

Appendix 1

Scottish Borders Council Annual Assurance Statement 2023/2024 to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Homelessness Service

Scottish Borders Council's Homelessness Service is responsible for the provision of housing and homelessness advice and assistance to customers throughout the Scottish Borders. As a stock transfer authority Scottish Borders Council has developed close working relationship with the four main Registered Social Landlords across the region to ensure we are able to discharge our statutory duty to provide permanent accommodation. A trauma informed person-centred approach is at the core of our working practices to ensure that we meet our legislative requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework. Quarterly returns are provided to the Scottish Government and a yearly Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) return is provided to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

The Council agreed a 5-year Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan in June 2019. Development and implementation of the Scottish Borders RRTP has been led by the Borders Homelessness & Health Strategic Partnership (BHHSP).

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, combined with the pressures due to the current Cost of Living crisis and increasing demand for homelessness advice and assistance, the Service has not been able to drive forward the action within the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan, to reduce the number of temporary accommodation properties needed as well as reduce time spent within temporary accommodation. However, we continue to meet the statutory obligation to provide temporary accommodation in mainstream furnished properties across a range of communities within the Scottish Borders.

- During the past year the service has seen an increase in demand for temporary accommodation, to ensure availability of furnished temporary accommodation we have increased our portfolio to 155 properties. We have had no breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order during 2023/24.
- As part of homelessness prevention, we continue to work with RSL's and private sector landlords to identify and work with customers who are in financial difficulties and at serious risk of losing their home.
- We implemented our Housing First Project in 2021. By the end of March 2024, 19 customers had been supported in their own secure tenancies. The project is due to end in September 2024, when we plan to mainstream this housing first within existing housing support services.

In reviewing our compliance with the Regulatory Framework, we are satisfied that we meet all our duties in relation to homelessness services, equality and human rights and tenant and resident safety. In particular, we have gained the necessary evidence-based assurance from our Registered Social Landlord partners of our compliance in respect of duties relating to gas, electrical, fire, and water safety and obligations relating to asbestos, damp and mould for our temporary accommodation properties. To support effective reporting on compliance, these underpin a Service Improvement Action Plan which is monitored by senior officers at agreed intervals to ensure successful achievement.

Gypsy Travellers

Gypsy/Traveller site – The Council’s designated site for Gypsy/Travellers within Scottish Borders at Tweedside Caravan Park, Innerleithen continues to meet the Scottish Government’s minimum standards for Gypsy/Traveller sites. Provision for the collection of relevant data on protected characteristics for service users who use the Gypsy/Traveller site at Tweedside Caravan Park, Innerleithen is now collected in a feedback survey form which is intended to give all Gypsy/Traveller households who stay on the site the opportunity to give their views on their experience of the service and to make suggestions for how the service can be improved.

We confirm that in respect of landlord services provided by the Council we are assured that the Council complies with the regulatory requirements as laid out in Chapter 3 of the Scottish Housing Regulator’s Regulatory Framework, including:

- All relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter in respect of any tenants, homeless persons, and other person who are in receipt of housing services; and
- Legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety.

Signed: Jenni Craig, Director – Resilient Communities

Signed: Councillor Elaine Thornton-Nicol, Chair of Audit Committee