

Annual Assurance Statement: Inverclyde Council

The purpose of this Annual Assurance Statement is to reassure the Scottish Housing Regulator, our tenants and other service users that Inverclyde Council complies with its regulatory and statutory obligations as set out in section 3 of the regulatory requirements. In areas where there is no (or part) material compliance we have indicated how we are planning to improve in those areas and the timeframe for improvement.

Homelessness Services

As a local authority we can confirm that we continue to meet our statutory duties to provide temporary accommodation and homelessness assistance. Our Assessment and Support Team are focussed on prevention of homelessness and achieve prevention in around 50% of approaches to our Housing Options and Homelessness Advice Service. As a stock transfer authority Inverclyde is wholly reliant on the Section 5 referral process and work is underway to reduce non-compliance by introducing a new Local Lettings Initiative to increase lets to homeless households to between 25%-30% of total lets in a close strategic partnership with the four main local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

Our ability to meet our statutory duties associated with homelessness, housing support and settled accommodation underpins the work we do to ensure equality, human rights and tenant and resident safety. As Inverclyde Council is reliant on a strategic partnership with local RSLs, individuals using our service have a direct relationship with officers through effective caseload management and assistance with local Choice Based Lettings systems. Therefore, the customer/landlord relationship must be considered within that context.

We can confirm that Inverclyde Council achieves standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter relevant for tenants in a stock transfer authority i.e., people who are homeless and others who use our services:

The homeless service is undergoing a programme of transformational change, working with all statutory agencies by placing a focus on prevention activity, supporting tenants in partnership with local RSLs, Third Sector organisations and integrated services within the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to increase successful outcomes in tenancy sustainment.

We continue to meet our duty to assess homelessness within 28 days and provide temporary accommodation for households where homelessness cannot be prevented.

Where people have complex needs, the rapid rehousing support team undertake the statutory duty to provide support, and this service is regulated by the care inspectorate to ensure robust governance and maintain the principles of housing first. A monitoring framework and team plan, linked to the Inverclyde Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP), housing contribution statement and HSCP Strategic plan is in place.

The service has seen a significant increase in demand for assistance during 2023/24 with a 29% increase in the number of homelessness applications. In spite of this the service has significantly improved its assessment timescale and its offer of temporary accommodation. In the reporting year covered by this Annual Assurance Statement Inverclyde had the shortest average assessment time in Scotland at 9 days. Temporary Accommodation saw a 10% reduction in average void periods and a 32% reduction in the amount of rent lost due to voids. Unfortunately, in Quarter 4 of 2023/24 the Service required to utilise Unsuitable Accommodation to meet demand, with 17 instances of Unsuitable Accommodation being utilised across that period.

Housing Stock

Last year it was reported that Inverclyde Council had nine houses, three of which did not fall within the scope of the Scottish Housing Regulator as one was vacant and, on the market, and the other two are not on Scottish Secure Tenancies. The house which was previously on the market has now sold so the council now has eight houses in total, two of which fall out with the scope of the Regulator.

All of Inverclyde Council's housing stock had condition surveys carried out in March 2022 by external agents, Brown & Wallace Building Surveyors. The report highlighted several repairs and upgrades required to the houses to ensure they met current SHQS and EESSH standards. The council is currently in discussion with Sanctuary Homes regarding transferring the ownership of these six houses to Sanctuary. As a result of this only routine maintenance and emergency repairs plus small upgrades to the Moorfoot Primary schoolhouse have been carried out to the houses over the past year.

TPAS has now been appointed to act as the independent tenant advisor and meetings have already been carried out with the tenants, officers from Sanctuary Homes, a council officer and the TPAS representative. Sanctuary have completed further condition surveys of the six houses and discussions regarding upgrading all houses to current SHQS and EESSH standards, plus additional works as considered necessary, are ongoing. Once all tenants have been contacted to discuss the repairs the first formal Notice containing the incentives on offer, which will include a two-year rent freeze as well as upgrades to each house, will be sent to the tenants, this will start the first part of the formal transfer process.

Following a ballot, assuming there is a majority vote in favour of the transfer, all works contained within the final formal notice will be completed by Sanctuary Homes within the first year of transfer. Should the tenants choose to stay with the council then the council confirms that all necessary works to ensure compliance will be completed as soon as possible.

Currently three of the six houses pass both the SHQS and the EESSH, these are St Francis former schoolhouse, St Patrick's former schoolhouse and Ardgowan former schoolhouse. In terms of future energy efficiency upgrades St Francis and St Patrick's are both timber framed houses which are unsuitable for cavity wall insulation, and Ardgowan former schoolhouse is of solid construction and so has no

cavity to insulate. The remaining three houses all fail the SHQS as they all require cavity wall insulation, these houses are St Michael's former schoolhouse, Moorfoot former schoolhouse and Whinhill former schoolhouse. Of the three houses failing the SHQS, two also fail the EESSH. It is noted that Moorfoot former schoolhouse would require the permission of an adjacent owner before cavity wall insulation could be considered. As part of the works on offer by Sanctuary, external wall insulation is being considered for those houses where cavity wall insulation is unsuitable.

Regardless of whether the transfer is successful or not, the Council will retain the two houses which are located within parks; however, these are not on Scottish Secure Tenancies and are therefore not affected by the legislation.

We confirm that we have utilised and considered appropriate evidence to give us this assurance. This Assurance Statement was formally approved by the Council's Environment & Regeneration Committee on 31st October 2024.

Cllr Michael McCormick
Convenor
Environment & Regeneration Committee
Inverclyde Council