

# Nomination Form

## Housing Organisation of the Year



### TIS National Excellence Awards 2024

The **TIS National Excellence awards** recognise and celebrate housing organisations, staff, volunteers, tenants, residents, and community groups **who are leading the way and making positive change in the Scottish social housing sector.**

Categories honour excellence in everything **from partnership working, tenant participation and scrutiny practice, to digital creativity and innovation.** Hotly anticipated, the awards offer a seal of approval for the most outstanding work.

Finalists are selected by an expert and independent judging panel, and **winners announced at an awards ceremony on Thursday 7th November 2024 at the Grand Central Hotel in Glasgow.**

**The closing date for applications is 5:00pm on Thursday 11th July 2024.** TIS accepts submissions in more than one award category.

#### Category Overview

The **Housing Organisation of the Year** award recognises an outstanding housing organisation who has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to embedding tenant participation, scrutiny, and wider community engagement into the culture of the organisation.

Submissions must **evidence how the organisation is dedicated to going above and beyond, to ensure tenants' rights are at the forefront,** have a meaningful say, and are pivotal in influencing housing policies, services, and standards. The organisation must promote quality and recognise that tenants are at the heart.

#### Who you can nominate

This award is open to housing organisations operating across the Scottish social housing sector.

## About you

Please note information about the individual, organisation, or group submitting the application:

<b>Name</b>	Larke Adger
<b>Position</b>	CEO
<b>Organisation</b>	West Granton Housing Co-op
<b>Email address</b>	Larke.adger@westgrantonhc.co.uk
<b>Telephone number</b>	0131 551 5035

## About the nominee

Please note information about the housing organisation you are nominating:

<b>Organisation</b>	West Granton Housing Co-op
<b>Email address</b>	larke.adger@westgrantonhc.co.uk
<b>Telephone number</b>	0131 551 5035

## Background

### Maximum 250 words

Please outline background information about the housing organisation that you are nominating.

For example, detail:

- The background of the organisation, including: total number of homes, total number of employees, and the geographical areas the organisation covers, etc.
- A brief background of their tenant participation, scrutiny, and wider engagement practices.

West Granton Housing Co-op is only one of 8 housing co-operatives left in Scotland. We are a registered social landlord based in north Edinburgh.

We are community based with a stock of 372 general needs properties.

Being a fully mutual co-operative, all our tenants have to first become members of the Co-op and only members can be offered a Scottish Secure Tenancy.

As a fully mutual co-operative, we are a 100% tenant governed organisation meaning that our Committee of Management (our Board) is made up entirely of tenants. We currently have 12 Members on our Board.

This is one of the highest levels of tenant participation you can achieve with an RSL and this is not widely recognised nor celebrated enough within our sector. The level of dedication and commitment to demonstrate substantive and effective governance in the boardroom has to go way beyond that of an ordinary housing association owing to the fact the Scottish Housing Regulator need ongoing assurance that tenants are “governance fit” to drive the strategic direction of the organisation. This means our Committee undertake a huge amount of hours of governance training each year, and we have our own “in-house Governance Consultant”, in addition to the specialised governance advisory services and training as provided through our membership of Co-ops UK.

As a co-operative we work to the co-operative principles and also our mission statement that “Our Tenants are paramount in everything we do”.

## Actions

### Maximum 500 words

Please outline specific actions the housing organisation has taken to make an exceptional commitment to embedding tenant participation, scrutiny, and wider community engagement into the culture of the organisation.

For example, outline:

- How the organisation has gone above and beyond to ensure tenant rights are at the forefront.
- How the organisation has made a real difference to the lives of tenants.
- How the organisation promotes equality and recognise that tenants are at the heart.
- How the organisation has explored innovative new ways to get people involved.
- The work involved and their overall aim.

- We are a Co-op where all our tenants are member and members are tenants. We wanted to create and implement a Tenants Charter but wanted our tenant members to decide on the service standards they want us (staff) to work to. As a co-op & social landlord we truly believe in the practice of tenant participation.
- We looked at our Complaints Received and also myself (CEO) and the COO listened to the conversations between our staff and tenants over the telephone and in person, at the front desk. We became aware that the main issue for our tenants was that they weren't getting the feedback they were looking for in terms of "what was happening" to various tenancy issues they had reported if they were experiencing any delays- for example if there was going to be a delay with effecting a repair, or a delay in dealing with a neighbour dispute or home visit, permissions to carry out an alteration, or a more complex request.

As Senior Management, we could have decided (with Board approval) what the service standards should be for the organisation, but we felt that if we were going to be true to our values and our mission statement, AND for us to be in keeping with the spirit of a co-operative and truly embrace tenant participation, we should let our tenant members decide.

- In order for our tenants to decide on the standards they wanted us to perform to in their Charter, we wanted to be completely removed from the process so as not to influence or bias the outcomes. Also, we felt that there would be increased staff "buy-in" if it wasn't coming from Senior Management or the Board. In addition, WGHC is working towards achieving its Investors in Excellence accolade, and this approach tied in with this ethos.

To ensure a completely independent approach was adopted and facilitated for our tenant members, and to ensure that the whole process was entirely tenant-driven, we commissioned TIS to carry out 2 specialist Tenant Focus Groups to come up with these standards and also for TIS to write up our new Tenant Charter, along with the approval of our Tenant Members.

- We accepted TIS's proposal to develop our Tenants' Charter. The project was written up and led by Stephen Connor (Development Manager).

The proposal was as follows:-

Stage 1: Customer Service Charter		
Task January 2023	Staffing	TIS Hours
Written WGHC Customer Service Charter and presentation in relation to review of WGHC customer service report findings and recommendations.	TIS DM	7 hours
<b>Total hours</b>		<b>7 hours</b>

Stage 2: Arrangements for the Focus Group		
Task January 2023	Staffing	TIS Hours
Meeting between WGHC and TIS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Agree the approach and timetable;</li> <li>» Agree dates, times and formats of focus group; and</li> <li>» Agree communication and information sharing procedures.</li> </ul>	TIS DM	1 hour
<b>Total hours</b>		<b>1 hour</b>

Stage 2: Consultation		
Task February 2023	Staffing	TIS Hours
Communication and information development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Utilise the comprehensive library of stakeholder databases (shared stakeholder database).</li> <li>» Provide clear and transparent information on the focus group process; why we are consulting; and what will be achieved as a result of the consultation process.</li> <li>» Outline the role of TIS.</li> <li>» Provide contact details and FREEPHONE line to ask further questions about the consultation process.</li> <li>» Detail information about the Focus Group session and how to participate/get involved.</li> </ul>	TIS DM	7 hours (Inc. preparation of materials and paperwork).
Focus Group Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Delivery of one (1) tenant and wider customer focus group session.</li> </ul>	TIS DM	7 hours (Inc. 3.5 hours preparation of materials and paperwork).
Understanding WGHC's customer service charter Training and information session to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» WGHC's customer service values and principles</li> <li>» WGHC's customer service standards</li> <li>» Understanding how WGHC's new Customer Service Charter links and aligns with the Business Plan and wider Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC)</li> </ul>		
<b>Total hours</b>		<b>14 hours</b>

<b>Total Development Project Hours</b>	<b>22 hours</b>
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#### Timeline:

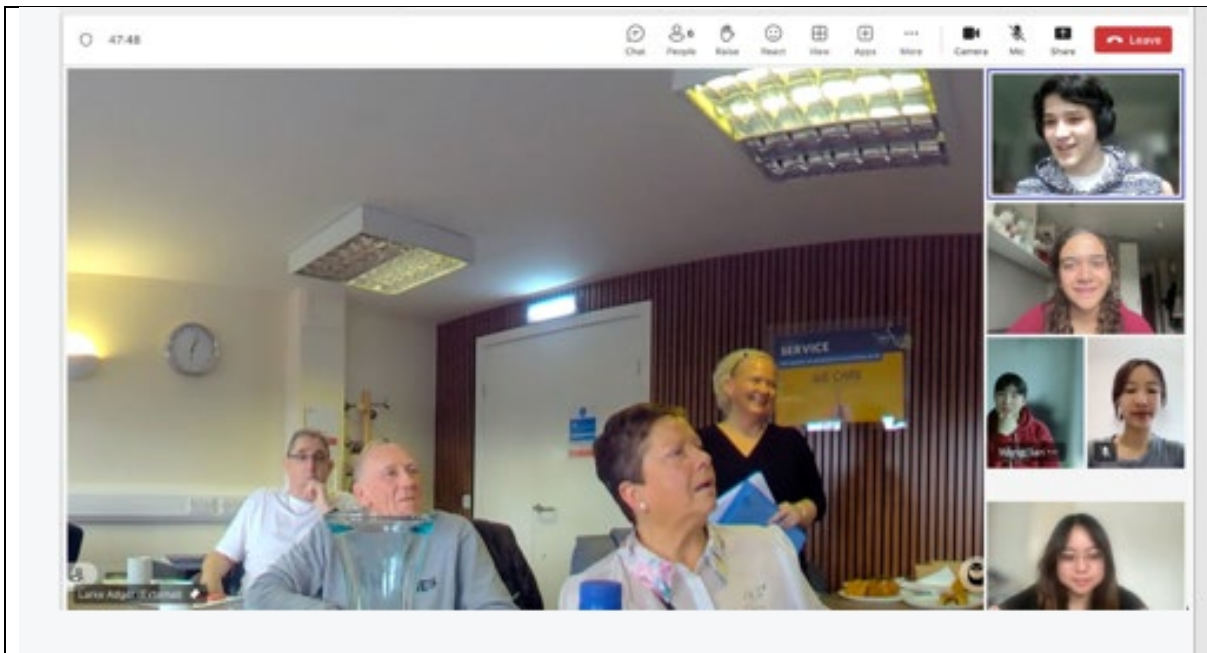
- 24<sup>th</sup> November 2023 - the first Focus Group with TIS/Stephen Connor took place in our Boardroom with 13 tenants (We have 372 tenants and 13 responded to the TIS invite letter). On purpose, none of our 12 Committee Members (who are also tenants) were invited to take part as they might have been “bias” or have influenced the process and the outcome. We wanted this to be entirely tenant-member driven. ALL other tenants were invited to take part. We had a good demographic representation who came forward.
- 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024 – the second Focus Group with TIS/Stephen Connor took place in our Boardroom – again with the same 13 tenants which helped ensure consistency.
- 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024- on the back of TIS finishing their final Focus Group Session with our Tenants, we had agreed with Stephen Connor to “prep” our tenants up to meet with University College London/180 Degrees Consulting who were, at the same time, doing a research exercise for us in assessing WGHC’s social impact in the community and as part of that they wanted to be able to interview our tenants personally. This was a perfect opportunity for our tenants to give their feedback at this Final Focus Group Session.

The feedback we received from participating tenants was incredible – they absolutely loved the level of involvement and the “say” they had in setting their service standards. And it was fantastic that they got to see it become a reality and they truly felt “ownership” of the entire Charter.

- 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024 – the Committee of Management (our tenant governed Board) approved the final draft Tenant Charter
- 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024 – WGHC formally implemented their first Tenants Charter. It has been made into two large A2 posters and hangs in our Reception area for all to see on arrival. Full staff implementation

We purposefully chose the Boardroom as the venue for our tenants to meet.

As a Co-op, this is infact “their” Boardroom- their rent pays for the office we all work in; as well as all our wages!



It was the first time these tenant members got to sit in the Boardroom. They were welcomed by staff at Reception and Stephen (TIS) took them and guided them straight through to the Boardroom. Apart from the “Welcome” at Reception- WGHC were not involved in any way in the process. It was completely independent and without influence from WGHC staff or Committee.

We arranged plenty of hot catering & cakes for all our tenants on both days and they each also received 2 x £20 shopping vouchers for attending both days (not to mention very generous “take home doggie bags of sausage rolls & steak pies”!

It has been agreed that TIS will return to review the implementation of our new Charter along with our Tenant Focus Group in November 2024 as per excerpt from their Review Report below:-

### **7. Monitoring and Evaluation**

It is essential that customer satisfaction with service standards continue to be monitored and evaluated to identify if agreed values and standards have been met, to recognise what works well and what may need to be adapted to meet the changing needs and priorities of WGHC and its tenants.

TIS recommend that an exercise to review customer satisfaction with customer service standards takes place in November 2024.

## Outcomes

### Maximum 700 words

Please outline positive outcomes achieved as a result of the housing organisation's commitment to embedding tenant participation, scrutiny, and wider community engagement into the culture of the organisation

For example, detail the impact on:

- The delivery of housing services.
- The improvement of satisfaction levels.
- The strategic approach of the organisation.
- The culture of the organisation and its core values.
- Communication, strengthening relationships, and partnership working.
- The inclusion and lasting benefits of tenants, residents, and/or communities.
- The skills and knowledge of other tenants, residents, and/or communities.
- How others can learn from the organisation's good practice now and in the future.

- We now have a standard email acknowledgement response used for every tenant email received. The email refers to our Tenant Charter and the timescales which we have to give a full response/answer to our tenant together with the details of our COO, to who we ask them contact directly if we fail to meet those timescales. It is not automatically generated either; it is personally sent from a staff member each time. And also to ensure that emails don't get lost in "a blackhole of a generic email inbox". This ensures direct accountability and direct ownership of each email received. So it is not just a "faceless" bit of digital communication. It is a request from our tenants for us to action for them. To engage and feedback to them.
- Our delivery of housing services has improved in terms of us having an improved understanding of our tenants and their needs. This has been achieved by the increased levels of discussion with our tenants when they make request to us. Most requests either come in by email or over the phone. Tenants can get directly through to a staff number within 5 telephone rings. We aim to resolve the tenant's request as quickly as we can.
- It has also resulted in us feeding back to our tenants more and often – if it is required. And this feedback is now more informative, relevant and useful. It has helped to manage expectations. So tenants aren't left wondering "what happened to my request to....." Tenants are all aware of the timescales we need to work to. Staff are aware of the timescales by which they need to deliver by. If there is going to be a delay or if the service request is of a more complex nature, the tenant is now made aware of this and not left wondering. This improves our relationship with our

tenants. Tenants are genuinely appreciative and happy. They are not unrealistic but are supportive and understanding with our staff and this has also helped to increase staff satisfaction levels at work.

Feedback from tenants to date, has been incredibly positive. As a result of the Charter Tenants feel more empowered and it makes it more comfortable for them to have this as a tool to refer to in the event we didn't do what they asked. It stops it being "personal" and all about the service standards they have set in place for us. It has been hugely successful.

- Our formal KPI Tenant Satisfaction levels are amongst some of the highest across the sector; consistently. This can be independently verified by the SHR Charter Returns Comparison Tool and also through the Scotland Housing Network who do our annual performance analysis visit when they compare our performance against other RSLs in the sector.

The aim of this exercise with development and implementation of a Tenants Charter was never about improving the KPIs of Tenant Satisfaction Levels in the Scottish Social Housing Charter (i.e. how good do you feel your landlord is about keeping you informed, etc).

This was always about improving the levels of satisfaction that aren't so easily measured – but were being observed by myself as CEO and our COO (when listening and observing interactions and conversations between our staff and tenants).

I never wanted to use a phrase with staff such as "going the extra mile".

Because that implies that we are asking more than their job role or job description states and suggests they should be rewarded for "going that extra mile".

I wanted this just to be part and parcel of what we do; for us to truly practice and work to our values and mission statement "that our tenants are paramount in everything we do"

It is in our Business Plan for 2024-2027 that we will implement a Customer Service Charter.

This aligns with our vision to become a Centre of Excellence as we work through our organisational journey of achieving our Investors in Excellence. We are looking to be assessed in October this year. If successful, we will be the first organisation in Scotland to achieve this.

Moving forward, it is thereafter our vision to become the leading housing co-operative in Scotland, recognised as a Centre of Excellence.

Our tenant members are proud of their Co-op. We are proud to serve them. To WGHC, this is what social housing is all about.

To do what we say we will do; to allow our tenants to have their say about what it is we do and how we do it.

## 7. strategic objectives

WGHC **To continue working towards achieving excellence through our commitment Investors in Excellence**

(aligning with our mission statement that our tenants are paramount in everything we do)

WGHC **To implement a Customer Service Charter**

(aligning with our core value of providing excellent customer service)

WGHC **To change our approach to complaints handling**

(aligning with our core value of being a learning organisation)

WGHC **To continue to seek new ways of increasing our Social Impact**

WGHC **To continue our advocacy of the housing co-operative model**

WGHC **To continue working towards an integrated approach to asset management**

## Our Mission Statement:

Our tenants are paramount in everything we do

## Our Vision:

To become the leading housing co-operative in Scotland, recognised as a Centre of Excellence

## Our Core Values



Our organisational culture is very much about embodying the ethos and spirit of a co-operative, as well as that of a high performing social landlord who is fully compliant.

Our culture is all about our tenants.

It is our purpose.

It is the reason we come to work every day.

We are here to make a difference for our tenants and for their community.

Also, Co-ops have traditionally not been seen in a good light by the Scottish Housing Regulator. We have worked hard to change this by ensuring high standards of governance within our organisation. This year, in May 2024, we were one of the RSLs who were on the Scottish Housing Regulator's List for their Annual Assurance Visits.

Following that visit, the SHR has cited West Granton Housing Co-op for two elements of good practice, and this can be found in their latest report dated 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024 – excerpts below:

**West Granton Housing Co-operative** provides governing body members with access to a comprehensive digital evidence bank that holds detailed information linked to regulatory requirements. The evidence bank is regularly reviewed and updated throughout the year to ensure accuracy and is used to support the governing body by providing sources of assurance during the preparation of the Statement.

**West Granton Housing Co-operative's** concise and clear style of reporting financial information to the governing body ensures key financial concepts are communicated appropriately and are well understood. It found that setting out the dates of annual returns at the start of each governing body report is a good way to keep the Committee informed and assured that regulatory financial returns have been completed accurately and submitted on time.

Overall, in implementing a Tenants Charter it not only helps our organisation prioritise our tenants and the service we provide it also helps to formalise our commitment to the quality of service we want to provide; and more importantly what and how they want us to provide to them.

It is a brave move to hand over the process of setting service standards to your tenants.

But we truly wanted to make a difference. We wanted to be different.

We are a co-op and by definition, a co-op exists to better serve the needs and interests of its members. Our members are our tenants. Our mission statement was never meant to be a string of words. We wanted it to be our reason for coming to work and the purpose of what we do. Our mission statement of “our tenants are paramount in everything we do” had to be believed by our tenants.

That is why we took the decision to hand our tenants the responsibility of setting the standards by which they want us to work to. For them.

We can be 100% confident in stating that our Tenants Charter is truly tenant driven; as are all the standards that we work to which appear in this Charter. It is their Charter. We are here for them.

The success to this was always going to be our commitment.

That we would be committed to delivering the standards that were set for us.

By the very people that we are employed to serve, our tenant members.

More than setting quantitative standards; they also set a truly amazing set of qualitative standards such as asking us to listen and respect their views, show consideration and understanding and for us “to take pride in the work that we do and recognise that we are doing it for our tenants.” I think this last one is an incredible standard to ask us to work to and it makes me emotional every time I read it.

I think others can learn from WGHC's example.

Our tenants have been fantastic in what they have done for us with their Tenants Charter. And they have done an incredible job in setting these service standards. They are fair, reasonable, achievable, and yet fundamental as to how we should all treat one another.

I think we need to learn to trust our tenants more.

Their voices are critically important.

They should be our focus, our purpose and our passion.

I think the Charter they have delivered to us is a true testament that Tenant Participation really does work. So, don't be tokenistic about it. Deliver it. Embrace it.

On the next two pages, I proudly present the WGHC Tenants Charter, written by our Tenants.



# WGHC

Our tenants are paramount in everything we do

## West Granton Housing Co-operative Tenant Service Charter

<b>Respect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communicate with tenants in a polite and friendly manner;</li><li>• Listen to tenants and respect their views;</li><li>• Behave respectfully and professionally;</li></ul>
<b>Inclusive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be approachable, welcoming and friendly with everyone;</li><li>• Ensure that everyone we engage with feels respected;</li><li>• Take time to listen and get to know tenants and their needs;</li><li>• Ensure that information is accessible, such as the provision of interpreters, large print, etc;</li><li>• Provide access to translation and/or interpretation services on request;</li><li>• Be aware of and understand our communities cultures and beliefs;</li></ul>
<b>Integrity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speak honestly and be open;</li><li>• Help wherever possible;</li><li>• Do the right thing, even if it is not the easiest thing to do;</li><li>• Take responsibility and proactively resolve any issues;</li><li>• Do what we say we are going to do, and take the time to communicate updates;</li><li>• Ensure any information you share with WGHC will be treated in a confidential manner;</li><li>• Take pride in the work that we do and recognise we are doing it for our tenants;</li></ul>
<b>Improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be committed to providing good quality homes and working with tenants to make West Granton an attractive place for people to live with good quality housing and local environments, as well as deliver services that meet tenants needs;</li><li>• Seek to do our best with excellence as our standard;</li><li>• Strive to improve what we do for our tenants;</li><li>• Listen to you and take positive action to improve our services;</li><li>• Look for ways to make a positive difference through the work that we do;</li></ul>
<b>Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have a "how can I help" approach;</li><li>• Show consideration and understanding; and</li><li>• Listen to tenants concerns and help resolve issues wherever possible.</li></ul>



# WGHC

Our tenants are paramount in everything we do

## West Granton Housing Co-operative Tenant Service Charter

<b>Telephone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Answer calls promptly <b>within five rings</b> when the office is open.</li><li>• Tell you who you are speaking to.</li><li>• Respond to telephone messages you leave on our voicemail, when the office is closed or calls are diverted to voicemail for other reasons, within one working day of message being left.</li><li>• Call you back, if you have asked us to, <b>within two working days</b>. If you want to speak to a specific person who is not available, we will let you know when you can expect a call back or offer an alternative.</li></ul>
<b>Email</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acknowledge receipt of email <b>within one working day</b>.</li><li>• Reply <b>within five working days</b>.</li><li>• Provide an immediate out of office message advising when we will return or offer an alternative contact email.</li><li>• Ensure the name and job title of the staff member you have contacted or has contacted you, is included in our return emails, along with the office telephone number.</li></ul>
<b>Letter or Written Correspondence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acknowledge receipt of letter <b>within two working days</b> by letter, telephone, or email.</li><li>• Reply to letters <b>within five working days</b>.</li><li>• Ensure our letters to you are clear, easy to understand and provide information on what to do next, if required.</li><li>• Include a contact name, telephone number, and any other information needed</li></ul>
<b>Home Visits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Treat your home with respect.</li><li>• Let you know why we are visiting.</li><li>• Arrive promptly for a pre-arranged appointment, telephone, or text to advise of any change.</li><li>• Tell you in advance if we need to reschedule a visit.</li><li>• Leave a calling card when contact has not been possible to let you know how to rearrange your appointment.</li><li>• Confirm in writing any agreed actions from meetings <b>within five working days</b>.</li></ul>
<b>Appointments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Arrange to discuss personal information in a quiet and confidential space in the office.</li><li>• Arrange a suitable time and place to meet with you if nowhere is available at the time</li><li>• Provide an alternative appointment if the staff member you want to speak to is not available or there is no other member of staff who can help</li><li>• Meet you <b>within fifteen minutes of the agreed time</b> or a pre-arranged appointment</li><li>• If you do not have an appointment, we will let you know how long you will wait to speak to a member of staff.</li></ul>

## What makes this nominee stand out from the rest?

### Maximum 100 words

Please provide a short testimonial on why this housing organisation deserves to win.

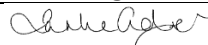
WGHC turned the setting of service standards on its head.  
It was not driven by management or the Board.  
It was 100% tenant driven. Independent of any organisational input.  
What our tenants have produced is an incredible piece of work on these two pages (See the WGHC Charter on pages 14 & 15).

For a small staff of 9, they do everything a social registered landlord has to do (just the same as the much larger, RSLs)..... but in addition to this.....they have worked and continue to work hard to learn and improve and be creative.

They truly have put their tenants first, and this continues to be their driving force to learn, improve and be creative... From investing in and supporting local charities who also make a real difference in our community, to joint working with other RSLs to provide an Energy Advisor who visits tenants in their homes, to our Housing Officer who also does Welfare Benefits work (the first holistic service approach to tenancy support), they work hard to truly embrace their co-operative ethos where everything is done in the best interest of their tenant members.

## Declaration

As the proposer I have completed this nomination form to the best of my knowledge, and the information provided is a true representation of the nominee's achievements.

<b>Name</b>	Larke Adger
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	01.08.24

Thank you for taking the time to complete this nomination form.

Please submit your nomination by **5:00pm on Thursday 11th July 2024** to TIS by email at: **info@tis.org.uk** or by post to: **TIS – Clockwise Offices, 77 Renfrew Street, Glasgow, G2 3BZ.**

## Next steps

- **All applications will be acknowledged on receipt by TIS.** If you do not receive acknowledgement within 3 working days, please contact us to ensure your application has been received.

- An **independent judging panel** will rate your application against the award criteria. The panel will consist of representatives from organisations across the Scottish social rented sector.
- Your award submission will provide the basis for both the shortlist and final decision of the winning entry.
- **TIS welcomes applications in more than one award category.**
- Please ensure you answer all questions as fully as possible and keep the content of your nomination focused – avoid exceeding the suggested word count.
- **TIS will inform all proposers of the outcome of their application Thursday 29th August 2024.**
- Finalists will be invited to the **TIS National Excellence Awards Ceremony**, as part of the TIS National Housing Conference and Exhibition, on **Thursday 7th November 2024** at the Grand Central Hotel in Glasgow.