

October 2023

West Dunbartonshire Council Annual Assurance Statement

We confirm that we have seen appropriate assurance that we comply with the:

- All of the relevant regulatory requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Framework;
- All of the relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter; and
- All relevant legislative duties associated with housing and homelessness services, tenant and resident safety and equality and human rights.

A letter from the Scottish Housing Regulator on 3 July 2023 to all social landlords asked that in this year's Annual Assurance Statement, assurance is provided that we have an effective approach to the collection of equalities information and that we are considering how we can adopt a human rights approach in our work. The letter also requested that a clear statement is provided in relation to compliance with relevant obligations in relation to tenant and resident safety.

Equalities

In keeping with the key messages from Scottish Government's programme for Government, equality and human rights are central to our delivery of our Local Housing Strategy. The development of the strategy has been underpinned by West Dunbartonshire Council's commitment to promoting and sustaining equality and inclusion, and equality and diversity principles.

We have worked closely with the West Dunbartonshire HSCP in piloting a Health Inequalities Impact Assessment Tool (HIIA), with each of the five themes being separately assessed and the assessments contributing to the final version of the LHS. The main actions associated with each theme are listed in the Action Plan and progress on these are being monitored as we move forward.

During 2021/22 we reviewed and updated our approach to collection of Equalities data based on published guidance and continue to monitor that this is being effectively implemented. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) is used for any new and developing policies and we plan to further review our approach during 2023/24, which will take account of updated guidance published in June 2022.

Tenant and resident safety

Issues around tenant and resident safety are monitored closely by Building Services. This includes areas such as gas safety, electrical safety, water safety, fire safety, asbestos safety, damp and mould and lift safety. We collect data for a suite of performance indicators relating to tenant safety, which are now reported annually to the Housing and Communities Committee.

Following the tragic death of a child in Rochdale, England, a Council motion in December 2022 requested a review of our approach to dampness and mould in Council properties. A subsequent report to the Committee in May 2023 outlined an overview of our approach to the management and future prevention of dampness and mould in council houses, including a technology solution to help identify, tackle, and prevent damp and mould issues proactively, investing an additional £10m over the next 5 years.

There are currently no cases being investigated by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) relating to

the safety of our tenants and residents and there have been no cases reported or investigated during the past year.

We are therefore assured that we comply with all the relevant safety requirements and duties in relation to tenant and resident safety.

Areas of non-compliance

We comply with all of the above requirements with the exception of the areas set out below.

Compliance with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard

Tenant safety within the Councils' housing stock is one of the main priorities for its Maintenance, Repair and Asset Improvement Services managed by Building Services and significant progress has been made in 2022/23. The main area of concern in 2022/23 remains the number of properties that require a valid EICR and there is an increased focus and various initiatives are underway to ensure improvements are made in 2023/24. We anticipate that this improvement will be evident in 2023/24 and that the Council will be fully compliant within a realistic timeframe.

Tenant Satisfaction

We carried out a comprehensive tenant satisfaction survey in late 2022 and subsequently reported lower levels of tenant satisfaction for all indicators in our 2022/23 ARC submission. These results were reported to the Housing and Communities Committee in May 2023, which approved an action plan aimed at addressing the drivers of dissatisfaction raised by tenants. This action plan is due to be fully implemented by March 2024.

Breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order

Whilst we continue to meet our statutory responsibility of offering temporary accommodation to those that need it, we continue to report breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order. Following the 21 breaches of reported in 2022/23, we have seen a further 30 breaches in Q1 of 2023/24. This is largely due to the time being taken to move households experiencing homelessness into settled accommodation and the subsequent pressures which exist in terms of providing temporary accommodation. Our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and the delivery of additional new supply housing highlights the focus we place on ensuring how we will we will ensure we minimise any future UAO breaches.

Our Annual Assurance Statement was considered at a meeting of the Housing and Communities Committee on 25 October 2023 and was formally approved and subsequently signed by myself as Convener.

Councillor Gurpreet Singh Johal,
Convener, Housing and Communities Committee