



# Human rights in practice: Housing

Based on a model developed by Participation in the Practice of Rights in Belfast, the Scottish Human Rights Commission and Edinburgh Tenants' Federation have been supporting residents in Leith to use international human rights as a tool for challenging poor housing conditions. Residents worked alongside researchers to design and deliver a survey to more than 180 households, to find out what kinds of issues people were facing.

They discovered that people in their community have been experiencing a range of problems over a number of years, including damp and mould, poor heating and windows, vermin and insect infestation. Many residents, especially in high-rise blocks, have very poor quality bathrooms and kitchens.

The survey revealed that tenants felt responses by the local Council to maintenance requests were often slow or incomplete. Despite Council plans to invest money into regenerating the buildings, tenants had been given limited opportunities to contribute their views to this process.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognises that everyone has the right to adequate housing which includes heating and sanitation, and protection from cold, damp, wind and rain, and causes of disease.

With support from the Scottish Human Rights Commission and Edinburgh Tenants' Federation, residents identified which problems could be tackled backed by human rights standards and developed a set of human rights based indicators to monitor improvements. Residents presented their findings to City of Edinburgh Councillors and council officers at a public meeting in June 2016. The Council agreed to meet the residents within a month and develop a plan for improvements. Residents will undertake a new survey in 2017 to measure progress and report back on the human rights based indicators they identified. The Scottish Human Rights Commission has also provided human rights training to council officers in human rights.

The Commission and residents continue to call upon the Council to ensure they meet their responsibilities to respect, protect and fulfil human rights in the way they deliver housing services.



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2015: People living in mainly council-owned housing in Leith, Edinburgh, feel that their homes have become severely run down.

Problems with: Infestation of mice, rats and pigeons. Poor heating and windows, damp, mould and neglected maintenance.

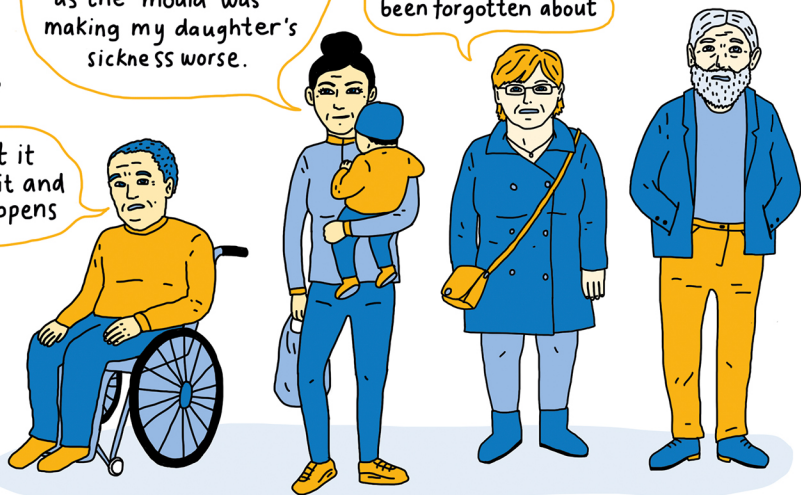


You report it and report it and nothing happens

This house has been classed as uninhabitable. We had to be moved as the mould was making my daughter's sickness worse.

We feel like we've been forgotten about

People says to me, "You live in a slum"



## Empowering people to know their rights

Summer 2015: Residents start working with Edinburgh Tenants Federation and the Scottish Human Rights Commission, who provide support to take a human rights based approach.



Since we found out about this, it's given us the knowledge we need to challenge things. We all just thought this was normal.

## International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Article 11: Everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing.

Article 12: Everyone has the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

### Human Rights Act 1998

Article 2: Everyone has the right to life.

Article 3: No one shall be treated in an inhumane or degrading way.

Article 8: Everyone has the right to home and family life.

Human Rights Law



## Putting rights into practice

Residents design and undertake a survey of all flats to find out what kind of conditions people are facing. Residents present the evidence they have gathered alongside human rights standards to the Council.

How do we take a human rights based approach?

Respect our rights.

Listen to us

Let's tackle this together!

Make us part of the decision



Are things improving?

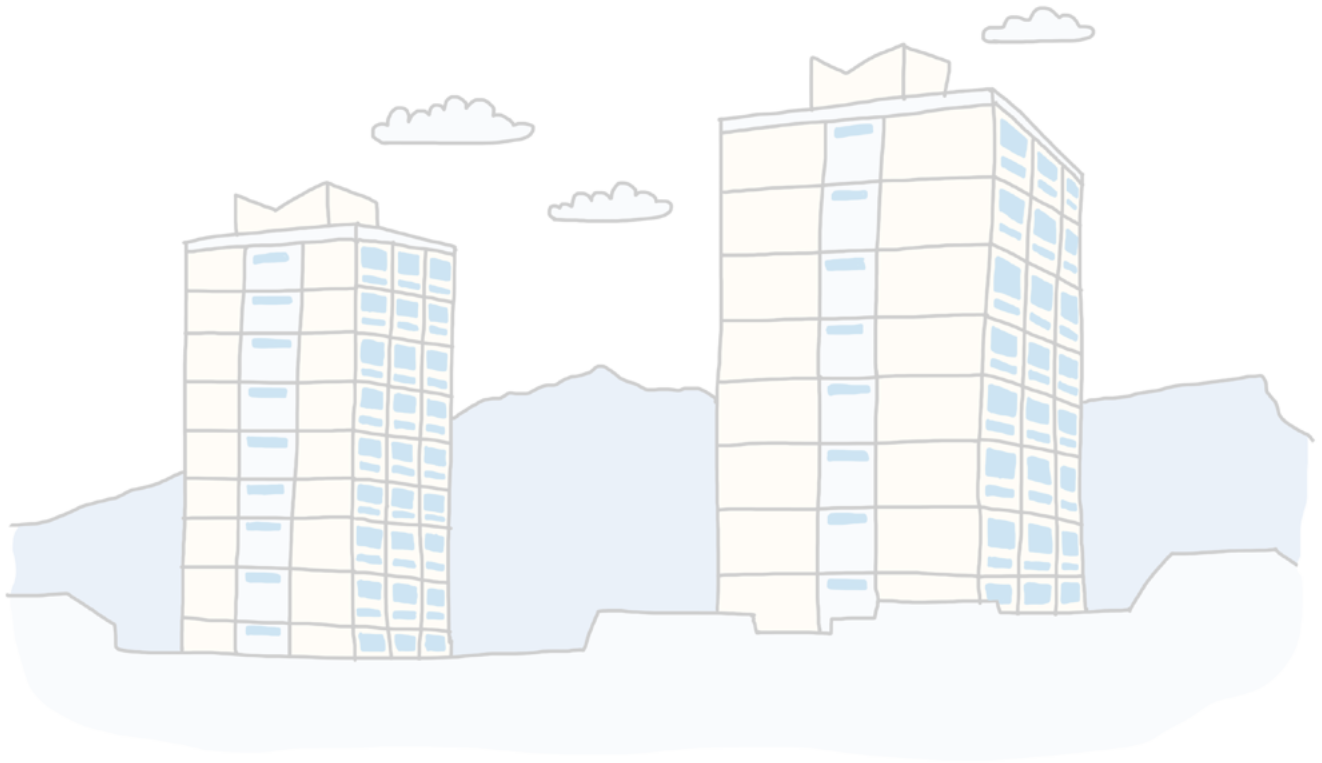
Not enough, let's keep working together.



## Holding authorities to account

Residents continue to use evidence from surveys together with international human rights laws and standards to call for improvements. They also have recourse to monitoring and regulation bodies and UN treaty bodies.

To find out more about the work of Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights, visit [www.snaprights.info](http://www.snaprights.info)



This case study has been produced as part of  
Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights (SNAP)

[www.snaprights.info](http://www.snaprights.info)



[actionplan@scottishhumanrights.com](mailto:actionplan@scottishhumanrights.com)