

Leadership and culture: Scottish social housing sector

Research brief

Background

The Grenfell Inquiry Phase 2 Report noted the failure of leadership in culture and leadership in the social housing sector in England but also concluded that the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, when enacted, would address the concerns raised by the inquiry. However, the Grenfell Inquiry did not consider Scotland within its remit. As such, given the challenges facing the sector in Scotland with the declaration of a national housing emergency and the commitment from the Scottish Government to respond to the Grenfell Inquiry report and recommendations, this report will consider what leadership and culture gaps exist in the Scottish social housing sector. In particular, it will detail the capabilities and knowledge required of leaders, the culture prevalent in the Scottish social housing sector and offer recommendations on how these can be developed to improve performance in these areas.

Existing evidence/research

While the Grenfell Inquiry considered what improvements would be appropriate to improve the housing system in England, we are not aware of any existing analysis of leadership and culture in the Scottish social housing sector.

This would therefore be the first evaluation of culture and leadership across the Scottish social housing sector and its determinations have the potential to inform discussions on professional practice in Scotland. However, we do note that a critique of performance in the private rented sector has led to the introduction of a qualification and CPD requirements for many working in the letting agent sector.

We also of course recognise the ongoing work of the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to ensure there is appropriate regulatory compliance from social landlords in Scotland and indeed the risks identified by the SHR in its annual report in 2023, which include the financial health and governance of RSLs and performance in delivering services.

While there is no definitive report on leadership and culture, in our discussions with social landlords across the sector, we note the following representative feedback from stakeholders:

- It is considered that the current system of regulation is different from the regulatory regime that exists in England and may not work effectively in identifying gaps in leadership or failure in culture.
- Improving culture and leadership has to be a collective responsibility and social landlords need support from a range of bodies which can offer assistance at all levels within an organisation.
- There is concern that existing structures at a local and national level do not adequately recognise and raise the importance of housing services and housing as a profession and in turn, create culture and leadership challenges. The strategic, systemic importance of housing teams is not recognised widely, given the absence of chief housing officers at a local and national level and a lack of CPD requirements.
- The introduction of a qualification requirement in England is not necessarily what is required in Scotland. Instead, a commitment to lifelong learning and training could be more helpful in supporting an improved culture in the sector rather than a one-off qualification.
- Supporting improved culture and leadership needs to be considered at an organisational and systems level, rather than placing responsibility on individual practitioners.

- The wider context in which landlords operate is changing, with more responsibilities, higher standards and fewer resources, all of which can encourage more professional boards and mergers.

As noted above, we recognise the Scottish Government's intention to respond to the findings of the Grenfell Inquiry by March 2025 and determinations from this review have the potential to ensure a greater focus on building better cultures in the Scottish social housing sector.

What the review will consider

A review will assess the strength and areas for development with regards to culture and leadership in the Scottish social housing sector, how landlords consider these factors (if at all) and how and if this could be improved at an individual, organisational and systemic level.

Given the anecdotal feedback from landlords in Scotland, the review will answer the following questions:

- What are the key professional competencies needed in senior leaders and how evident are they in Scotland?
- What are the perceptions/reality of the role of qualifications and training in supporting a positive culture?
- How can organisations identify and develop future leaders?
- To what extent does the structural design of the Scottish social housing sector support or inhibit good leadership and a positive culture?
- How does the existing context inform cultural and leadership practice in Scotland?
- What lessons are there from the wider rented sector, practice in England and other relevant sectors which could inform culture and leadership in the Scottish social housing sector?
- Are any systemic changes required to provide confidence to tenants, landlords, the SHR and Scottish Government about culture and leadership in the Scottish social housing sector?

To conduct this review, we suggest that the researcher(s) consider the following:

- Recent trends for staff retention/recruitment among social landlords and reasons for leaving/joining.
- Areas of concern/focus highlighted by the Scottish Housing Regulator and patterns driving a change in regulatory status among social landlords.
- Availability of CPD, training and qualifications for practitioners and its relevance.
- Attitudes and confidence on self-assurance from staff and tenants and its contribution to organisational culture.
- The presence of a statutory chief officer, practitioner registration and CPD requirements, and other relevant structural changes in other jurisdictions and professions and any evidence of improved performance, culture and leadership.
- Discussion with practitioners and tenants to understand approach and impact of leadership and culture.

Outputs

The final report should evidence:

- An analysis of leadership and culture in the Scottish social housing sector.
- The emerging trends and risks in the Scottish social housing sector.

- Learning from other jurisdictions and sectors.
- Recommendations for (i) practitioners (ii) employers (iii) SHR and (iv) Scottish Government on the systemic changes required to improve culture and leadership.

A PowerPoint slide detailing the findings of the evaluation should also be provided on completion of the project and we would expect the consultant to make themselves available to present the findings at a series of CIH events and forums over the succeeding six months.

Timeline and proposal details

Proposals should be emailed to callum.chomczuk@cih.org no later than **5pm on Friday 21 March 2025**, with interviews due to take place in April.

Following appointment, it is expected that the entire project may take around six months to complete, with a final report and presentation due at the end of this period. Any extension can be discussed and agreed with CIH Scotland. The successful candidate will likely undertake the following outputs, although we expect each proposal to set out how the researcher intends to approach the project and their suggested timeline:

- Work with CIH to establish a review group to support the project.
- Evidence review, including existing literature and existing data sets. This includes grey data and practice from across the UK.
- Online survey of tenants and landlords including survey design, dissemination and follow up.
- Setting up and conducting a series of interviews with sector representatives (10-20 in total).
- Draft of initial report and recommendations.
- Roundtables with tenants, landlords and other stakeholders and follow up consultation.
- Final draft report and supporting materials.
- Ongoing account management and client liaison.

If you have any questions or would like any further information, please get in touch by emailing callum.chomczuk@cih.org