

Dumfries & Galloway Annual Assurance Statement 2023/2024 to Scottish Housing Regulator

Housing Options and Homeless Service

Dumfries and Galloway Council's Social Work 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 as 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) is provided to the Scottish Housing Regulator. We also provide monthly reports to Scottish Government and the Scottish Housing Regulator on breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order and the impact of the removal of Local Connection.

The Council has reviewed and implemented a new 5 year Homeless Strategy 2023 – 2028, this Strategy is underpinned by the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2023 - 2028 and incorporates actions to address performance and drive service improvements and innovative joint working.

Despite an 8% decrease in the number of homeless applications the Service continues to experience pressures in relation to provision of Temporary Accommodation resulting in the utilisation of Bed and Breakfast accommodation to fulfil our statutory duty in relation to provision of temporary accommodation. Where Bed and Breakfast accommodation is provided to customers, we are pro-active in ensuring a move to suitable furnished temporary accommodation as soon as possible. The Service has furnished temporary accommodation and access to bed and breakfast resources in all areas of high demand. . The high levels of demand remain a budgetary and resourcing pressure for the service which is being monitored and managed closely. The Council recognises it is currently at high risk of systematic failure in their duty to provide temporary accommodation and acknowledges the continued breaching of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in relation to this. The ongoing pressures are regularly highlighted through the Council's Governance system to the relevant Committee(s).

In relation to statutory regulations and requirements the service has:

- Sought reassurance from all of the Registered Social Landlords to ensure that the portfolio of stock that the Council leases from them is free of RAAC.
- Is working to review accommodation leased from Private Sector landlords in relation to the properties being RAAC free.
- Ensured full compliance with gas servicing on all leased properties
- Introduced a procedure in relation to identifying dampness and condensation within leased properties and work closely with our accommodation providers if required. Where issues are identified customers will be decanted as appropriate.
- Is fully compliant with the Smoke Alarm and Heat Detection Legislation following its introduction in February 2022.

Through our engagement plan with the Scottish Housing Regulator it was identified we were not providing all customers with an appropriate appointment within the 5 day target. Whilst some appointments were outside the target to meet the customer requirements, it was identified 114 was due to not having availability. The Service does ensure all homeless tonight customer are seen immediately and is undergoing a review of this process to ensure all customers are offered an appointment within the target.

In July 2023 the Service introduced a Prevention Team who work alongside the Welfare and Housing Options team. The purpose of this team is to provide early intervention to improve tenancy sustainment, improve customer outcomes and reduce the number of customers having to access the homeless route. During 2023/24 there were 97 tenancies saved from eviction due to the intervention of these teams.

We have introduced a new Customer Engagement Policy which ensures we actively engage with customers. The feedback from customer experiences actively informs and drives service improvements. We collate and evaluate equality data and feedback to ensure that this informs policy decisions taken by Dumfries and Galloway Council.

Gypsy Travellers

Dumfries and Galloway Council's Governance and Assurance Service was responsible for the provision of Gypsy/Traveller sites at Glenluce and Collin during 2023/24. However this will transfer to the Council's Economy and Environment Service at the start of 2024/2025.

The refurbishment of the Council's Gypsy/Traveller site at Glenluce was completed in May 2021 and is now above the Scottish Governments Minimum Site Standards.

The Council's site at Collin does not currently meet these minimum standards. An options appraisal for the site was presented to Full Council on 14 December 2023. The Council's decision was to "agree to redevelop on current site as the preferred option".

A budget of £700k from the capital programme was agreed at Full Council on 27 February 2024 to support the development of the Thistle Grove Gypsy/Travellers Site in 2024/25 with an additional indicative allocation of £14m to support the progression of the full project. This will be subject to further review once the design work has been progressed. The Council also continues to engage with the Scottish Government regarding the Gypsy/Traveller Accommodation Fund.

Council Officers are to proceed to implement the decision via a Project Implementation Plan, conduct further formal engagement and consultation with all relevant stakeholders as appropriate. Reporting of the implementation will be through the appropriate Committees or Full Council.

Dumfries and Galloway Council will continue to engage with the Scottish Housing Regulator regarding its management of the Council's Gypsy/Traveller sites and its approach to achieving the minimum site standards in addition to following the joint action plan by the Scottish Government and COSLA Improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers: 2019-2021.

Signed by Social Work Committee 22nd August 2024

Signature:

**Councillor Pauline Drysdale
Chair of Social Work Committee**