

Annual Assurance Statement 2021

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; and
- All relevant legislative duties.

Further to this, we can confirm that there were no health & safety breaches in 2020-21 resulting in intervention by the Health & Safety Executive.

Our compliance with the annual gas servicing requirements specified in the Framework was 97.8% for 2020-21. The figure reflects 184 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. Highland also complies with the Gas Safety Advice recommendations issued by the Scottish Housing Regulator to all social landlords on 3 September 2021.

Highland is progressing works to comply with the new legislation concerning the standards of fire and smoke alarms. 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 11 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 April 2021 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 and 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 and Scrutiny Committee as appropriate; and

- Council Members and tenant representatives will also meet during the year to identify policy review issues as appropriate. For example, a Member Seminar was held in April 2021 to discuss homelessness and adult social care issues.

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 Member Seminars. A review of the tenant representative remit has commenced in August 2021.

Equalities and human rights

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the production of Regulator guidance intended to support landlords in their work to comply with equalities and human rights requirements.

Ahead of the guidance, Highland has reviewed our approach to the collection of equalities information and is confident that actions can be taken in 2021 and 2022 to ensure compliance with the requirements. Highland is also reviewing how we can adopt a human rights approach across various work remits.

Annual Customer Report for Tenants

The annual report for tenants was provided to tenants in September 2021 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. The 2021 survey was completed in Spring 2021 and 1,001 tenants provided survey responses.

The overall feedback was encouraging and was reported as part of the Annual Return of the Charter. The feedback has been provided to tenants and discussion has taken place with tenants as to how to address issues raised within the survey responses.

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 has highlighted two key issues where they indicated they wished to engage with the Council. Highland must:

- provide the Regulator with information required in relation to our homelessness services;
- provide the Regulator with bi-monthly reports showing progress in meeting all fire safety obligations for our Gypsy/Traveller sites; and
- confirm that its Gypsy/Traveller sites comply with all fire safety obligations as soon as possible.


Discussion on Highland's homelessness services will be connected to the rapid Rehousing Transition Plan which Highland submitted to The Scottish Government in June 2021.

An internal officer group has been established to progress the fire safety works on the Gypsy/Traveller sites. These works will be carried out in liaison with Scottish Government funding for other improvement works and following engagement with the residents. The Scottish Government attended the Longman Site on 9 September and indicated that they were pleased with the positive engagement with residents.

Highland has also been submitting monthly reports to the Regulator since June 2020 which detail performance against key housing issues during the pandemic.

I can confirm that Highland's Annual Assurance Statement 2021 (as above), was approved at Housing & Property Committee on 30th September 2021.

Signed by:

 Councillor Ben Thompson, Chair of Housing & Property Committee

Date:

1st October 2021