* see glossary

to review objectives for the Co-operative. Its strategic plans link with individual service plans which have objectives for both the co-operative and individual staff. Forgewood is generally aware of its strengths and weaknesses, although there is room for improvement, for example in gas safety. While some service objectives are SMART\*, others are not, for example tenant satisfaction. The Co-operative's use of performance targets could be developed further, for example it does not set a target for the time it takes to re-let its houses.

- 4.5 While the Co-operative's approach to performance monitoring is generally good, some areas are under-developed, for example responsive repairs and anti-social behaviour. Reports to the management committee are generally well developed but the reporting of empty houses, gas safety and tenant satisfaction performance are under-developed. Policies and procedures are also good, with only minor improvements needed.

## 5. Governance & financial management

### Leadership, ethical standards and risk

*Social Landlords should have a clear vision, promote values that underpin good governance and effectively manage organisational risk.*

- 5.1 Forgewood sets out its vision for the future of the Co-operative in its Internal Management Plan. The Management Committee has a clear view of its role in setting the strategic direction, monitoring performance, exercising control and it works well with staff. The committee generally receives good levels of performance information, although there is room for improvement in some reports. Performance information is reported regularly in newsletters, through responsive mail-shots and at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- 5.2 Forgewood has 15 management committee members and 13 are tenants of the Co-operative. Attendance at meetings is very good and above the peer and national average. The Co-operative's management committee members are experienced and committed to the improvement of the organisation. All management committee members receive an annual training needs assessment and are well supported with training and development opportunities.

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\* Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

- 5.3 A strong membership and good levels of participation at AGMs are important ways for landlords to demonstrate accountability. Forgewood currently has 69 tenant members and attendance at its last AGM, at 17%, is above peer and national averages. Promotion of the benefits of membership, and the monitoring and reporting of performance in membership levels, is limited. Members of the management committee that we spoke to were aware that increasing the membership is an important way to ensure current and future accountability.
- 5.4 Forgewood operates a joint staffing arrangement with Garrion Peoples Housing Co-operative and has established one subsidiary organisation, Bridges Housing Association. Bridges provides management services to other housing organisations and the Co-operative received £8000 from Bridges activities in 2004/05. The constitutional arrangements and management agreements in place are intended to ensure that Forgewood, Garrion and Bridges retain separate identities and that the relationships do not put Forgewood's assets at risk, although we found that Forgewood has not completed its scheduled 2004/05 review of its constitutional and management agreements.
- 5.5 Forgewood has a strong awareness of the importance of both staff and management committee members maintaining the highest ethical standards. We found that the Co-operative acts in accordance with statutory requirements relating to the granting of benefits in Schedule 7 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. Forgewood's management of potential conflicts of interest is under-developed. The Co-operative does not require tenant management committee members with rent arrears to withdraw from meetings when arrears are considered. We raised this with Forgewood during the inspection visit and it immediately agreed to review its procedures.
- 5.6 Forgewood's risk management policy is good and we found that the Co-operative has a good awareness of risk. Its internal audit system is good and Forgewood has taken action where the audit has identified problems, for example in its management of rent arrears.

## Financial viability and management

*Small Social landlords should be financially viable in the short and medium term and sustainable in the longer term. They should have a robust financial management framework.*

- 5.7 Forgewood's 10 year financial projections indicate that it is viable in the medium term. The Co-operative predicts that expenditure on major repairs work needed to comply with the SHQS will start in 2008. This additional expenditure results in deficits being forecast. However, Forgewood predicts that it will have adequate cash balances to finance the works, as well as houses it could use as security to raise more private finance should it be required.
- 5.8 Forgewood Co-operative's financial management framework is good with some strengths and areas where improvement is needed. The 10 year financial projections include a cash flow, balance sheet and an income and expenditure account, however, there is no narrative to help explain the figures and the assumptions underpinning the model are also not stated.
- 5.9 A one year budget is presented annually to management committee for approval and reviewed part way through the financial year. The management committee uses separate financial reports presented quarterly to monitor actual spend against budget. The quarterly financial reports do not include a cash flow but do provide explanations for variances and report on certain key performance indicators.

## 6. Areas for improvement action

These are the key areas that need to be targeted for improvement action. They are broadly in order of priority:

In **Service quality** Forgewood should:

- improve how it monitors its performance in its management of gas safety;
- improve its performance in collecting rent;
- review how it measures and reports its performance in responsive repairs;
- ensure that it understands the financial position of tenants in arrears before it makes repayment arrangements; and
- review how it measures and reports the performance of its anti-social behaviour services;
- improve its approach to sustaining tenancies with vulnerable tenants and those in arrears; and

- improve its void re-let performance.

In **Service user focus** Forgewood should:

- review how it consults with tenants who are not members of the management committee or the RTO.

In **Performance and resource management** Forgewood should:

- develop its service planning and performance reporting.

In **Governance and financial management** Forgewood should:

- review its arrangements for managing potential conflicts of interest in its relationship with Garrion Peoples Housing Co-operative and Bridges Housing Association and for management committee members with rent arrears;
- ensure that it regularly reviews the cost effectiveness of its management agreements with Garrion and Bridges;
- state the assumptions underpinning the 10 year financial projections and provide narrative to help explain the figures: and
- take steps to encourage an increase in participation by the membership of the Co-operative.

## 7. Next steps

7.1 This report highlights our findings following this housing inspection. We expect Forgewood to respond effectively to our recommendations using an improvement plan to be submitted to us within eight weeks of the publication of this report. The plan should show how the organisation intends to respond to our findings. The plan will be agreed by us.

7.2 If you would like to see Forgewood's improvement plan you should contact the

Chairperson at:

Forgewood Housing Co-operative  
79 Kinloch Drive  
Forgewood  
Motherwell  
ML1 3XD

Telephone: 01698 263311

## Sources of Evidence

### Groups and third parties consulted:

- North Lanarkshire Council
- Communities Scotland Homepoint Team
- Communities Scotland Quality and Transfer Delivery Unit
- Communities Scotland Tenant Participation Development Team
- Care Commission

### Interviews / meetings:

- Members of the Association's Committee
- Director
- Depute Director
- Housing Manager
- Maintenance consultant
- Financial consultant
- Members of the Registered Tenants Organisation

### Reality checks:

- Review of rent arrears cases and legal actions against tenants
- Review of gas safety documents
- Review of asbestos register
- Review of responsive repairs
- Review of housing list applications, allocations and suspensions
- Review of anti-social behaviour cases
- Review of Schedule 7 register
- Review of conflict of interest register
- Review of Committee rent accounts
- Observation of committee meeting
- Tour of estate

### Key documents reviewed:

- Inspection submission\*
- Schedule 7 register
- Conflict of interest register
- Complaints register
- Management committee rent accounts
- Draft Annual Report
- Performance reports

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\* see glossary

## Examples of Positive Practice

These are areas we would highlight as working particularly well, taking account of the organisations operating context:

### Service user focus

- Forgewood has introduced significant service improvements as a result of feedback from tenants groups and tenants on its management committee, for example estate caretakers and a CCTV system. Tenants that we spoke to confirmed that Forgewood listens to their views and acts to improve services.

### Service quality

- Forgewood has an excellent approach to managing asbestos in the common areas of its houses. It clearly outlines its approach to its duties in its management plan and has inspected all of its common areas to determine if asbestos is present. A record of asbestos is held by the Co-operative and contractors are made aware of asbestos before starting repairs works. Forgewood are also expanding their survey work to develop a register of all of their houses.

## Glossary

<b>Annual Statistical and Performance Return (APSR)</b>	Annual questionnaire completed by RSLs and sent to Communities Scotland. Used to keep the Register of Social Landlords up to date and to track the performance of RSLs.
<b>Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO)</b>	ASBOs are preventative orders designed to protect individuals from further anti-social behaviour that causes or is likely to cause alarm or distress. Breach of an order is a criminal offence, punishable by a fine or imprisonment.
<b>Average</b>	The arithmetic mean – the sum of all the values divided by the number of values.
<b>Common housing register</b>	A register of all applicants for social housing used by two or more landlords within an area.
<b>Focus group</b>	A group of people brought together to have a structured discussion on a specific subject or set of subjects, facilitated by an independent person.
<b>Fully mutual housing co-operative</b>	Defined by the Housing Association Act 1985. All members must be tenants (or prospective tenants) and all tenants must be members. Activities must be exclusively for the benefit of the members.
<b>Housing list</b>	A list of applicants for housing which is used by the RSL to allocate its housing stock.
<b>Industrial and Provident Society</b>	Many RSLs are legally incorporated as industrial and provident societies. I&Ps can be charitable or non-charitable, or housing cooperatives. They must be non-profit making and supervised by the Register of Friendly Societies.
<b>Inspection submission</b>	Documents submitted by the landlord at the start of the inspection to provide information to on its performance, context and how it is structured.
<b>Life cycle costing</b>	A method of calculating the cost and timing of the repairs to, and replacement of, major building components.
<b>Non-fully mutual housing co-operative</b>	A housing co-operative where all tenants are not required to be members of the co-operative. (See also fully mutual housing co-operative).
<b>Notice of proceedings</b>	The formal notice provided to tenants informing them that their landlord is taking legal proceedings to seek a court order for recovery of possession of a property.
<b>Peer group</b>	A group of organisations facing similar tasks and

challenges with which comparisons can be made. RSLs choose which peer group they belong to when they submit their APSRs.

<b>Performance indicator</b>	A measure of how a RSL is achieving its objectives. Performance Indicators can be compared with a pre-set standard (a benchmark) or with other organisations.
<b>Performance Standards</b>	Housing standards for all social landlords in Scotland.
<b>Reasonable Preference categories</b>	Homelessness, overcrowding, large families, living in below tolerable standard housing or unsatisfactory living conditions.
<b>Registered social landlord (RSL)</b>	A landlord providing social rented housing that is registered and regulated by Communities Scotland.
<b>Re-lets</b>	Lets made to the second or subsequent tenant. Distinguished from new lets that are made when the property is first built or modernised.
<b>Right to Repair</b>	A scheme which gives tenants legal rights to have certain repairs in defined times.
<b>Section 5 referrals</b>	Under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 a local authority can request a registered social landlord which has accommodation in its area to provide accommodation to homeless people. This request is known as a Section 5 referral.
<b>Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)</b>	All property managed by registered social landlords must be brought up to a certain standard by 2015.
<b>Scottish secure tenancy (SST)</b>	The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establishes the Scottish Secure Tenancy as the tenancy for all tenants of social landlords in Scotland.
<b>&amp; Short Scottish secure tenancy (SSST)</b>	Section 34 and schedule 6 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 establish the basic conditions when a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy can apply to some tenants of social landlords in Scotland in place of a full SST

## Regulation & Inspection

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