

Agenda Item	<b>12.</b>
Report No	<b>HP/13/22</b>

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Housing and Property Committee

**Date:** 31 August 2022

**Report Title:** Housing Performance Report: 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022

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

### 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides information on how the Housing Service has performed in 2021/22 based on key performance indicators and national benchmarking information.

### 2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- (i) **NOTE** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022.
- (ii) **AGREE** to fund additional support to assist tenants directly with specialist, independent energy advice and access to financial support as described in paragraph 7.10 of this report. The cost of £80,000 would be met from within the existing Housing Revenue Account budget.

### 3 Implications

3.1 **Resource:** The report proposes funding independent, specialist advice to tenants to help people affected by rising energy prices. The advisors cost of £80,000 would be contained within the current year Housing Revenue Budget.

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](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. Updated benchmark information will be available for future reporting and indications are that it will demonstrate the impact of the pandemic on performance across Scotland.

4.5 The Coronavirus pandemic has had a major impact on how services are delivered. The Housing Performance Report to previous Committees provided information on how the Service has responded to the challenges of the pandemic and in particular to the lockdown restrictions.

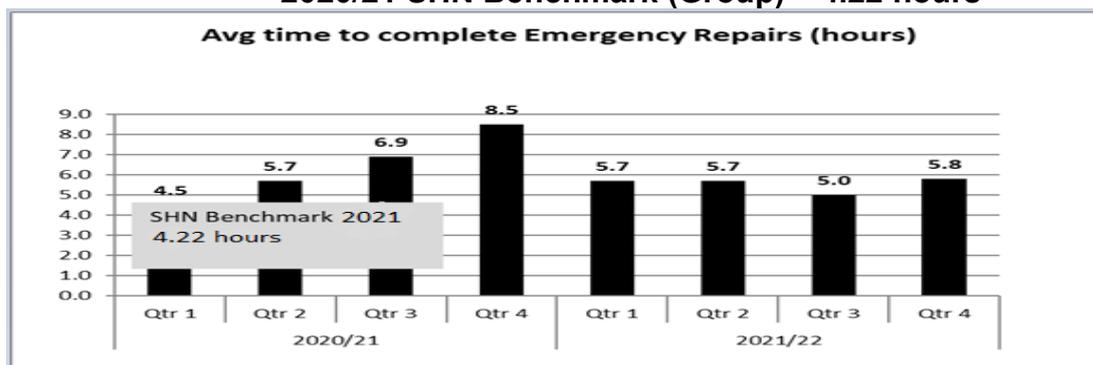
## 5. Housing Repairs

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 2020/21 figures.

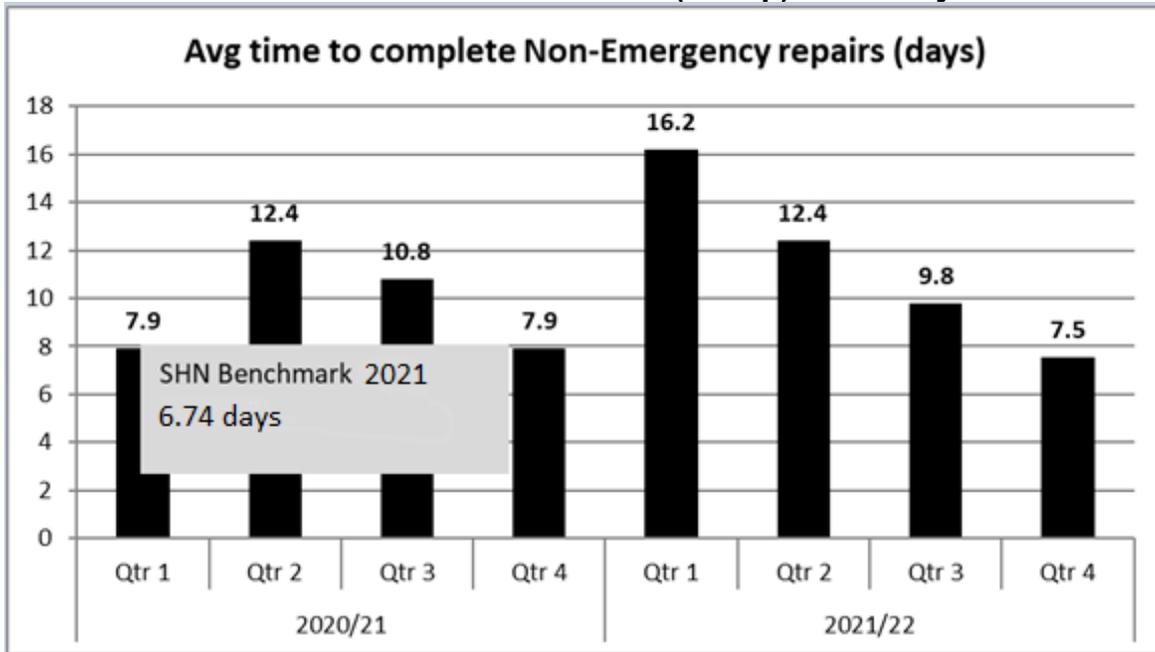
5.3 **Table 1: Average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs (hours)**  
**Target 14 hours**

**2020/21 SHN Benchmark (Group) – 4.22 hours**



5.4 Performance on emergency repairs has remained consistent in 2021/22 which reflects efforts to prioritise these repairs. Highland geography needs to be considered when comparing the Highland figure for the national benchmark on completing emergency repairs.

5.5 **Table 2: Average Length of Time Taken to Complete Non-Emergency Repairs (days) Target 8 days**  
**2020/21 SHN Benchmark (Group) – 6.74 days**

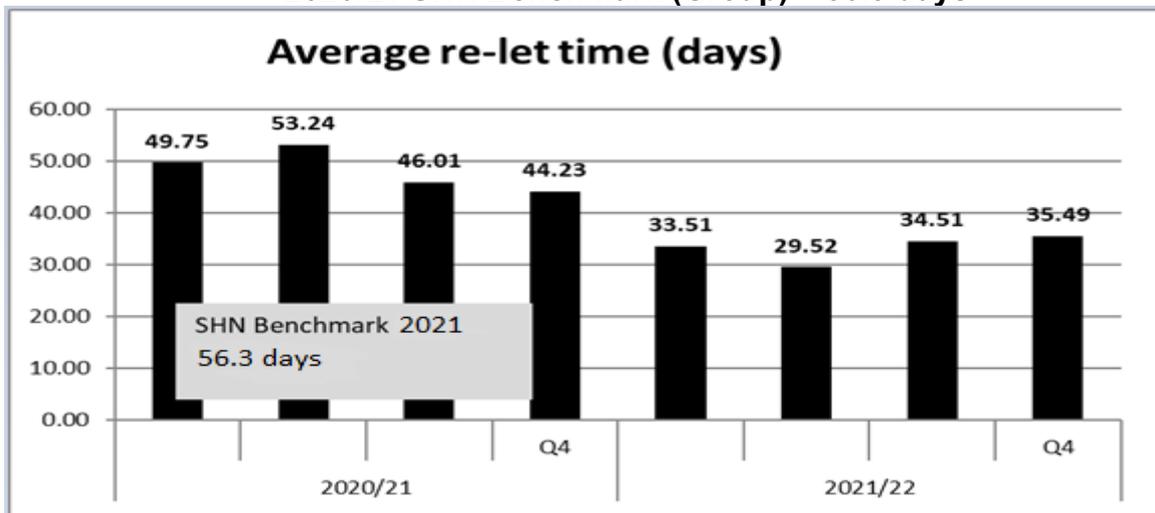


5.6 Average time to complete non-emergency repairs has decreased in the last quarter. Performance in the earlier part of the year was severely impacted as a result of the suspension of most non-essential repairs during the second lockdown period. Contractor capacity and material availability have also been negatively impacted by the pandemic.

## 6 Tenancy Management

6.1 Table 3 below 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**  
**2020/21 SHN Benchmark (Group) – 56.3 days**



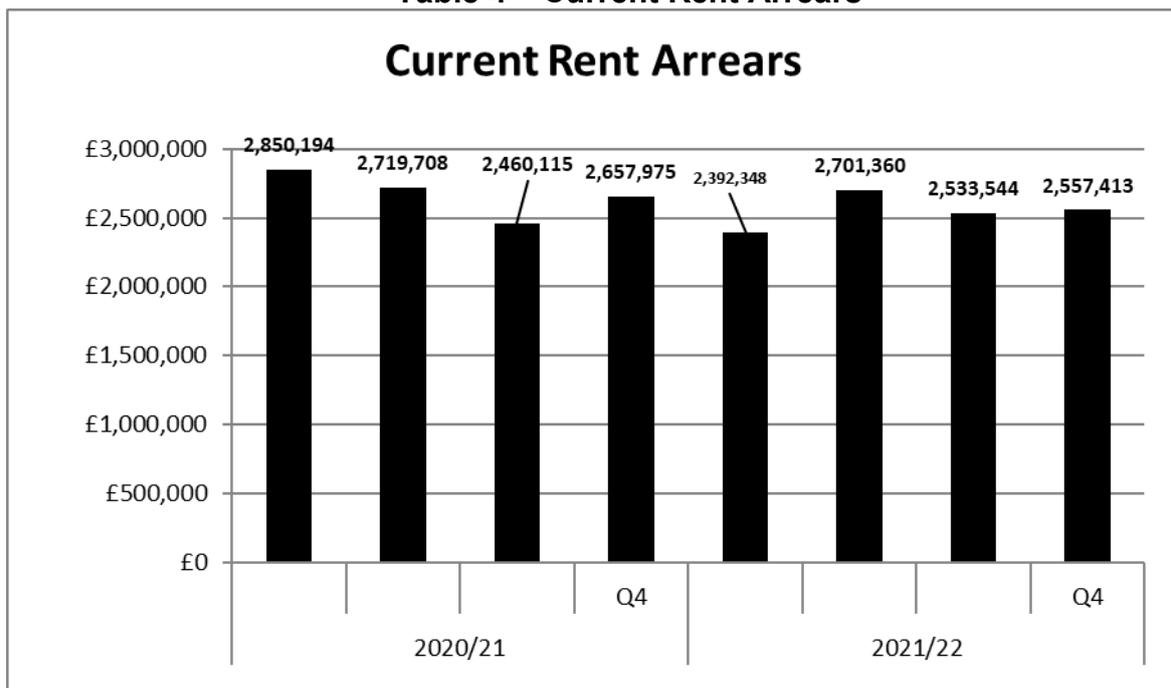
- 6.3 Performance on reletting times has improved in 2021/22 compared to 2020/21.
- 6.4 The graph shows the clear impact of the emergency on reletting activity and average reletting times. In line with national guidance, housing allocations during the lockdown period were happening at a greatly reduced level and were focused on homeless clients and other high needs cases.
- 6.5 With the easing of restrictions in April 2021, allocations have largely returned to pre-pandemic levels and officers continue to offer advice and assistance to applicants seeking re-housing. We saw an increase in reletting times in the last 2 quarters of 2021/22. This is associated with building maintenance labour and material supply issues and specifically to continuing national issues with electricity supplier affecting timescales for electricity meter changes in the social rented sector.

**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 and shows the comparative figure for the same quarter in the previous year.

7.2

**Table 4 – Current Rent Arrears**



- 7.3 Rent arrears for Q4 are comparable with the corresponding Q4 in 2019/20 and 2020/21.
- 7.4 Previous reports to Committee have 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 correspondence have been adapted to increase tenant awareness of the support available to them during the pandemic
- 7.5 With the easing of restrictions, visits to tenants in arrears have resumed, allowing officers to further progress arrears cases where face-to-face communication is crucial to resolving rent arrears issues. Officers are also reporting progress in individual

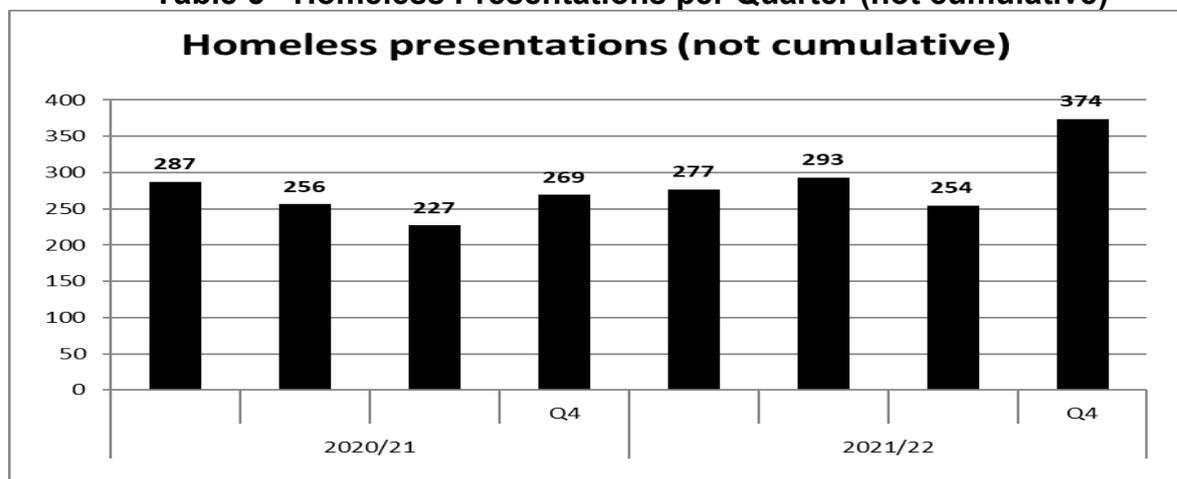
cases with Universal Credit claims being processed quicker than before and tenants making more frequent payments to their rent accounts now furlough has ended, and they have returned to work. These factors have all contributed to a reduction in rent arrears.

- 7.6 Under the emergency coronavirus legislation, there was 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 did not progress any rent arrears cases to court during the emergency and the extended notice period continued until 31 March 2022.
- 7.7 Officers remain supportive and sympathetic to all tenants facing financial hardship at this time and officers continue to signpost tenants to partner services who can provide specialist advice relating to income maximisation and benefits uptake.
- 7.8 Highland was allocated £297k in funding from the Scottish Government in 2021/22 to establish a Tenant Grant Fund in Highland. The Fund was targeted at tenants in both the private and social rented sectors who fell into arrears as a direct result of the pandemic. Referrals to the Tenant Grant Fund commenced on 15 November 2021 and Highland was successful in preventing homelessness in 233 cases across both the private and social sectors.
- 7.9 Fuel poverty continues to rise in Highland as a result of the combined cost of living and energy crisis. While the causes of this are out with the Council's control, officers continue to provide support to tenants who are struggling financially.
- 7.10 To assist with more specialist energy advice support, Highland are in discussion with AliEnergy, an advice charity who are currently assisting Lochaber tenants through a referral process via the local Housing Team. To extend this scheme Highland-wide it is proposed that we fund 2 full-time energy advisors to be employed by AliEnergy, with 1 based in North Highland and 1 in South Highland. These advisors will be able to assist tenants directly with specialist energy advice and will also provide access to external funding for financial support for tenants. The cost would be around £80,000, which can be met within the Housing Revenue Account budget for this year.

## 8. Homelessness

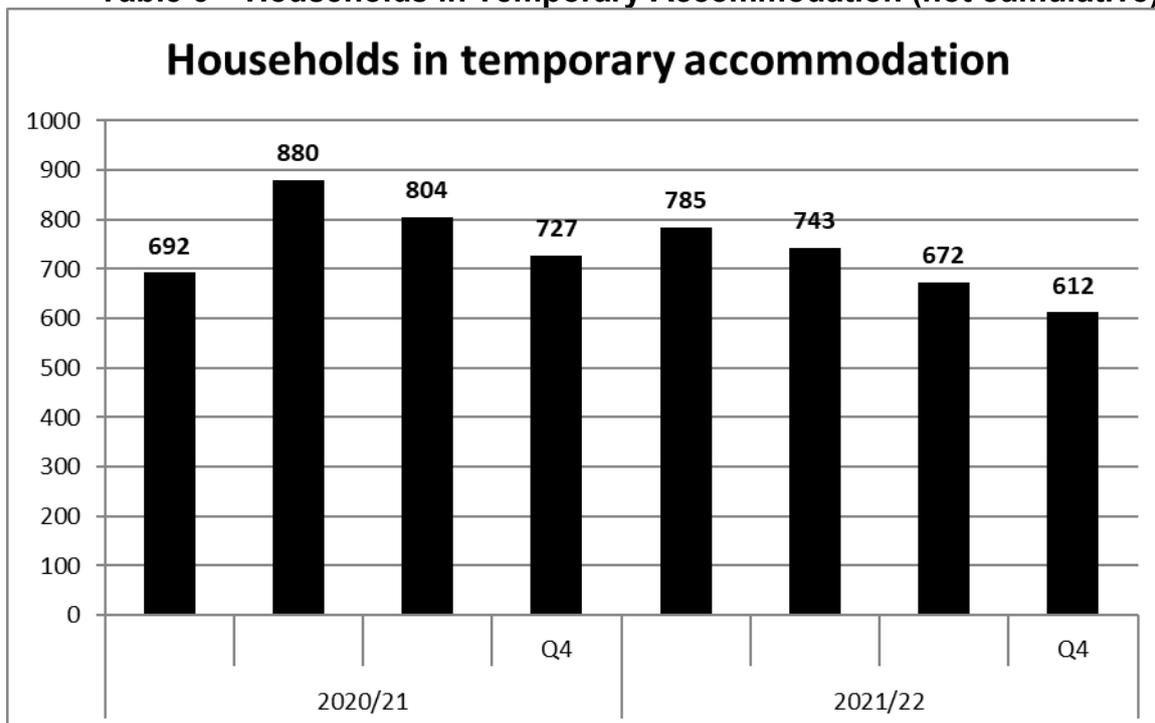
8.1 Performance information on homelessness is noted in tables 5 and 6.

8.2 **Table 5 - Homeless Presentations per Quarter (not cumulative)**



8.3

**Table 6 – Households in Temporary Accommodation (not cumulative)**



8.4 Table 5 (above) shows that numbers of homeless presentations have increased to comparable levels from before the pandemic. There has been a significant rise in the last quarter. Although the number of households in temporary accommodation remained high during 2021/22 there was a gradual reduction over the year. This reflects the work that is ongoing to implement our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan

8.5 A homelessness update will be provided to the next Committee, and this will detail current and forthcoming initiatives designed to prevent homelessness in line with changing national guidance and legislation.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property

Date: 11 August 2022

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Background Papers: Scottish Housing Regulator: The Scottish Social Housing Charter: Indicators and Context Information