

Agenda Item	12.
Report No	HP/29/24

The Highland Council

Committee: Housing and Property

Date: 6 November 2024

Report Title: Annual Assurance Statement 2024

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides the Council's Annual Assurance Statement for the calendar year 2024 to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to

- i. **APPROVE** the Annual Assurance Statement for 2024 detailed in **Appendix 1** of this report.

3 Implications

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

3.2 **Legal** - Submitting an Annual Assurance Statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator is a regulatory requirement.

3.4 **Risk** - Risk is managed through regular review and reporting to allow corrective action to be taken if necessary.

3.5 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** - There are no health and safety implications arising from this report.

3.6 **Gaelic** - There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4 Impacts

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an annual update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Background

- 5.1 The Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) was established in April 2012 and sets out the standards and outcomes that service users such as tenants, homeless people and Gypsy/Travellers can expect from social housing providers. As part of the regulation process, the Scottish Housing Regulator requires social landlords to provide it with an annual performance return, focused on the outcomes of the Charter.
- 5.2 In February 2019, the Scottish Housing Regulator published a new Regulatory Framework and associated guidance setting out how it would regulate social housing providers and its reporting requirements for the next 5 years. This Framework introduced a new requirement for landlords to provide an Annual Assurance Statement starting in October 2019.
- 5.3 The Regulator will use the Assurance Statements alongside the existing Annual Return on the Charter to guide its engagement with landlords and assist in the production of its Annual Engagement Plans for each landlord.
- 5.4 The Regulator verified the Council's Annual Return of Charter in Summer 2024 and the Highland Landlord Report, including the Engagement Plan, is available at: <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance/landlords/highland-council>

6 Highland's Annual Assurance Statement 2024

- 6.1 The Council's draft Annual Assurance Statement for 2024 is attached as **Appendix 1** and is in line with the recommended Regulator guidance.
- 6.2 The content of the Statement has been discussed and verified with a group of tenant volunteers. The Statement will be publicly available to tenants in due course.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 1 October 2024

Author: Brian Cameron, Strategic Lead - Housing & Building Maintenance

Background Papers: Scottish Housing Regulator: Statutory Guidance on the Annual Assurance Statement.

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Annual Assurance Statement 2024

Annual Assurance Statement 2024

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; and
- All relevant legislative duties.

Further to this, we can confirm that there were no health & safety breaches in 2023-24 resulting in intervention by the Health & Safety Executive.

Our compliance with the annual gas servicing requirements specified in the Framework was 100% for 2023-24.

In 2023-24, Highland progressed works to comply with the new legislation concerning the standards of fire and smoke alarms. Highland achieved full compliance with the new standards in October 2023. The reason for the non-compliance was tenant non-access during 2021-22 and 2022-23.

All registered social landlords were notified by the Scottish Housing Regulator on 20 July 2022 that any property which has not had a 5-yearly electrical installation condition report by 31 March 2022 should now be considered as not complying fully with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. As a result of the Covid-19 work restrictions, the inspection regime in Highland is behind schedule. A monthly update is provided to the Regulator to advise of the number of properties which fall into this category and also to detail plans to increase the number of inspections to deal with the backlog of inspections.

64% of Highland stock was compliant with the electrical inspection condition regulations as of 1 October 2024. Contracts have been established to accelerate the work and reach compliance in 2025-2026. It is anticipated that there will be a significant number of abeyances as non-access remains a significant challenge to achieving compliance. As of 1 October 2024, there were over 600 abeyances.

Highland will continue to conduct periodic reviews of its health and safety commitments in regard to a number of other issues such as asbestos, water safety and fire safety.

A major focus in 2024 has been a review of how Highland tackles reports from tenants of suspected damp and mould in our stock. New guidance will be issued to tenants in Autumn 2024. A new process is also scheduled in Autumn to monitor reports of suspected damp and mould and to be more proactive in arranging technical inspections, appropriate works and follow-up reports in our stock when tenants have reported potential damp and mould. Tenants are also encouraged to monitor the situation themselves through advice and referrals to energy advice officers. Further work will be carried out in line with the emerging Regulator guidance on the issue, which will be clarified ahead of the 2025/2026 reporting year.

Committee Reporting

We can confirm the following reporting structure within the Council: -

- Each of the 10 Area Committees receives quarterly or bi-annual housing performance reports and also reports on request of the Area Chair/Members; reporting has been adapted in 2021 and 2024 to accommodate revised Area Committee structures 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 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 Local Housing Strategy; 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, Climate Change Committee 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.

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 has been an opportunity for tenant-nominated tenant representatives at the Strategic Committee and at associated Member Seminars.

Equalities and human rights

Highland has commenced efforts to collect data on each of the equality's aspects recommended in the Regulator guidance. Recent efforts have focused on the My Housing Online module which offers applicants the opportunity to provide more detail on their circumstances and housing needs/household characteristics.

Highland is continuing to review how we can adopt a Human Rights Approach across various remits and policies. We currently carry out a range of impact assessments, including around equalities, and have recently introduced both Human Rights and Children's Rights (UNCRC) impact assessments as part of this approach.

Annual Customer Report for Tenants

The annual report for tenants will be provided to tenants in October 2024 as required by the Scottish Housing Regulator. This includes key performance information which is of interest to tenants.

As part of this annual process, the Council is asking the views of tenant volunteers ahead of publication and their views will be considered in producing the final document.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

The Council is required to undertake a comprehensive tenants' satisfaction survey every 3 years. A comprehensive survey took place in Spring 2024.

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:-

- Highland Tenant Forum
- Value for Money Working Group
- Communications Working Group
- Tenant Scrutiny Panel
- Tenant involvement in the repairs service redesign
- Tenant Participation Strategy Working Group
- Gypsy/Traveller client group.

In recent years, the Council participated in the Scottish Government's Next Steps Programme and tenants have been actively involved in drafting a Tenant Participation Action Plan. This will be incorporated into the review of the Tenant Participation Strategy, and this will be submitted to Committee in November 2024. 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.