

Annual Assurance Statement 2020 – Highland Council

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;
- Return on the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing;
- All relevant legislative duties.

Further to this, we can confirm that there were no health & safety breaches in 2019-20 resulting in intervention by the Health & Safety Executive.

Our compliance with the annual gas servicing requirements specified in the Framework was 99.9% for 2019-20. The figure of 99.9% reflects nine properties which Highland was unable to carry out the annual gas service as a result of national safety guidelines regarding the coronavirus pandemic. All of these properties have now received an annual service. It is anticipated that compliance will be further negatively impacted in 2020/2021 as a result of the pandemic.

Highland is progressing works to comply with the new legislation concerning the standards of fire and smoke alarms. Compliance towards the new standards will be reported as part of the Annual Return of Charter in Spring 2021 and Highland anticipates full compliance with the new standards before the compliance date in 2022.

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 since January 2020 to accommodate the revised Area Committee structure 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 new Committee has been active 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 & Property Committee on the subjects of 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 and the Council's Audit & Scrutiny Committee as appropriate; and

- Council Members and tenant representatives will also meet as a Policy Development Group 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 have been tenant-nominated tenant representatives at Strategic Committee and at the associated Policy Development Groups.

Annual Customer Report for Tenants

The annual report for tenants was provided to tenants in November 2020 as required by the Scottish Housing Regulator. This included key performance information which is of interest to tenants.

As part of this annual process the Council asked the views of tenant representatives ahead of publication and their views were considered in producing the final document.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

The Council is required to undertake a comprehensive tenants' satisfaction survey every 3 years.

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: -

- Homelessness client group
- Young tenants focus group
- Tenant Scrutiny Panel
- Tenant involvement in the Trades Redesign
- Gypsy/Traveller client group
- Rate your Estate inspections.

The Council has been participating in the Scottish Government's Next Steps Programme and tenants have been actively involved in drafting a Tenant Participation Action Plan which will be incorporated into the review of the Tenant Participation Strategy in 2021. The Tenant Participation Advisory Service has commended Highland staff and tenants for their ability to work together to identify how tenant participation can be progressed in Highland.

Highland Council have been instrumental in setting up a group called Northern Tenants Partnership. This is a group made up of officers and tenants / residents from most of the social housing landlords in the North of Scotland. The group meet quarterly and their objective is to work together to improve tenant participation, discuss common issues, share good practice and carry out joint training.

Scottish Housing Regulator's Engagement Plan

The Scottish Housing Regulator's Engagement Plan in April 2019 highlighted key indicators, relating to service quality, where they indicated they wished to engage with the Council. These are: -

- Compliance with the Council's statutory duties in relation to offers of temporary accommodation and the unsuitable accommodation order;
- Engagement with the Council following submission of its Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan;
- Delivery of the minimum standards for Gypsy/Traveller sites;
- Charter performance in regard to the following indicators:
 - overall satisfaction;
 - satisfaction with the Council keeping tenants informed about services and decisions;
 - satisfaction with opportunities to participate;
 - satisfaction with the quality of home;
 - complaints' management; and
 - factored owners' satisfaction with the factoring service.

Updated information relating to these indicators was provided to the Regulator in May and June 2019.

The Regulator provided an updated Engagement Plan in August 2019. In response Highland detailed the recent progress made in terms of mitigating homelessness in Highland, including progress against the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the Regulator has not issued a 2020-2021 Engagement Plan. However, the Council continues to discuss individual issues with the Regulator including monthly updates on gypsy traveller engagement and proposed improvement works on Highland's 4 gypsy traveller sites. Highland has been submitting monthly reports to the Regulator since June 2020 which detail performance against key housing issues during the pandemic.

Following approval at Housing & Property Committee on 10 December 2020, the Statement was signed off by Cllr Ben Thompson (Chair):

Signature:

Date: 10 December 2020