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Scotland's Housing – And Then There Was Light

The Scottish Housing Regulator reports that 37% of social housing properties are reported as still below the physical Scottish Housing Quality standard and that an estimated £13 million a year in potential rental income is being lost across Scotland in unrented property due to slow or poor systems. But he also acknowledges that there has been some positive progress recently.

One example of this progress is the Glasgow Housing Association whose persistent hard work in overcoming problems exactly like those listed by the regulator has earned them a finalist place in the Ground Breaking Service Team of the Year category at this month's Housing Heroes Awards.

Meanwhile the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman reported that last year 25% (the largest single portion) of all complaints about social housing were about repairs and maintenance.

Congratulations are due then to our other Scottish finalist West Lothian Council, whose repairs improvement team were noted in the Frontline Housing Team of the Year category.

But of the 75 award finalists from across the UK, in 15 different categories, only 2 Scottish housing organisations appeared. So what's so different about these organisations? They have both turned away from traditional management philosophies and are both using a management method called Systems Thinking. And last year's only Scottish Housing Heroes Awards finalist was doing the same.

The Scottish Parliament's Finance Committee is currently assessing Systems Thinking as one potential method for making deficit savings whilst keeping frontline services. One example of the results this can bring was given by Vanguard Scotland (the company whose Systems Thinking method did so well for our new housing heroes above). The Glasgow Housing Association saved £2 million in rent arrears and improved service performance by 18% just in the first year after Vanguard Scotland taught them their Systems Thinking method.

So it seems that for Scottish Social Housing, the light at the end of the tunnel may not be an oncoming train after all. It might just be a new way of doing things.

Vanguard Scotland have now publicly issued a series of free reports challenging traditional assumptions around how to design and run social housing systems and offering solutions to running them better and cheaper. Get them at <http://www.vanguardscotland.co.uk/housingreport.html>