



Fife Council Annual Assurance Statement 2024

The People & Communities Scrutiny Committee at a meeting on the 26th September 2024 sought appropriate assurance that Fife Council Housing Service comply with all relevant requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulatory Framework; all relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter; and all relevant legislative duties. Evidence has been considered through a regular cycle of performance reporting and liaison with tenant organisations to support the required level of assurance.

On review of the evidence provided, it can be confirmed the Council recognises material non-compliance in the following standards and outcomes of the Scottish Social Housing Charter for tenants, people who are homeless and other service users. These areas are a focus for performance improvement throughout 2024-25:

Areas of Non-Compliance:

Homelessness

Although 2023-24 statistics show a slight reduction in new presentations alongside a rise in housing options-based responses, an increase in homeless presentations is anticipated, in line with the national increase. The pressure on temporary accommodation remains disproportionate and more severe than the increase in new presentations, with sustained demand and supply constraints resulting in households staying longer in temporary accommodation. This significant pressure translates as regular breaches of statutory duty and breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order relating to the use of hotels and B&B type accommodation. The Service continues to focus on homelessness pressures and meeting statutory duties, approving a new Ending Homelessness Together Strategy in January 2024 and as part of the High-Level Housing Emergency Action Plan in June 2024, following the political decision to declare a Housing Emergency in March. The improvement actions for delivery in 2024-25 are to:

- Continue enhanced monitoring, reporting and escalation arrangements for temporary accommodation allocations to achieve 100% compliance.
- Continue promoting rapid rehousing through scatter flat flipping to minimise customer transitions.
- Develop a temporary accommodation strategy which will promote plans to decommission or reprovision unsuitable accommodation and significantly reduce the use of B&Bs and hotels.
- Continue to enhance a revised frontline housing options service focussed on homelessness prevention as part of a Whole Systems and Wider Task Force approach, to prepare for a Homelessness Prevention Duty.
- Review front line delivery services linking to the Fife Council No Wrong Door transformational change programme.
- Proactively redevelop the housing advice, options and prevention framework to promote informed housing choices and pathways.
- Implement the Voids Service Improvement Plan with a view to reducing to 20 days to let and reduce void rent loss while promoting a transfer led approach to housing allocations.
- Continue to deliver the Ending Homelessness Together Plan and commitments as updated in January with a continuing focus on Test of Change projects.
- Continue to redevelop a range of commissioned services with a focus on providing a range of housing support, accommodation-based support and housing.

Tenant and Resident Safety:

With regards to tenant and resident safety, compliance is recorded against water safety, lift safety and asbestos. Following a period of in-depth checks, it has been confirmed there is no Reinforced Autoclave Aerated Concrete (RAAC) present in Fife Council properties. A robust programme of work is in place to address the following tenant and resident safety requirements where Fife Council are not fully compliant. These areas are closely monitored to ensure compliance moving forward.

Gas Safety

The Council recognise non-compliance in five cases where gas safety checks were not carried out within timescale, thus breaching a statutory duty. Failures were either linked to a system issue or were long-term void properties returning to use. To prevent future failures, the improvement actions in place for 2024-25 are to:

- Implement a revised process for long-term voids to ensure a valid certificate is in place at property allocation and communicate the process to area teams.
- Close monitor systems to prevent properties from exclusion in scheduled appointments.

Fire & Electrical Safety

Interlinked fire and smoke alarms and a full electrical safety inspection certificate are both elements forming part of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). As of 31st March 2024, 890 properties did not comply with fire and smoke alarm requirements and 3,915 properties did not have a valid electrical safety certificate. This is the outcome of denied access from tenants and a backlog of properties without a valid certificate that is currently being prioritised.

To ensure compliance moving forward, the improvement actions identified for 2024-25 are to:

- Conduct in excess of 6,000 electrical safety tests per annum and implement an increased volume of work on smoke alarms to ensure backlog is cleared.
- Continue to progress work through an integrated Housing Services/Building Services 'no access team' by communicating with and supporting tenants to allow necessary works to take place. Options for enforced access will be investigated, where entry continues to be denied.
- Implement required works through void properties, acquisitions, new builds, major repairs and projects where possible, to avoid disruption for tenants.
- Implement improvements to the Housing Asset Management System, through a BTS upgrade project which will allow closer monitoring of component replacement programmes.

High Rise Fire Safety Improvements

A programme of work is on-going in two high rise blocks in Fife to improve fire safety. This includes the replacement of External Wall Insulation phenolic insulation boards with a mineral wool tile system, an upgraded energy efficient heating system, internal fire safety work and the replacement of older kitchens and bathrooms. Consultation has been conducted with tenants, elected members, the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service and the Scottish Government. The completion of works is anticipated during 2025.

Damp & Mould

Fife Council recognise the legal, health and reputational risks of failing to effectively tackle damp and mould in Council housing. An established approach and principles are in place for dealing with dampness, condensation and black mould which include a dedicated team resourced to offer specialist advice and a Building Services team who undertake dampness mitigation work, alongside external specialists. From April 2023, 2,152 referrals have been resolved and although routine

referrals continue to be received, a proactive approach allow these to be dealt with in a timeously manner.

Pressures:

The Committee considered pressures for 2024-25 and the mitigation measures to support these.

Housing Emergency

On the 21st March 2024, Fife Council declared a housing emergency due to the unprecedented pressures on housing and homelessness services. This political decision was taken due to a range of systemic housing failures, although the main catalyst was a 24% reduction in Scottish Government Affordable Housing Subsidy. Other factors include reduced turnover in social housing following the Covid-19 pandemic, a significant increase in the demand for temporary accommodation which is resulting in a regular breach of statutory duties, an increased number of empty homes specifically in the private sector, as well as economic factors impacting affordability.

To respond to the housing emergency, a high-level Housing Emergency Action Plan (HEAP) was approved by Cabinet Committee in June 2024. A series of consultations have taken place to help inform action plan priorities and develop the HEAP. Early engagement has established the prevention of homelessness, social sector void properties, maintaining housing and land supply, long-term empty homes and maintenance and technology to support tenants as priority areas for the action plan.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Future Financial Viability

Following a series of below inflation rent increases over recent years and recognising cost of borrowing pressures on the financial viability of the HRA, the 30-year HRA Business Plan is placed under increased risk. This restricts the Council's borrowing ability to fund new build programmes and stock improvement to meet SHQS and future Social Housing Net Zero standards. To ensure viability in future years, a robust HRA Business Plan review process has been implemented, alongside reviewing service efficiencies and consideration of service delivery deferrals in non-statutory areas as required.

Equalities and Human Rights:

Fife Council recognises that it has responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998. Amidst the challenges presented through the housing emergency, the Council is committed to promoting equality, addressing discrimination and providing housing as a human right. Some examples of how we achieve this are:

- Collecting equalities data on our staff, tenants, homeless customers, Gypsy/Travellers and service users to help understand needs and being clear on how we use that data.
- Completing equality impact assessments and carrying out consultation through various methods on all new strategies, policies, programmes and decisions, prior to approval through Committee.
- Safeguarding people with protected characteristics through the provision of Gypsy/Travellers' sites, temporary accommodation, older persons housing and refuge provision.
- Implementing a 3-year capital improvement programme of work to Gypsy/Traveller sites in Fife to install chalets and energy efficiency improvements, following consultation with site tenants.
- Eliminating discrimination and promoting diversity through extensive staff training, including equality and diversity, equality in recruitment, mental health, gender equality, etc.

People & Communities Scrutiny Committee Date: 26th September 2024

Councillor Judy Hamilton
Spokesperson Housing and Building Services

Cllr Gary Holt
Convenor People & Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date: 1st October 2024

Date: 10th October 2024