

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

Housing and Communities Committee

8 September 2021

Annual Assurance Statement 2021/20 – Scottish Housing Regulator

Report by Depute Director (Communities)

(Report No. 21/156)

To comply with the Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Framework, the Council must approve and submit an Annual Assurance Statement, giving assurance that it is meeting legislative and regulatory standards for social housing in Scotland.

This report provides a brief overview of the Framework and appends the Annual Assurance Statement 20/21 for approval by Committee.

1. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 This is the third year that social housing landlords have been required to publish an Annual Assurance Statement in line with guidance within the Scottish Housing Regulator's (SHR) published Regulatory Framework. The Framework details the SHR's statement on performance of functions, and sets out how they regulate Registered Social Landlords, as well as housing and homelessness services delivered by Local Authorities.
- 1.2 Within the Framework, the SHR carry out their work in the following four broad ways:
 - gathering and publishing data in ways that tenants and other stakeholders can use
 - seeking assurance from landlords
 - acting where they need to
 - thematic activity, to look in depth at specific areas of work
- 1.3 Central to their approach is landlords assuring themselves, their tenants and the SHR through landlord self-assurance.
- 1.4 Every Registered Social Landlord and Local Authority is responsible for delivering good outcomes and services for their tenants and service users. The SHR is clear that landlords must be self-aware, analytical, open and honest about their performance and identify and drive improvement activities.
- 1.5 When considering whether to engage with landlords, the SHR will initially consider what they have done to assure themselves that they are meeting regulatory requirements. In line with this requirement, all landlords must prepare an Annual Assurance Statement to confirm to their tenants and the SHR that they are meeting regulatory requirements.

2. ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT

- 2.1 Since April 2019, there has been a requirement for all Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords to submit an Annual Assurance Statement, which must be agreed by the relevant Local Authority Committee.

Statements should confirm the landlord's level of compliance with the requirements detailed within the Framework, including:

- all relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter
- all relevant legislative duties
- details of any areas of material non-compliance, briefly describing plans and a timeframe to improve
- confirmation that the relevant Local Authority Committee have seen and considered appropriate evidence to support the level of assurance

- 2.2 A signed and unsigned copy of the Annual Assurance Statement must then be provided to the SHR, who will then make the unsigned version publicly available. There is also a requirement for landlords to ensure the Statement is easily and readily available for tenants.

- 2.3 During 2020/21, Perth and Kinross Housing Service complied with all but one regulatory requirement as set out in Chapter 3 of the Scottish Housing Regulator's Framework. This confirms that we:

- achieved all the standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter for tenants, people who are homeless and others who use our services.
- complied with our legal obligations relating to housing and homelessness, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety.

- 2.4 As a result of Covid-19, the Council did not materially comply with gas safety regulations, as the Housing Service missed 128 services (failures) during the reporting year – a challenge faced by many social landlords. These failures represent 2% of the 6,387 domestic gas services carried out in 2020/21 by the Service.

- 2.5 All 128 failures resulted from the Covid-19 restrictions and our need to effectively balance the health (covid) and safety (gas servicing) issues for our tenants. All failures were due to tenants shielding or self-isolating.

- 2.6 To help minimise failures and provide reassurance to our tenants, we issued communications encouraging tenants to allow engineers access and provided information about the robust safety measures and risk assessments in place to protect both tenants and engineers.

- 2.7 Many failures were only missed by 2 to 5 calendar days. However, as a result of a few longer-term shielding cases, our overall average for failures was 30 calendar days between the missed anniversary date and the service being completed.
- 2.8 In line with Health and Safety Executive guidance, the repair history of the boiler was analysed for all failures, to ensure there was no immediate danger to our tenants.
- 2.9 As restrictions have eased, good progress has been made, and through tenants' confidence in our arrangements and robust safety measures, this has meant that there are currently no outstanding gas services.

Evidence to Support Assurance 2020/21

- 2.10 Our management and democratic structures, and processes are all designed to facilitate effective decision making, and the proper scrutiny of decisions and their impact, in terms of performance and the achievement of outcomes.
- 2.11 This is supported by a range of planning processes, ensuring we meet the needs of customers, and that targets for quality improvements are set and monitored. Individual Business Management & Improvement Plans set out detailed actions and outcomes for each Service and include performance indicators. This is underpinned by the statutory requirement on local authorities to produce a Local Housing Strategy and provide regular progress updates. This sets out our priorities and plans for the delivery of Scottish Housing Regulator outcomes.
- 2.12 Service performance is reported regularly to the Housing Management Team, Communities Senior Management Team, Executive Officer Team and publicly through the Council's themed Committees and the Scrutiny Committee. Financial performance is publicly reported through the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.
- 2.13 The evidence required by the SHR forms part of the self-assessment process, which informs in part, the Council's Annual Governance Statement. Appendix 1 details an overview of information that supports the Annual Assurance Statement.
- 2.14 On 1 April 2021, the SHR published its plans for engagement all social landlords based on 2020/21 performance, including all 32 Local Authorities, across Scotland. Due to the impacts of Covid on households facing or experiencing homelessness, the SHR are engaging with all Local Authorities this year to seek reassurance on their delivery of services for people facing homelessness. The SHR have noted that nationally Covid has significantly impacted the service provided by social landlords in 2020 and will continue to influence how services are provided in 2021/22 and therefore will continue to monitor and assess how Local Authorities responds to these challenges.

Tenant Assurance

The SHR has indicated that it is the responsibility of Committee to consider and approve the Annual Assurance Statement. There is no requirement for this to be approved by tenants.

- 2.15 However, we held several digital interactive sessions with the Service User Review and Evaluation (SURE) Team, where the Housing Management Team presented an overview of the Service's performance for 2020/21 to enable them to assess the Service's performance and provide feedback on potential areas for improvement. This feedback will be used to support our Annual Landlord Performance Report and the Annual Assurance Statement.
- 2.16 In 2020, we commissioned an independent market research company, Knowledge Partnership, to carry out a tenant satisfaction survey on our behalf. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, we were unable to carry out face-to-face interviews with the selected sample of tenants as we did in 2018. Instead, the survey was conducted over the telephone.
- 2.17 The survey was carried out between 17 November and 30 December 2020 and 1,000 tenants were interviewed. Tenants were asked how satisfied they were with housing services against several national key indicators set by the Scottish Housing Regulator.
- 2.18 The results indicated that a large majority of tenants (82.9%) are satisfied with the overall service they receive from Perth & Kinross Council as their landlord. In addition, more than 8 in 10 tenants were satisfied with most key elements of the housing service such as housing quality, neighbourhood management, and being kept informed.
- 2.19 This, together with our external scrutiny by the SURE Team, provides the required level of assurance from the tenants who receive and experience the services we deliver.

Self-Assessment

- 2.20 During 2021, the Service held a Self-Assessment workshop, using the framework "How Good is our Service" to assess service delivery against the outcomes of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. This assessment forms the basis of the Annual Assurance Statement, which is attached as Appendix 2.
- 2.21 Based on the findings of the Self-Assessment, an action plan was developed which identifies key improvements including:
 - the implementation of Housing Online, to enable housing applications to be completed online and provide the facility for applicants to manage and update their own application.

- a review of our regulatory requirements and standards, relating to equalities data collection and the adoption of a human rights approach, to ensure compliance with new guidance.
- the introduction of pulse surveys to gain regular feedback from our tenants on themed areas of service delivery.
- continuation of the review of projects and planned improvement programmes to ensure, where practicably possible, all our housing stock meets the new Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH2) as set out in policy, by December 2032.

2.22 The Scottish Housing Network also carried out a desktop review of our Annual Return Charter (ARC) performance prior to submission to the SHR. The feedback received was very positive and areas of suggested improvement were already in progress by the Service.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

3.1 The Council's Housing Service continues to deliver high levels of service, with strong performance across all areas and ongoing high levels of tenant satisfaction despite the impact and challenges faced by Covid. This has also been achieved in the context of maintaining our rents at affordable levels by having the third lowest local authority rents in Scotland, demonstrating our commitment to delivering a value for money service for our tenants. Throughout the year, Committee has received several key reports providing assurance that we are delivering and exceeding the standards required by the SHR (Appendix 1).

3.2 It is recommended that Housing and Communities Committee:

- notes the requirement to submit an Annual Assurance Statement
- approves the Annual Assurance Statement as detailed in Appendix 2

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Approved

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	Yes
Corporate Plan	Yes
Resource Implications	
Financial	No
Workforce	No
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	No
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	No
Strategic Environmental Assessment	No
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	No
Legal and Governance	Yes
Risk	No
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	Yes
Communication	
Communications Plan	Yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan/Single Outcome Agreement

1.1 This report and proposals support the delivery of the Perth and Kinross Community Plan in terms of the following priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

Corporate Plan

1.2 This report and proposals support the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan Priorities:

- (i) Giving every child the best start in life;
- (ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens;
- (iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy;
- (iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives; and
- (v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations.

2. Resource Implications

Financial

- 2.1 The Head of Finance has been consulted on this report. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Workforce

- 2.2 There are no workforce implications arising from this report

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.3 There are no land or property implications arising from this report

3. Assessments

Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups. Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments for plans and policies allows the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting these duties.
- 3.2 The proposals have been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.2 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.

Sustainability

- 3.3 Under the provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 the Council must discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.

Legal and Governance

- 3.3 The Head of Legal and Governance has been consulted and is supportive of the approach taken in respect of the Annual Assurance Statement.

4. Consultation

Internal

- 4.1 Heads of Service and senior managers from Communities have been consulted on the content of this report.

External

- 4.2 Tenant Reports Panel noted that this is a good summary report and it is great to see in Appendix 1 the links to the evidence to support this report.

5. Communication

- 5.1 The Annual Assurance Statement will be made publicly available.

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 2.1 No background papers were relied upon during the preparation of this report.

3. APPENDICES

- 3.1 Appendix 1 - Overview of information that supports the Annual Assurance Statement.
- 3.2 Appendix 2 - Annual Assurance Statement