

## Our Annual Assurance Statement

We comply with the regulatory requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Scottish Housing Regulator's (SHR) Framework, with the exception of those areas we set out below.

We:

- **Achieve all but the following standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter for tenants, people who are homeless and others who use our services:**

- ◆ **4. Quality of Housing**

Aberdeenshire Council was not able to bring all of our properties up to the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH) by the deadline of December 2020. While the Covid-19 pandemic significantly hampered planned improvements, particularly during 2020-21, this was also a pre-existing issue.

In addition, the 2021-22 changes to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) to include meeting ESSH has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of our properties meeting SHQS. ESSH compliance is the only material barrier to homes meeting SHQS when they are allocated.

The Housing Service is continuing a schedule of works as part of its Housing Improvement Programme to bring properties up to ESSH and continues to work to identify alternative technologies and ways of delivering improvements to ensure that as many properties as possible are brought up to the standard. We are currently forecasting that approximately 800 further properties will be brought up to ESSH during 2022-23.

The Council continues to review ESSH targets in light of ESSH2 2025 and 2032 deadlines and in line with the Scottish Government's guidance on ESSH may reschedule investment to ensure compliance with the 2032 milestone. This approach will be for works that are difficult to achieve due to ongoing Covid-19 impacts and are more economically and technically challenging, but which can be demonstrated to be the most cost-effective approach within an overall programme of work to improve the energy efficiency of the landlord's housing stock as part of ESSH2. We will also conduct a review to confirm which stock is a viable and sustainable long-term asset. Present assessments are that we are performing well in terms of our ESSH2 planning although this remains under review in relation to Net Zero targets.

◆ **13. Value for Money**

Aberdeenshire Council is currently performing below expectations with regard to void turnover times and rent loss, although it meets the other requirements of this outcome. After the implementation of an updated void procedure last year, Aberdeenshire Council continues to monitor performance closely and explore opportunities for further process improvements. The changes implemented are creating improvements in void turnover times and rent loss, however at this stage current performance still remains at a level that represents a material failure. Relet times and void rent loss in relation to sheltered housing properties were particularly affected by the Pandemic and continue to be a significant factor in overall performance. Aberdeenshire Council has a higher than national average proportion of housing stock in this category and such properties have typically longer relet times than mainstream properties and a disproportionate impact on void rent loss given higher average rent levels. While the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on our ability to relet properties which is still being felt, void performance is a pre-existing issue, and therefore this failure is not solely the result of the Pandemic.

- **Comply with our legal obligations relating to housing and homelessness, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety, with the exception of the areas set out below:**

◆ **Gas Servicing**

Aberdeenshire Council failed to renew 9 gas safety certificates within the correct timescale in 2021-22. Of these failures, 7 were due to tenants self-isolating with Covid and 2 were due to new boiler installations where the benchmark certificate was not received by the Housing Service from an external contractor. Additional measures have been introduced to prevent any further issues of this sort and Aberdeenshire Council continue to monitor the efficacy of these.

◆ **Electrical Safety Testing**

As at 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2022 we did not hold a valid Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) certificate for 46 properties. Of these, 7 properties were void at that date and in 13 cases we were awaiting a copy of the completed EICR from the contractor. However, a remaining 26 occupied properties were outstanding for inspection.

Factors that have affected completion of inspections in time include Covid-19 self-isolation, house condition, tenants refusing access, and a small number of cases where the responsible contractor has been unable to complete works on time.

Actions are in place to address all current overdue cases, and the contractor responsible for carrying out inspections has amended their scheduling system to work 2 months ahead of expiry dates. This will allow additional time to deal with delays due to issues such as house condition, tenant mental health and confirmed Covid cases, and where necessary as a last resort for legal entry to be compelled. We anticipate that the above changes will prevent future

failures, and that we will be in a position to report full compliance in our next Assurance Statement.

◆ **Legionella Risk Assessment**

Aberdeenshire Council Housing Service does not currently meet its duty with respect to fully implementing Legionella control measures identified by our risk assessment process. Covid-19 continues to impact 2 yearly Legionella assessments within Sheltered Housing schemes as all flats within the scheme must be inspected as part of the assessment, therefore any instance of self-isolation due to Covid-19 prevents the assessment being completed. As at 11<sup>th</sup> August 2022, 9 out of 63 2 yearly Legionella assessment inspections were overdue for Sheltered Housing schemes.

In addition, a new subcontractor risk assessment means that some annual disinfections have not been completed due to insufficient walkways and lighting. We are currently arranging for this to be installed to ensure that work can be carried out in a health and safety compliant manner.

Plans are in place to complete all necessary works. Our Asset Management Planned Maintenance team continues to closely monitor this issue and we are currently forecasting that all outstanding issues will be resolved by no later than March 2023.

◆ **LD2 Fire Detection Standards**

As at 17<sup>th</sup> August 2022 Aberdeenshire Council housing stock was 99.8% compliant with the new fire detection legislation (LD2 Standards). The remaining 28 properties requiring installation of compliant alarms have not been completed due to tenant refusal. Our Asset Management team is working closely with tenants to resolve these outstanding cases and where necessary will ultimately use appropriate legal processes to compel access to the property. This is currently a resolution of last resort and a person-centred approach is being taken to working with tenants to complete works in a way that balances their individual concerns and overall welfare with the requirement to complete this work as soon as possible.

We confirm that we have seen and considered sufficient evidence to give us this assurance.

We confirm that our Annual Assurance Statement was approved at the meeting of Communities Committee on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2022.

I sign this statement on behalf of the Committee.

**Chair's Signature:**

**Date:** 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022