



**Senate Scrutiny Exercise into
information on spending available to
RCH customers.**

Summer 2020



1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been written by the Senate to provide feedback from their investigation into what information River Clyde Homes publishes for their customers in relation to monies spent.

2. Background

2.1 The Senate had been meeting to discuss their next investigation before 'Lockdown' happened.

2.2 As the timescale for remaining in this situation was unknown, the Senate agreed they would like to carry out a shorter investigation if possible.

2.3 Some of the group are general members and they advised that the AGM would take place in September with the annual accounts being made available to them. This encouraged the group to investigate what information on spending was available to all customers with the overall purpose to look at what information is available and in what format, how it looks and if it tells customers what they want to know.

3. The Senate

3.1 The Senators carrying out this investigation were Marion Wilson, Ian McArthur, Elizabeth Berry, John Clenaghan, Margaret MacLeod, Jim Lennon and Joe MacLean.

3.2 The Senate were supported in their investigation by Siobhan O'Kane, Governance & Executive Team Support Manager, RCH and Anne Ross, Governance Officer, RCH.

4. Report Structure

4.1 The report outlines the methods used to investigate the current practices and the Senate's findings. It makes recommendations based on these findings.

5. Methods used

5.1 The exercise was conducted as follows:

- Due to the Government guidelines on social distancing, a Skype meeting took place and the Senate discussed how it might carry out an investigation considering the current situation.

- The group discussed what they individually wanted to know about RCH' financial situation, previous spend and planned spending due to their varying accommodation and rent charges.
- The Communications and Marketing Manager attended a meeting and discussed the current information and formats that are available for customers. Following the meeting he supplied links to varying reports and information currently available via the website.
- The Senate reviewed the current RCH information available to the public and agreed there was no requirement to indicate specific spend over particular thresholds. What was required was publication of spend relating to rental income.
- The Senate agreed a list of other RSLs to contact and submitted an enquiry through the TPAS(S) members enquiry service, to gain comparative information.
- The Senate agreed seven questions to use for research purposes. (See Appendix 1)
- The Senate looked at other RSL's websites, the SHR website and spoke to Officers from other RSLs, using the set questions.
- The Senate compared the findings to RCH information available (Appendix 2) and discussed potential recommendations.

Group discussions

The Senate are fully aware that all comments and information are treated in the strictest confidence.

Senate members have signed a Code of Conduct and confidentiality agreement and feedback will not be attributed to individual managers or customers who took part in this investigation.

6. Results

Method	What happened	Comments
The Senate met to discuss the possibility of carrying on any scrutiny during the Covid-19 pandemic.	<p>The members considered how they might be able to do an investigation from home.</p> <p>They agreed to do a short investigation into what financial information is available to customers and whether customers understood it and if it was meaningful to them.</p> <p>.</p>	<p>The Senate acknowledged that gaining information from others could be difficult whilst staff at RCH and other RSLs were furloughed or working from home.</p> <p>The members decided that much of the information required was probably available online. However, the Senate asked the Governance Officer to contact the RSLs to establish a contact who might be prepared to provide information verbally.</p>

<p>The Senate met with the Communications and Marketing Manager</p>	<p>Discussed the availability of information and the frequency of publication.</p>	<p>The manager advised that following consultation and review it was found that hard copy publications were not offering Value for Money but would still be available on request.</p> <p>Following the meeting he provided e-links to the information discussed.</p>
<p>The Senate split the list of RSLs and agreed that some would look online at websites and some would call to speak to the Officers at specific RSLs who had responded to their requests for contact.</p>	<p>The group met to discuss their various results.</p>	<p>The Senate highlighted the difficulty in finding information on some of the RSL's websites. When the Senate was unable to find the information, it had tried searching using certain words and, in some instances, could not find anything. Further investigation showed that some financial information could only be found within 'Regeneration' and or 'Development'. It was felt in general this was not obvious for customers.</p> <p>It was noted that many RSLs have the Annual Accounts only, available on their websites. It was felt that the information was almost being hidden away.</p> <p>Only by looking on the SHR website could specific information be found. The Senate questioned whether customers across the country would know to look there.</p>
<p>A spreadsheet with the comparisons was sent to all members of the Senate to assess.</p>	<p>The Senate met to discuss possible recommendations.</p>	<p>The Senate compared the RCH information in relation to what was being reported by the other RSLs and where and when it was published.</p> <p>A report was drafted to be presented to RCH Board.</p>
<p>Reviewing hard copies of financial information.</p>	<p>The Senate could not access any hard copies from RCH or other RSLs due to these being kept in offices which were inaccessible due to 'Lockdown' restrictions.</p>	<p>The Senate was informed that customer consultation had taken place at RCH and within one or two of the other RSLs regarding hard copy publications.</p> <p>The results had shown this did not represent Value for Money and so</p>

		most RSLs had either stopped or reduced printing significantly.
--	--	---

7. Investigation supporting notes

- 7.1 Due to the unknown timescale of 'lockdown' the Senate was keen to continue to meet in some way and to carry out a scrutiny exercise if possible, during this time. The Senate agreed that the investigation would need to be a smaller scale investigation. It recognised that it could be difficult to engage with some staff at RCH and other RSLs because of staff being furloughed or working from home with limited access to specific information.
- 7.2 One or two members of the Senate are currently working varying hours so did not take part fully in this investigation. For other members without internet facilities we reimbursed telephone costs when joining meetings via Skype. We have provided a device to two of the Senate via the RCH digital inclusion team.
- 7.3 There were some Skype meetings when one or two group members had technical issues trying to join the meetings but overall the Senate was pleased with the frequent interaction with the others in the group, using this facility.
- 7.4 The Senate noted that the information published by RCH was highlighted on the opening page of the website, RCH produced information more frequently than other RSLs and showed spend in a number of different ways, e.g. pie charts, columns of figures, customer satisfaction results.

8. Recommendations

The Recommendations agreed are:

	Recommendation	Reason for making this recommendation
	With the Asset strategy being a 'needs based' programme of works, publishing a cyclical maintenance programme with costings is requested. This together with more detailed information of actual previous spend by area, e.g. Port Glasgow town centre, sheltered complexes etc. is required to inform customers. The information should include the actual works carried out, e.g. cyclical maintenance, roof repairs, close painting etc.	<p>To enable customers to see how their rent is spent and to show that all customers are receiving the same levels of service as required, regardless of where they live.</p> <p>To ensure customers are aware of the work that is planned and undertaken across Inverclyde as required.</p> <p>Caveat – following the period of 'Lockdown' the Senate are aware there will be delays in planned work whilst RCH prioritise the outstanding</p>

		repairs that were not carried out due to government guidelines.
2.	Use a pound coin as a visual reporting image.	Will allow tenants to see how many pence of every pound of rent is spent. Simplifies it for people to understand. Do not want percentages.
3.	Ensure there is a regular report available and the reporting timescales are defined.	Customers will know when to expect the information to be available and so may potentially take more interest in it as will be able to make their own comparisons on a more regular basis. At least twice a year in 'Up Close', plus the annual report.

9. Review

- 9.1 The Senate will meet to discuss the Board's acceptance or rejection of any of the recommendations.
- 9.2 An action plan for the recommendations approved by the Board, will be generated by the responsible Director and presented to the Senate.
- 9.3 Team Leads will be invited to the Senate meeting to report progress on their specific actions.
- 9.4 The Senate will have the option to attend any subsequent meetings of the Board or the Social Landlord Operations Committee, during which an update of the action plan is being presented by the relevant Team Lead.