

Annual Assurance Statement 2025

Legislative compliance

We can confirm that Highland Council achieves all the following standards and outcomes for tenants, people who are homeless and others who use our services:

- All relevant regulatory requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework;
- All relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter; and
- All relevant legislative duties.

Further to this, we can confirm that there were no individual health & safety breaches in 2024/25 resulting in intervention by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE).

In regard to asbestos safety, Highland were issued with an Improvement Notice by the HSE on 20 February 2025; this related to a number of improvements involved with how the Council manage surveys and information relating to asbestos and suspected asbestos in communal areas in blocks of flats; it did not indicate an immediate health and safety risk.

To comply with the Notice, Highland agreed to:-

1. Conduct asbestos management surveys of the shared areas of domestic properties that are built before the year 2000 and do not have an existing management survey for those communal areas;
2. Draw up an asbestos register and management plan for the communal areas of said properties where asbestos is present or is presumed to be present;
3. Conduct regular monitoring inspections of the asbestos in the shared areas of said properties in accordance with the management plan;
4. Review your arrangements for managing asbestos in the shared areas of domestic properties at regular intervals;
5. Provide suitable monitoring reports to senior management regarding asbestos to allow them to fulfil their duties;
6. Ensure that sufficient resources (time, money, and personnel) are made available to do this in a timely manner; and
7. Take any other equally effective measures to remedy the said contraventions.

HSE confirmed on 3 April 2025 that Highland had complied with the Notice; it formally closed the case on 9 April 2025.

In terms of activity required to comply with the Notice, Highland commissioned independent surveys of 275 communal blocks. Of these, over half identified no suspected asbestos present in communal areas and the remainder identified suspected asbestos but in good condition.

Our compliance with the annual gas servicing requirements specified in the Framework was 100% for 2024/25.

Highland achieved full compliance with the new legislation relating to fire safety in October 2023. There are plans to include the servicing of interlinked smoke alarms as part of our 5-yearly electrical inspection regime.

All registered social landlords were notified by the Scottish Housing Regulator on 20 July 2022 that any property which has not had a 5-yearly electrical installation condition report by 31 March 2022 should now be considered as not complying fully with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. As a result of the Covid-19 work restrictions, the inspection regime in Highland is behind schedule. A monthly update is provided to the Regulator to advise of the number of properties which fall into this category and to detail plans to increase the number of inspections to deal with the backlog of inspections.

66% of Highland stock was compliant with the electrical inspection condition regulations as of 31 March 2025. A new servicing contract is due to be released for tender imminently and this is anticipated to achieve compliance by 31 March 2026; however, it is anticipated that there will be a considerable number of abeyances as non-access remains a significant challenge to achieving compliance. As of 31 March 2025, there were over 800 abeyances.

Highland will continue to conduct periodic reviews of its health and safety commitments in regard to a number of other issues such as water safety, fire safety and lift safety.

A major focus in 2024/2025 has been a review of how Highland tackles reports from tenants of suspected damp and mould in our stock. New guidance was issued to tenants in Autumn 2024. A new process commenced in Autumn 2024 to monitor reports of suspected damp and mould and to be more pro-active in arranging technical inspections, appropriate works and follow-up reports in our stock when tenants have reported potential damp and mould.

Further work will be conducted in line with the new performance indicators and performance against these will be reported as part of the Annual Return of Charter in Spring 2026. Further engagement work will be undertaken with tenants, including the development of advice resources.

Committee Reporting

We can confirm the following reporting structure within the Council: -

- Each of the 10 Area Committees receives quarterly or bi-annual housing performance reports and also reports on request of the Area Chair/Members; reporting has been adapted in 2021 and 2024 to accommodate revised Area Committee structures in Ross-shire;
- The Council's Housing & Property Committee receives quarterly performance reports on key performance indicators and monitoring reports on other housing policy issues; the Committee has been active in this form since January 2020;
- Quarterly financial reports on spend against the Housing Revenue Account, non-Housing Revenue Account housing expenditure and Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme are submitted to the Housing & Property Committee;
- Reports are submitted annually (or on request of Members) to the Housing and Property Committee on the subjects of the Local Housing Strategy; the Highland Housing Register; the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan; and the Annual Assurance Statement;
- Reports relating to housing services will also be subject to full Council, Climate Change Committee and the Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee as appropriate; and
- Council Members and tenant representatives will also meet during the year to identify policy review issues as appropriate.

The Area and Strategic Committee reporting is based almost exclusively on the performance indicators as established by the Scottish Housing Regulator in its Charter and by the Scottish Government in its Quarterly Homelessness Return.

From October 2018 there has been an opportunity for tenant-nominated tenant representatives at the Strategic Committee and at associated Member Seminars.

Equalities and human rights

Highland has commenced efforts to collect data on each of the equalities aspects recommended in the Regulator guidance. Recent efforts have focused on the My Housing Online module which offers applicants the opportunity to provide more detail on their circumstances and housing needs/household characteristics.

Highland is continuing to review how we can adopt a Human Rights Based Approach across various remits and policies. The Council's new Integrated Impact Assessment process includes assessments for both children's rights and wellbeing and human rights, alongside existing duties related to equalities and socio-economic disadvantage. This approach is assisting in ensuring our policies and services take a broader rights approach.

Annual Customer Report for Tenants

The annual report for tenants will be provided to tenants in October 2025 as required by the Scottish Housing Regulator; this includes key performance information which is of interest to tenants.

As part of this annual process, the Council is asking the views of tenant volunteers ahead of publication and their views will be considered in producing the final document.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

The Council is required to undertake a comprehensive tenants' satisfaction survey every 3 years. A comprehensive survey took place in Spring 2024.

A range of other customer satisfaction surveys are in place across the Service in order to assess the quality of the service on an ongoing basis. These include: -

- New tenants' survey regarding the quality of home and service.
- Repairs Satisfaction survey;
- Capital Improvements satisfaction survey; and
- Homelessness service questionnaire.

Other forms of tenant feedback include, but are not limited to, the following:-

- Highland Tenant Forum
- Value for Money Working Group
- Communications Working Group
- Tenant Scrutiny Panel
- Tenant Participation Strategy Working Group
- Gypsy/Traveller client group.

Future engagement with tenants is required following the approval of the Tenant Participation Strategy at Committee in November 2024. Tenant involvement is a continually evolving process and Highland will explore how this can be reviewed and developed to best promote positive engagement with tenants.

Approved at Housing & Property Committee and signed by Glynis Campbell Sinclair (Chair) 13 August 2025