



Fife Council Annual Assurance Statement 2021

The Community and Housing Services Sub-Committee at a meeting on the 29th October 2021 sought appropriate assurance that Council housing services 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 principally through the Annual Return on the Charter 2020-21, 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 2021-22:

Areas of Non-Compliance: General Reasons

Gas Safety

The Scottish Housing Regulator has previously highlighted concerns to Fife Council around its failure to carry out annual gas safety checks in 100% of homes. The Council recognises there was non-compliance in 197 cases where gas safety checks were not carried out within timescale, thus breaching a statutory duty.

In terms of preventing future failures, the improvement actions identified for delivery in 2021-22 are to:

- Establish weekly meetings of the Gas Safety Governance Group with representation from area teams, including weekly monitoring and reporting of gas safety cases below 12 weeks.
- Provide the Affordable Housing Team with responsibility for inputting new Council properties directly into Genero for inclusion in the gas safety programme.
- Reset the role of Area Teams to communicate to, and support tenants, in arranging gas safety inspections.
- Establish a Gas Safety Team within Housing Services for the administration of gas safety work.
- Reset the timeline to 'red flag' cases at 4 weeks, allowing earlier action to access properties for gas safety inspections.

Energy Efficiency Standard for Scottish Social Housing (ESSH)

Performance for 2020-21 highlights that 84.70% of the Council's housing stock currently meets EESSH standards, highlighting the Council's inability to deliver EESSH by the original deadline of December 2020.

The improvement actions identified for delivery in 2021-22 are to:

- Frequently monitor and update the Orchard Asset system.
- Conduct additional property surveys.
- Improve access to properties by using area staff with localised knowledge to contact tenants to confirm appointments e.g., texting, telephoning, etc.
- Target the capital investment programme to maximise EESSH compliance rates.
- Review options for achieving higher EESSH2 standards.
- Undertake costed options appraisal with support from the Energy Savings Trust modelling software to ensure most cost-effective improvements to achieve the required standards.

Homelessness

The Scottish Housing Regulator has previously highlighted concerns around access to homelessness services, the assessment of homelessness applications, offers of temporary / emergency accommodation and the outcomes for people who are homeless in relation to discharge of duty. In 2021-22 there is likely to be a further focus on accommodation that is deemed as unsuitable, which includes most of the Council's hostel type accommodation and the use of B&B / hotel type accommodation. The Regulator is also likely to be interested in of the Council's approach to reducing the number of families with children in temporary accommodation. While temporary accommodation continues to operate under significant pressure, the Council will continue to make all homeless households an offer of temporary accommodation where this is required.

The improvement actions identified for delivery in 2021-22 are to:

- Provide enhanced monitoring, reporting and escalation arrangements for temporary accommodation allocations to ensure 100% compliance.
- Expand temporary accommodation using Fife Council, Fife Housing Register partner and private sector properties to reduce pressure on mainstream tenancies.
- Implement an Unsuitable Accommodation Mitigation Plan to drive faster transitions through emergency accommodation, re-purposing buildings and developing different models of accommodation with support.
- Establish a revised frontline housing service focussed on homelessness prevention with a specific focus on young single people and planned housing access pathways taking a '4DX' approach supported by consultants Franklin Covey.
- Proactively redevelop the housing advice framework to focus on housing options and homelessness prevention to reduce the pressure on temporary accommodation.
- Redevelop front line Council and online services to promote informed housing choices and pathways.
- Deliver 2021-22 Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan commitments to:
 - Modernise temporary accommodation and enhance the range of accommodation with support options.

- Increase the use of Housing First tenancies in partnership with the Rock Trust for young people and develop further Housing First pathways with the Health and Social Care Partnership to meet the needs of those with specialist or complex needs.
- Continue to 'flip' 100 temporary tenancies to permanent homes per year to reduce transitions and improve outcomes for those experiencing homelessness.
- Review and recommission homelessness and housing support services in line with the recommendations of the independent review.
- Increase allocations to statutory homeless households across the Fife Housing Register Partnership.
- Complete the Housing Access Integration Managing Change to focus on homelessness prevention.
- Re-design temporary and supported accommodation staff structures linked to a modernised temporary accommodation service.
- Enhance private and private rented sector interventions to raise standards and prevent homelessness.

Areas of Non-Compliance: Covid-19 Reasons

Voids Turnover

Following a period of significant and sustained improvement, the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic and wider environmental factors have had a negative impact on voids. Voids management was a particular positive during the pandemic with the a cross-service partnership being awarded Housing Team of the Year at the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland Awards. The team worked collaboratively to ensure all properties remained available for allocation or were directed to meet other priority needs, including enhancing temporary accommodation. A combination of factors which include revised arrangements for working in homes, different requirements in managing void properties, promoting transfers to generate turnover and general allocations practice have combined to extend the time properties are empty and negatively impact void rent loss. Return to top quartile performance is an organisational priority to maximise use of the housing stock and support the HRA Business Plan.

The improvement actions identified for delivery in 2021-22 are to:

- Specialise the Voids Management Team within Housing Services with a direct line of accountability to the Head of Service.
- Renew procurement contracts to achieve a systematic reduction within the voids process.
- Refocus allocations to reduce pressures on allocating officers and improve outcomes for priority groups.
- Improve performance management systems across the partnership and implement a new Housing Management Information System to enhance workflow and process management.
- Review the Letting Standard with a revised focus on customer engagement and programmed post-let works.

Routine Repairs

Covid-19 restrictions had an immediate and widespread impact on the ability to deliver repairs. Health & Safety Executive and Scottish Government guidance set parameters for safe working and identified categories of work which could still go ahead. Restrictions on close working along with the number of staff self-isolating with symptoms also had a marked impact on resources available to carry out works.

Emergency repairs, health & safety and annual gas safety checks continued as far as possible. There were instances where access was not available due to Covid concerns and shielding by tenants and their families. Official Covid-19 guidance identified that non-emergency repairs should not be carried out.

Therefore, whilst routine repairs reports were accepted, customers were advised that their request would be added to a holding list until the position regarding restrictions changed. As the pandemic eased, and working practices were adjusted, resources were directed to addressing the holding list.

Future Risks

The Committee also considered future risk areas for 2021-22, particularly arising through the Covid-19 emergency.

Increased construction costs and supply chain issues

Supply chain issues and high demand across the residential sector are driving widespread increases in construction costs which pose a risk to the new build programme and repairs service. Both labour and materials are being affected and getting contractors to hold pricing for any length of time is extremely challenging. This poses a risk to both newbuild and component replacement programmes.

The improvement actions identified for delivery in 2021-22 are:

- Existing strong partnerships with suppliers & developers will be used to agree supply & delivery options. Support from Procurement Services will be accessed as required.

Equalities / Human Rights

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

- Promoting customer and tenant participation in decision making working collaboratively with our Tenant and Resident Associations and Tenant Forum, achieving Gold Accreditation by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) for excellence in tenant participation.
- Collecting equalities data on our staff, tenants, service users and being clear on how we use that data.
- Completing equality impact assessments for all new strategies, policies and programmes prior to approval through Committee.
- Providing accessible information on performance through our website, dedicated publications, and the tenant magazine, Down Your Street.

- Understanding the needs of tenants and service users through housing need and demand assessment, customer surveys, workshops, etc.
- Safeguarding people with protected characteristics – through the provision of gypsy travellers' sites, temporary accommodation, older persons housing and refuge provision through Public Social Partnership arrangements.
- Providing housing as a human right through our work in the resettlement schemes.
- Eliminating discrimination and promoting diversity through an extensive staff training programme, including equality and diversity, equality in recruitment, mental health, gender equality, etc.

Community and Housing Services Sub-Committee Date: 29th October 2021

Councillor Judy Hamilton

**Convener Community & Housing Services
Sub-Committee**

Councillor Lesley Backhouse

**Vice-Convener Community & Housing Services
Sub-Committee**

Date

Date