HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: **Housing and Property Committee**

Date: **10 December 2020**

Report Title: **Housing Performance Report – 1 April 2020 – 30 September 2020**

Report By: **Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property**

1   Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1   This report provides an update on key housing performance indicators from 1 April to 30 September 2020 (Quarter 2).

2   Recommendations

2.1   Members are asked to **Note** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 – 30 September 2020.

3   Implications

3.1   Resource: There are no resource implications arising from this report.

3.2   Legal: There are no legal implications arising from this report.

3.3   Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): There are no equality implications arising from this report.

3.4   Climate Change/Carbon Clever: There are no climate change/Carbon Clever implications arising from this report.

3.5   Risk: Risk is managed through regular review and reporting to allow corrective action to be taken if necessary.

3.6   Gaelic: There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4   Background

4.1   The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) has set out the performance indicators that it will use in its scrutiny of landlords.

4.2   This report provides performance information based on the reporting framework recommended by the SHR. Further performance information by Council Ward can be found on the Highland Council Intranet ward reporting pages.
http://www.highland.gov.uk/staffsite/info/13/members_intranet/37/ward_reporting/2

4.3   In accordance with the Scottish Social Housing Charter guidance, the Repairs, Tenancy Management and Rent Arrears figures are cumulative, while the Homeless Presentations figures are given for each separate quarter.

4.4   Scottish Housing Network (SHN) benchmark information, derived from the performance of all Scottish Landlords, has also been provided where available.

5   Housing Repairs

5.1   The key indicators for measuring repairs performance are the average time taken to complete Emergency repairs and Non-emergency repairs.

5.2   Table 1 details performance on the average time taken to complete emergency repairs and Table 2 details the average time taken to complete non-emergency repairs. Both graphs contain national benchmark figures for these indicators based on published 2019/20 figures.

5.3   *Table 1: Average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs (hours)*
Target 14 hours
2019/20 SHN Benchmark (Group) – 4.91 hours
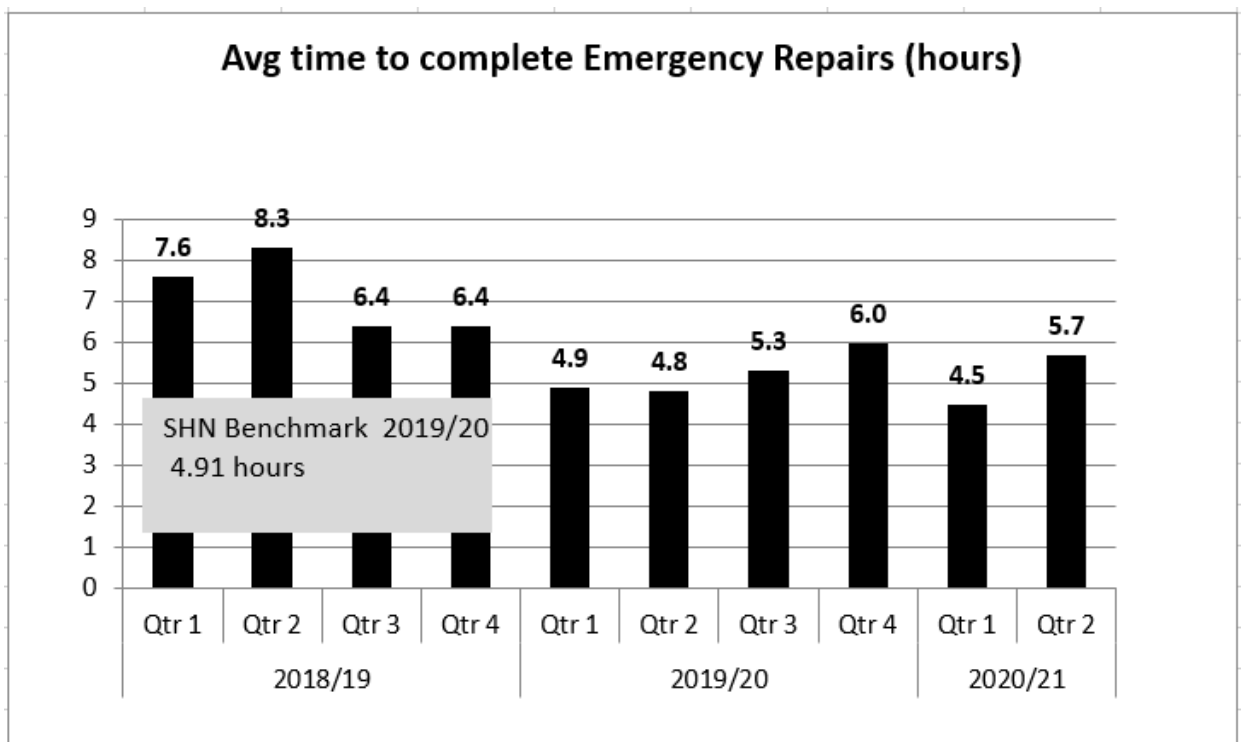
5.4 Performance on emergency repairs remains within the Highland target but the time taken has increased since Quarter 1. The coronavirus pandemic has impacted on performance as additional safety measures are being taken to ensure tenant and contractor safety in carrying out repairs.

5.5 ***Table 2: Average length of time taken to complete non-emergency repairs (days)***
Target 8 days
***2019/20 SHN Benchmark (Group) – 6.64 days***
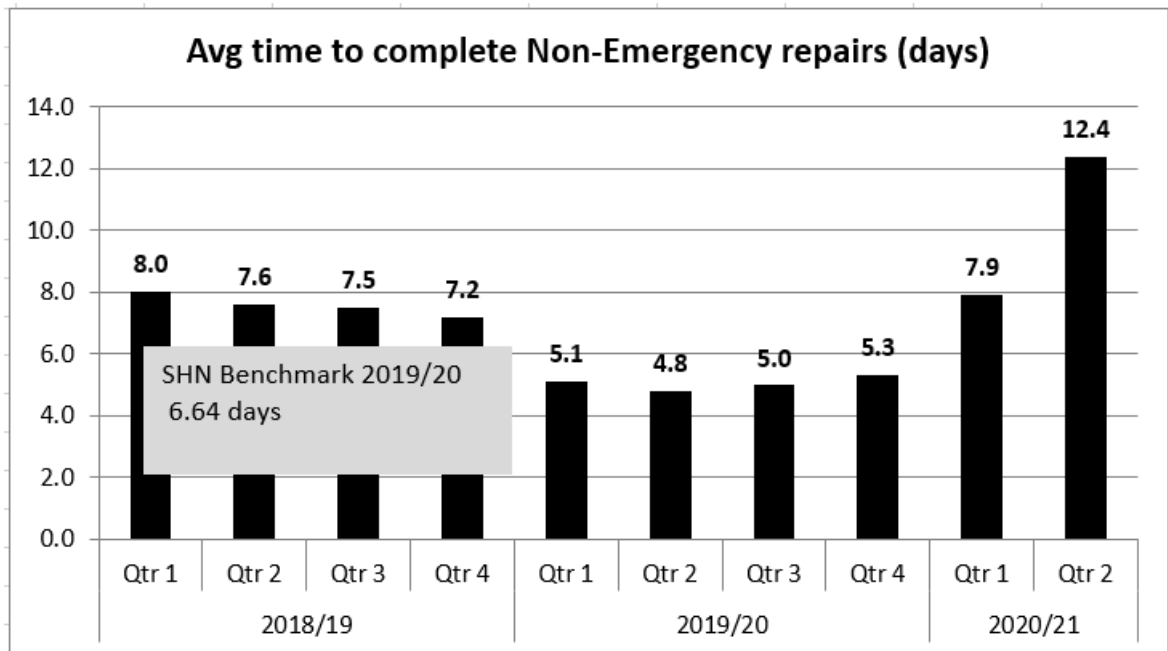
5.6 As predicted, the average time to complete non-emergency repairs has increased significantly in quarter 2. As reported to Committee in August we were working our way through a backlog of non-emergency repairs which we had not been able to complete during lockdown. Following the initial easing of lockdown, a backlog of approximately 1,300 non-emergency repairs had built up. As at 1 November 2020, this backlog had reduced to approximately 100 non-emergency repairs. In some cases, tenants have indicated a willingness to delay their repairs still further as a result of their shielding requirements. It was inevitable that as we completed repairs that had been delayed due to lockdown the average completion time would rise. We should now begin to see a reduction in average response time in future quarters as the backlog is reduced.

6   Tenancy Management

6.1 Table 3 provides information on the average re-let time showing the trend back 3 years and highlighting the same quarter in previous years for comparison.

6.2

Table 3 : Average re-let time (days) Target 35 days
2019/20 SHN Benchmark (Group) – 39.64 days

**Average re-let time (days)**
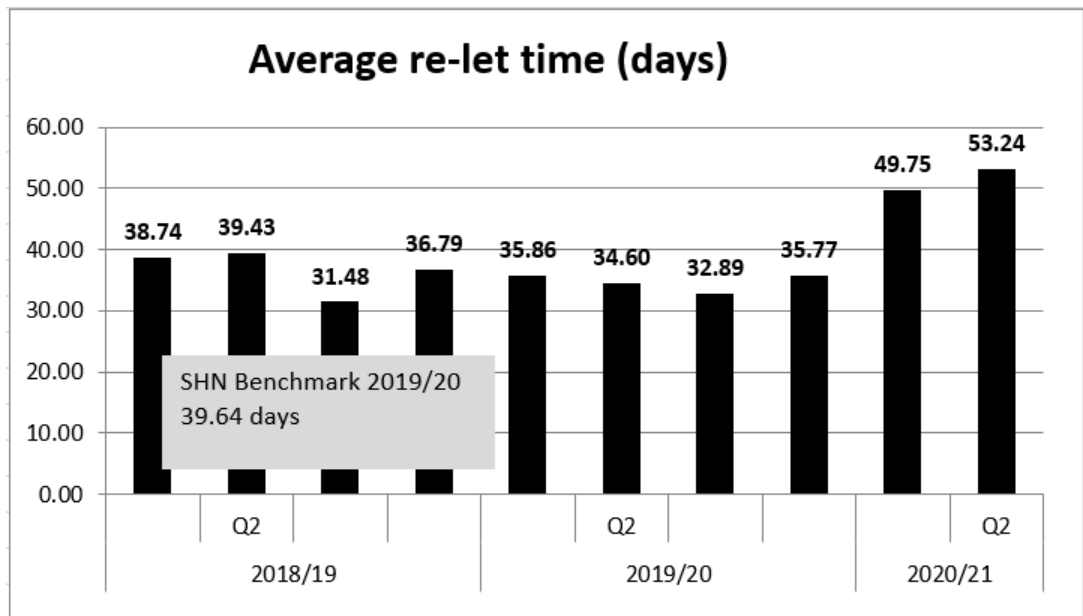
6.3 The graph shows the clear impact of the emergency on reletting activity and average reletting times. In line with national guidance, housing allocations were happening at a greatly reduced level during lockdown, with allocations focussed on homeless clients and other high needs cases. We have seen a gradual increase in housing allocations activity over the last 3 months. As we address the backlog in housing allocations the high proportion of properties that are let following delays are leading to higher average reletting times.

7 Rent Arrears

7.1 The key performance indicator for rent arrears is the value of current arrears. Table 4 below provides information on current rent arrears going back 3 years and shows the comparative figure for the same quarter in previous years.

7.2

Table 4 – Current Rent Arrears

Current Rent Arrears
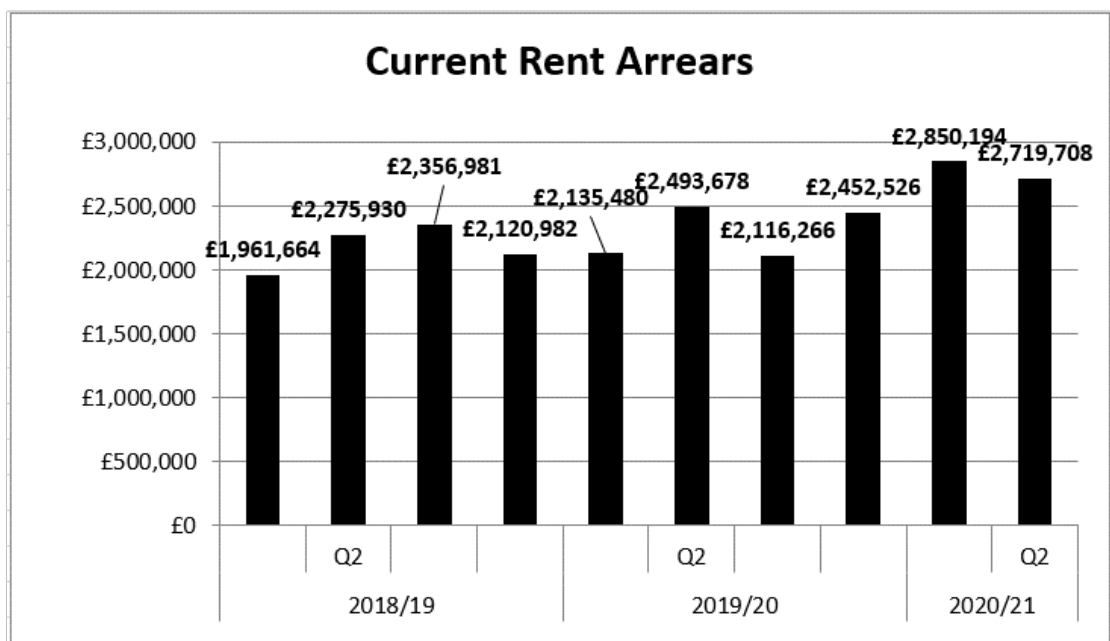
7.3   The performance report to August Committee detailed the efforts of officers during the pandemic to provide a full service in relation to rent arrears and to adapt communication and engagement with tenants to help them maintain rent payments and to seek support required.   Processes and communication have been adapted to increase tenant awareness of the support available to them during the pandemic.

7.4   Despite the efforts being made to contact people in arrears, rent arrears for quarter 2 are significantly higher than for the corresponding quarter in 2018/19 and 2019/20. Although there is a small decrease in the value of arrears from quarter 1, this is likely to be due to changes in the direct payment arrangements for Universal Credit claimants. The overall upwards trend in arrears is expected to continue.

7.5   Engagement with tenants and partners has confirmed that tenants are experiencing the same issues of unemployment and/or reduced income as the rest of the population during the pandemic. Many people are claiming Universal Credit for the first time and it is expected these numbers will increase when the "furlough" scheme ends in March 2021.

7.6   Under the emergency coronavirus legislation, there has been an extension to the notice period required to be given to tenants before landlords can start legal action to obtain an order for eviction. In line with this, Highland has not progressed any rent arrears cases to court during the emergency and the extended notice period will continue until 31 March 2021.

7.7   In line with our current escalation process, the issuing of notices of proceedings resumed in early November. Notices have been solely targeted at tenants who have simply failed to engage with services and have failed to make efforts to mitigate their rent arrears. These tenants still have the extra time period allotted in the emergency legislation to resolve their arrears before court action is initiated after April 2021.

7.8   The intention is that these officer efforts will stop these tenants falling into further debt and that they will seek support as soon as possible. Officers will continue to engage with tenants during this period to resolve matters pre-Court.

7.9   The impact of reduced rental income is being considered as part of the revenue estimates for 2021-22. A report will be presented to January Committee which will propose the budget-setting for the Housing Revenue Account for 2021-22 and will consider what rental income is required to deliver essential services for tenants. The annual rent consultation with tenants commenced in late November and details of tenant responses will be presented as part of the above report.

8   Homelessness

8.1   Performance information on homelessness is noted in tables 5 and 6.

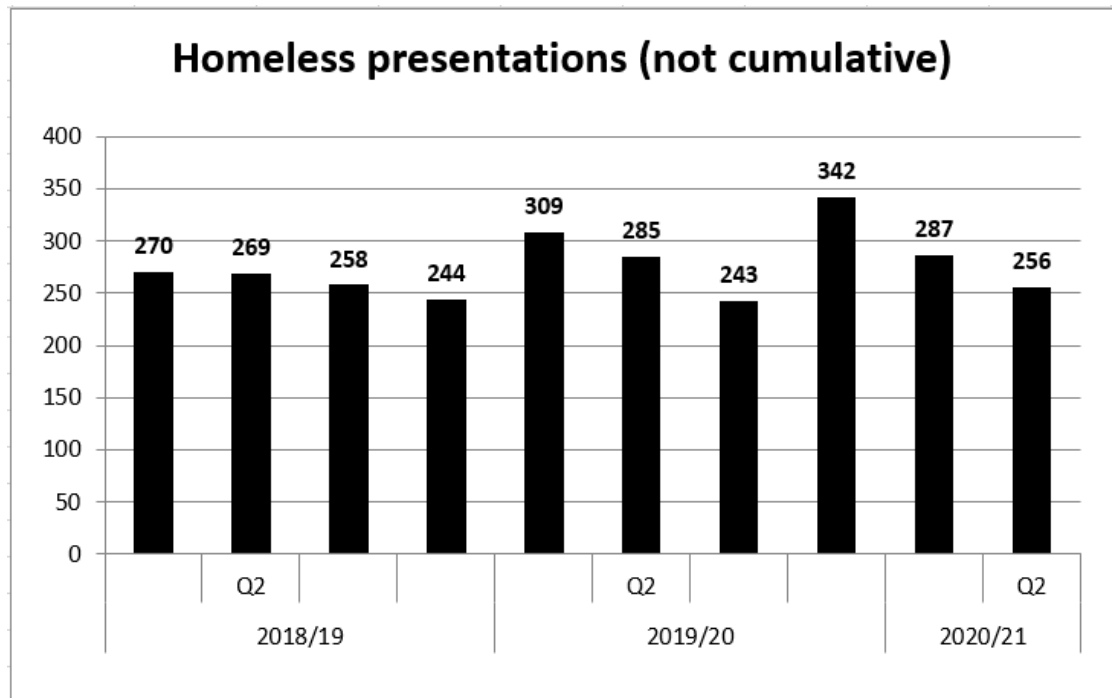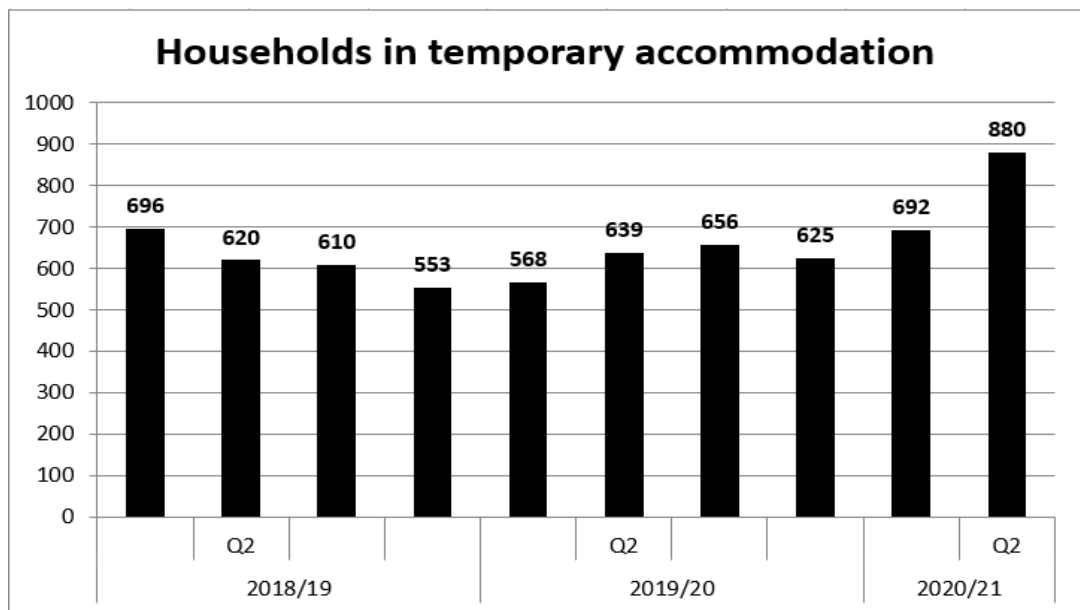*Table 5 - Homeless presentations per quarter (not cumulative)*

Homeless presentations (not cumulative)

270	269	258	244	309	285	243	342	287	256

Q2 2018/19   Q2 2019/20   Q2 2020/21

Table 6 – Households in Temporary Accommodation (not cumulative)

Households in temporary accommodation

696	620	610	553	568	639	656	625	692	880

Q2 2018/19   Q2 2019/20   Q2 2020/21

8.2   Table 5 (above) shows that numbers of homeless presentations have been slightly lower than normal compared to previous years which may reflect the legislation concerning court action, particularly in regard to private sector housing. Table 6 (above) shows a large increase in the numbers of homeless people in temporary accommodation which reflects the difficulty of moving clients into secure tenancies during the pandemic.

8.3   As reported at September Committee, the Unsuitable Accommodation Order has been extended to include all homeless clients and not just pregnant women and families with children. Although there are exemptions to the extended Order as part of the emergency coronavirus legislation, these are scheduled to end on 31 January 2021, and it is anticipated that this will increase further the pressure on officers to provide self-contained temporary accommodation within 7 days of a homelessness application.

8.4   An officer Homelessness Task Force has been set up to consider the above issues and to progress existing actions within the Highland Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan. An update on homelessness will be presented to Committee early in 2021 detailing this progress and considering the impact of both the pandemic and emerging national policy/legislation.

8.5   The development of a Housing First approach is one of the key priorities of our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan and we have developed our approach in close partnership with Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership (HADP) colleagues. They have provided £130k funding over 2 years to develop and implement our Inner Moray Firth Housing First Team. Housing First currently focuses on service users who have experienced repeat and/or long-term homelessness and are at risk of significant harm through drug and/ or alcohol use.

8.6   The Housing First Team has now been in operation since November 2019 and a Housing First Pathway has been developed with key partners. The Housing First Team now has an operational caseload of 10 service users, all of whom receive person-centred multi-agency support. Evaluation is underway to assess how Housing First may be developed and rolled out further in Highland.

8.7   Another key element of our Plan is the development and expansion of our Shared Temporary Accommodation approach. This will be based on the learning from our pilots in Inverness and Ross-shire. Using Scottish Government funding, a Team Leader has been recruited to the team and recruitment is underway in respect of the other team members.

8.8   The Scottish Government awarded Highland funding of £280k in 2019/20 and £297k for 2020/21. Levels of Year 3 funding for Local Authorities in 2021/22 will be announced in December following their discussion with COSLA. Levels of Phase 1 & 2 funding were distributed based on homeless presentation figures.

8.9   We have also been in discussion with Shelter Scotland to develop an approach to bring empty homes in Highland back into use. Shelter have offered to 50% match fund a 2-year temporary post to lead on the development of our Empty Homes and Private Rented Sector approach. This can be funded within the Scottish Government's 2021/22 funding allocation to Highland.

9   **Complaints and enquiry performance**

9.1   Table 7 below provides information on performance against complaints, freedom of information requests and MSP enquiries. This demonstrates the volume of formal complaints and enquiries that the service is dealing with. Staff are dealing with much larger numbers of service requests and enquiries on a day to day basis which do not form part of formal reporting. Given the nature and volume of business involved in housing services the proportion of formal complaints received is relatively low. As well as complaints some tenants and housing customers also take the time to contact us to compliment staff or thank us for the services they have received. Information on compliments received is also provided below.

9.2   Following completion of stage 2 complaints customers are advised that they can contact the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman if they are not satisfied with the way the Council has dealt with their case. There have been no complaints upheld by the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman to date in 2020-21.

Housing Complaints

Average Response time (days)

	Stage 1 Complaints		Stage 2 Complaints	
	Number	Av response time	Number	Av response time
Apr – Jun 2020	29	12	12	25
Jun – Sep 2020	75	11	23	26

Housing Freedom of Information Requests

	Number logged	Number now closed
Quarter 1 (Apr-Jun)	13	13
Quarter 2 (Jul-Sep)	37	36

Housing MSP Enquiries

	Number logged	Number now closed
Quarter 1 (Apr-Jun)	55	55
Quarter 2 (Jul-Sep)	94	93

Number of compliments received:

	Compliments
Apr – Jun 2020	6
Jun – Sep 2020	12

10   Summary

10.1   The Scottish Housing Regulator has been collecting key performance information from all Scottish Social Landlords since May 2020 to monitor the impact of the Covid-19 emergency. Their published information shows that the challenges faced in Highland are consistent with the national experience.

10.2   The Annual Assurance Statement 2020 is being provided to this Committee as a separate report. This includes further details of housing performance and ongoing engagement with the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Designation:	Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property
Date:	27 November 2020
Author:	Brian Cameron: Housing Policy and Investment Manager David Goldie Head of Housing and Building Maintenance
Background Papers:	Scottish Housing Regulator: The Scottish Social Housing Charter: Indicators and Context Information