

Dumfries & Galloway Annual Assurance Statement 2020/2021 to Scottish Housing Regulator

Homeless Services Team

Dumfries & Galloway Council's Neighbourhood Services are responsible for the provision of Housing Options and Homeless services to customers throughout Dumfries & Galloway. As a stock transfer authority Dumfries and Galloway Council has developed close working relationships with Registered Social Landlords across the region to ensure we are able to discharge our statutory duty to provide permanent accommodation which is sustainable and affordable. A person-centred approach is at the heart of our working practices to ensure that we meet our legislative requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework. We ensure compliance with the relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter. Monthly and quarterly returns are provided to the Scottish Government and a yearly Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) return is provided to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

The Council agreed a 5 year Homeless Strategy in June 2018 which incorporates actions to address areas of performance and also drive improvements. This was supplemented by the 3 year Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan in June 2019. The oversight for this improvement work and the strategy is provided by the Council's Communities Committee.

The impact of Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan being revised to reflect the changes in demand;

- As a stock transfer authority we worked closely with our RSL providers to increase our temporary accommodation portfolio to meet the increasing demands on our service
- In order to comply with the Unsuitable Accommodation Order we removed accommodation not in compliance with the revised regulations from our portfolio by the deadline set by the Scottish Government.
- We flipped 24 tenancies into permanent accommodation
- We set up allocation working groups with RSL's to ensure that all accommodation within D&G was being offered to Section 5 referrals as a priority
- As part of homelessness prevention, multi-agency working groups were set up with RSL's to identify and work with customers who were in financial difficulties and at serious risk of losing their home.
- We commissioned a new Housing Support Contract to ensure we were complying with statutory duty to provide housing support
- We brought forward the development of our Housing First Project from year 5 to year 3 of our RRTP following guidance from Scottish Government that indicated Housing First had demonstrated a way of recovery from the pandemic for our most vulnerable customers.

We continue to revise our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan in response to the impacts and recovery process that Covid-19 has had on our service and across the Local Authority.

We continue to collate and evaluate equality data and feedback to ensure that this informs policy decisions taken by Dumfries & Galloway Council.

Gypsy Travellers

The work to bring Dumfries and Galloway Council's Barlockhart, Glenluce site up to the minimum site standards was due to start on 30 March 2020 but was suspended in line with COVID-19 guidance. The work re-commenced on Monday 13 July 2020 following the COVID-19 Framework relating to the Construction Sector and is estimated to be completed by the end of May 2021. The Council's site at

Thistle Grove, Collin currently does not comply with minimum site standards. A cross Council service project team has been undertaking an options appraisal of possible solutions and the capital/revenue consequence. This work was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council has been taking part in the Scottish Government's 'More & Better Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation - Improving Quality Sub-group' to create a national Design Guide to exceed current minimum site standards. The Council will use the design guide to inform it's work for Thistle Grove, Collin. In addition, the Council has used the Scottish Governments COVID-19 Framework to inform it's decision making process on the provision of services including toilet facilities in certain circumstances. The Gypsy/Traveller Service has worked with various partners including Social Work, NHS, Education and others to ensure that Gypsy/Traveller families are supported through the pandemic.

The review of minimum site standards, COVID-19 Framework and negotiated stopping proposals are a material change in circumstances which need to be given due consideration. These factors will be aligned to the project, timelines and budget requirements. The Options Appraisal report will be presented to Communities Committee in August 2021 for members consideration.

In the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic a decision was made to help mitigate the financial impact on Gypsy/Traveller site occupants. This included by-passing electricity meters and suspending rent charges. Additionally site residents have been made aware of the wide range of support that is available from partners such as the NHS and Social Work.

Dumfries & Galloway Council has used a portion of the Scottish Government's £2million improvement fund for additional works at the Barlockhart, Glenluce site, the work has included additional fencing and kitchen units. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and lockdown it has not been possible to progress a face-to-face consultation which is the most culturally appropriate way to conduct this work, as restrictions lift an appropriate consultation will take place.

An up to date Remedial Plan has been submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator identifying the steps required to achieve compliance and setting out a timeline for doing so. The Scottish Housing Regulator has been made fully aware of the Council's approach to achieving the minimum site standards in our region and regular progress updates are provided.

Approved by Communities Committee 29th June 2021

Signature

Andy Ferguson – Chair of Communities Committee