



## Moray Council Housing and Property Service Assurance Statement

We comply with the regulatory requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Framework with the exception of the areas set out below.

We achieve all but the following outcomes and standards in the Scottish Social Housing Charter:

- **Outcome 1 - Equalities**

We continue to work towards compliance on the guidance on equalities published by the SFHA last year. We have been unable to fully implement system changes due to conflicting definitions on some of the protected characteristics which would affect the Scottish Government's homeless data collections. The Government has indicated that they will not review this until at least 2025.

We routinely complete Equalities Impact Assessments on all of our strategies, policies and plans which form an integral part of our decision making process.

Moray Council has initiated work on development of improved equalities and human rights outcomes as part of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, Corporate Plan and its Equality Outcomes. Progress on the Equality Outcomes are now reported through the Council's performance reporting framework. This will improve mainstreaming of response to equalities and human rights issues throughout the Council.

- **Outcome 4 – Quality of Housing**

### **Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)**

At 31 March 2023, 4,216 of our 6,383 properties did not meet the SHQS. An additional 953 properties were classed as exempt and 191 properties were in abeyance. The main areas of non-compliance are:

- Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH);
- Electrical Safety; and
- Fire Safety.

Our Housing Investment Programme was significantly delayed due to the pandemic but we have a 30 year plan to make improvements to our housing stock. Our new Asset Management Team structure has been implemented and the development of our asset management module has commenced. These are critical milestones in improving how we manage projects, improve stock condition data and target future works to ensure compliance with housing standards and legislative changes. We have made progress on addressing our performance in this area despite facing challenges of increasing costs, recruitment issues within key trades and difficulty sourcing external contractors.

## **Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH)**

At 31 March 2023, 1,388 of our 6,383 properties do not meet the ESSH. We had difficulty contracting out an insulation programme and instead focused on the replacement of heating systems, delivering 522 heating replacements through Warm Homes R4 and Low Carbon Infrastructure Transition Programme (LCITP). We plan to deliver a further 100 heating and insulation upgrades including solar panels to rural hard-to-treat properties in 2023/24, as well as additional insulation and heating upgrades subject to availability of external contractors.

We comply with all relevant legislative duties, including our legal obligations relating to housing and homelessness, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety with the exception of:

- **Tenant and Resident Safety**

We aim to provide safe homes for tenants. We have obtained appropriate assurance that we meet our duties for the areas listed below but have highlighted where we are working towards compliance where appropriate:

**Asbestos** - We have an asbestos register and carry out a risk assessment before work commences in properties. Our intention is to phase out cloned asbestos surveys so that we have full surveys available for all of our properties. We are reviewing our asbestos procedure and are implementing an Asbestos module that will provide staff with electronic access to information on Asbestos Containing Materials (ACM) within properties.

**Damp and Mould** - We have carried out an extensive analysis to identify trends in our stock profile and are investigating prevention measures for affected properties. We improved guidance for tenants on dealing with damp and mould issues and improved our internal procedures. We have also made use of smart technology in a pilot of 33 recently acquired properties which could be at risk of damp and mould and have plans to expand this to affected properties.

**Electrical Safety** - At 31 March 2023, 4,630 properties did not have a valid Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) although some of these were in abeyance. Housing investment works over the past decade or so involved key elements of electrical upgrade work as part of planned/cyclical maintenance programmes. However, this work was recorded on partial electrical certificates rather than full EICRs, meaning that most of our property records are slightly below the required standard. We set aside additional investment to ensure the non-compliant properties are inspected to the required standard by 31 March 2024 but were unsuccessful in procuring an external contractor. We are currently re-tendering this contract to attract a wider range of contractors. We aim to complete the outstanding work by 30 September 2024 subject to the availability of contractors to support our in house delivery programme and non-access.

**Fire Safety** - At 31 March 2023, 189 properties did not meet the updated fire safety regulations, a reduction of 673 since the previous year. Good progress has been made however the main reason for the delay are access issues which has led to forced entry taking place on a number of occasions. Our aim is to complete the remaining upgrades by 30 September 2023.

**Gas Safety** - In 2022/23 we did not meet our statutory duty to complete a gas safety check within the required timescale for 4 properties but this was rectified at the earliest opportunity and all are now compliant. The reasons for the checks not being carried out on time were:

No of failures	Reason
3	Human error – engineer visited incorrect address/admin recorded on incorrect property record.
1	Contractor failed to carry out check on communal boiler on time.

Procedural improvements have been made and as at 31 July 2023 no new failures have taken place.

**Lift Safety** - We only have one sheltered housing complex with a lift which is included on a cyclical maintenance contract to ensure that it complies with relevant legislation.

**Water Safety** - We routinely carry out legionella testing on our empty properties.

- **Homelessness**

**Unsuitable Accommodation Order** - During 2022/23 there were 45 households breaching the Order. Our temporary accommodation stock was reconfigured and reduced from 140 at 31 March 2022 to 124 at 31 March 2023. Unfortunately we then experienced a 10% increase in homeless presentations from 512 in 2021/22 in to 562 in 2022/23. Initial investigations have shown that some of our local RSL partners have fallen short of the amount of Section 5 referrals that they should have offered/accepted, increasing pressure on available Council housing to meet this statutory requirement.

We also have 4 separate refugee programmes in Moray. Whilst many of the refugees in these programmes have not directly made homeless applications, they have been housed through other routes. This has impacted the amount of properties available for us to discharge our homeless duties.

We closely monitor our temporary accommodation requirements and have increased our stock to 133 units. From 9 July 2023 there were no breaches of the Order and at 31 July 2023 we had no households occupying bed and breakfast accommodation.

**Temporary Accommodation Standards Framework** - We are working towards compliance with the new guidance/framework. Most of our properties satisfy each of the criteria with the exception of digital inclusion. However, tenants have access to Moray Council information hubs and our main reception which all provide free internet access.

We confirm that we have seen and considered appropriate evidence to give us this assurance.

We approved our Assurance Statement on 12 September 2023 and sign this statement on behalf of the Housing and Community Safety Committee.

Councillor Amber Dunbar  
Chair of Housing and Community Safety

Councillor Donald Gatt  
Depute Chair of Housing and Community Safety