

## **Dumfries & Galloway Annual Assurance Statement 2019/2020 to Scottish Housing Regulator**

### **Homeless Services Team**

Dumfries & Galloway Council are responsible for the provision of Housing Options and Homeless services to customers throughout Dumfries & Galloway. Dumfries and Galloway Council is a stock transfer authority, therefore close working relationships have been developed with our Registered Social Landlords working across the region to ensure we are able to discharge our 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 are meeting our legislative requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework. We also ensure that we comply with the relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter. We submit monthly and quarterly returns to the Scottish Government and we provide a yearly ARC return to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

The Council agreed a new 5 year Homeless Strategy in June 2018 which incorporates actions to address areas of performance and also drive improvements. The oversight for this improvement work and the strategy is provided by the Council's Communities Committee.

Dumfries and Galloway Housing Options and Homeless Service has been working closely with the Scottish Housing Regulator to improve service areas highlighted in the Local Area Network Local Scrutiny Plan since 2016/17. A recent visit and report from the Scottish Housing Regulator in June 2019 highlighted the improvements made to the service over the interim period, We considered the further recommendations made by the Regulator and have acted to ensure that these are being met across the service by:

- Always taking a homeless application, particularly if a customer is at threat of losing their home within 56 days of presenting.
- Ensuring that all of our customers who present as homeless or are at threat of being made homeless are offered temporary accommodation to meet their needs where possible and practicable.
- Improving our Out of Hours accommodation to a higher specification of accommodation in a safer and more customer focussed environment.
- Advertising the Housing Options and Homeless Service to the wider community
- Regularly auditing completed case work to ensure accuracy and fairness. We record this on our monthly performance table to ensure that we are achieving the target of 10%.

We are currently revising our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan in alignment with the impact Covid-19 has had on our service and across the the Local Authority.

**Gypsy Travellers**

The Council’s Communities Committee considered a report on the investment required to enable the region’s traveller sites to meet the Scottish Governments minimum standards on 19 January 2019. Subsequently a budget was added to the 2019/20 Capital Investment Strategy to support the improvement works at the Council’s site at Glenluce. The work was due to start on 30 March 2020 but was suspended on 27 March 2020 in line with Scottish Government COVID-19 guidance. Residents on this site have regularly updated in relation to scheduling.

The Council’s site at Collin currently does not comply with the Scottish Government’s minimum site standards. A cross Council service project team has been undertaking an options appraisal (following the principles set out in HM Treasury’s ‘The Green Book’) of possible solutions and the capital/revenue consequence. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic this work was suspended. In addition, the Council agreed in principal to take part in a working group with the Scottish Government to review and exceed the current minimum site standards for all new sites. This work has been put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The review will be fully considered and thereafter aligned to the project, timelines and budget requirements, this will be the subject of a further report to the Council’s Communities Committee.

The Council provided feedback on the draft COVID-19 Framework with COSLA, the Scottish Government and other internal and external agencies to look at options for temporary site provision in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Council is in the process of examining options for temporary site provision for Gypsy/Traveller families coming into the region including the provision of washing/toilet facilities as they have been identified as a “high risk” vulnerable group. Gypsy/Traveller site residents have been consulted on the principles of the provision.

A 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 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020

Signature .....

Andy Ferguson – Chair of Communities Committee