

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET21 October 2021Report by Director of EnvironmentHOUSING SERVICES ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT 2020/21
(SCOTTISH SOCIAL HOUSING CHARTER)**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the Annual Assurance Statement (AAS) 2021. This outlines Housing Services' compliance with the Scottish Housing Regulator's (SHR) Regulatory Framework, the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) and our statutory obligations. It will also take account of our engagement plan with the SHR. The AAS is an annual requirement for all Register Social Landlords (RSLs) by the SHR.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Cabinet:
- a) Note our performance report against SSHC indicators and measures and how we compare against both 2019-20 performance and the average for the housing sector;
 - b) Note the proposed Action Plan to further strengthen our compliance against the Regulatory Framework and SSHC; and
 - c) Approve the AAS 2021 which has been prepared taking into account the outcomes of Housing Services self-evaluation of our performance.

BACKGROUND

3. The Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) requires each landlord to provide the SHR with details of their performance against 37 performance indicators and also information for a further 32 contextual indicators by 31st May each year. This is known as the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC). This detail has been submitted to Cabinet each year since its introduction in 2013/14.

4. Based on the ARC submission the SHR will then produce:
- a summary Landlord Report for every social landlord in Scotland and they publish this on their website.
 - an Engagement Plan for each landlord, which outlines the areas of scrutiny they will focus on, based on the prior year's reported performance. East Renfrewshire's performance information from 2020/21 can be viewed at: <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance/landlords/east-renfrewshire-council>

5. The SHR'S Regulatory Framework also requires all social landlords to produce an AAS confirming compliance with the Regulatory Framework, SSHC standards and with statutory obligations, and on approval by Cabinet, to submit this to SHR for consideration annually.

6. The AAS:

- requires a self-evaluation to be undertaken by each landlord looking at performance and the quality of services provided.
- should be accompanied by an appropriate action plan, where any areas of non-compliance with standards are identified.

7. The SHR will use the information from the ARC as well as the Assurance Statement to inform the Engagement Plan to determine the key areas of risk identified in the Local Scrutiny Plan for each Local Authority.

8. The SHR adapted its approach to landlord scrutiny during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim was to ensure landlords kept a clear focus on critical service delivery and assess risk appropriately. This also allowed SHR to remain well briefed on the ongoing performance of landlords, any issues they may face in compliance with legal obligations and standards, and that this is reported timeously.

9. All social landlords were providing key data through a monthly COVID-19 data return to SHR in 2020-21 in addition to reporting through other corporate returns to Scottish Government, COSLA, etc. The SHR has introduced quarterly performance schedule for social landlords in 2021-22 in key areas to continue their more frequent assessment of sector performance and issues to inform their primary role to protect the interests of tenants and others in the delivery of the housing service in Scotland.

10. Where any failures in compliance with legal or safety standards have been identified these have also been notified to the SHR and any other relevant bodies.

REPORT

11. The performance report against the SSHC (appendix 1) demonstrates that Housing Services is performing well in comparison to last year and the average for the housing sector in Scotland.

12. The main highlights in our performance and areas for improvement are as listed:

Areas of Good Performance (ARC)

Repairs

13. Our repairs service is delivered through the Housing Maintenance Team supported by external contractors for specialist works. The performance is excellent with East Renfrewshire Council completing emergency repairs within an average time 2.4 hours compared to Scottish Council average of 6.2 hours. Similarly non-emergency repairs (whilst COVID restrictions allowed) were completed within an average of 5.39 days compared to a Scottish Council average of 7.3 days. The quality of repair work is clearly evident through high percentage of jobs fixed first time at 99.5% compared to a Scottish Council average of 92.6%. This is a major achievement during the Covid pandemic.

14. However, it is noted that customer satisfaction for repairs is lower than the Scottish average. Some customers do not feel Housing Services communicate appropriately regarding their repairs. To address this, Housing Services are redesigning the staff structure and investing in new technology such as real time hand held devices for staff and a software system that permits self-serve. Other areas for investigation will include how customers make contact with the service and the role of direct messaging.

Maintenance

15. There is good progress in the improvement of our tenants' homes to meet the Scottish Government's targets for housing quality (Scottish Housing Quality Standards) at 91.4% compared to a Scottish Council average of 90.5% and energy efficiency (Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing) at 93.2% compared to a Scottish Council average of 86.4%.

Estates and Tenancies

16. There were an increasing number of new tenants sustaining their tenancies from 90.2% to 94.21% which is higher than the Scottish Council average of 91.3%. We are pleased we are managing to resolve anti-social behavior and this is supported by tenants' high satisfaction for our management of their neighbourhood.

Areas for Improvement (ARC)

Rent Arrears

17. There has been a significant increase in current tenants' rent arrears during the Covid pandemic which has been seen across the social housing sector. In East Renfrewshire a significant number of tenants moved from paying full rent or receiving traditional Housing Benefit payments to Universal Credit due to a change in their circumstances. This change automatically places these tenants into a minimum of 5 weeks arrears. We will maximize resources to engage and support our tenants to pay their rent and reduce arrears in the coming year.

Empty Homes

18. We have undertaken a review of our management of empty houses with the aim to be more efficient to reduce lost rent and to contribute towards allocations outcomes. We are beginning to see improvement in our performance in this key area in 2021-22 with void rent loss predicted to reduce by £80k from the 2020/21.

Tenancy Refusal

19. Housing Services introduced Choice Based Lettings in 2019 which allowed applicants to bid for a property rather than wait to be offered a property. However despite the success of this new letting process, tenancy refusal rates still remain higher than the Scottish Council average. When finding permanent accommodation for homeless households, Housing Services aim to meet the needs of the household in terms of preferred location. Unfortunately for many applicants, the stock is not available to meet their preferences.

20. We have significant demand from families who wish to remain in the Eastwood area and we will permit families to restrict their bids for a 3 month period to their area of choice. However the lack of available stock in this area means we often have to make direct offers of accommodation for properties in Barrhead which has 50% of all council housing. This results in a high number of refusals.

Annual Assurance Statement (AAS) and Action Plan

21. A key requirement of the AAS is for RSLs to assess their compliance against the provisions of the Regulatory Framework. A self-assessment has been undertaken and there is a good level of compliance against the Regulator Framework. An action plan (appendix 2) has been developed to further strengthen our compliance against the Framework and also to attend to areas for improvement in our performance against the SSHC.

22. The AAS 2021 will be published for our tenants, as well as submitted to the SHR by 31 October 2021 detailing our compliance with the Regulator Framework and performance against the SSHC. The draft AAS outlines there is good compliance and performance, although we have identified the following areas for increased focus and improvement:

Income Maximisation

23. A key objective in the year is to maximise our income through improved management of empty homes and to work with and support our tenants to reduce their arrears of rent. Our action plan in appendix 3 notes the following work:

- Empty Homes/Void Rent Loss – a review is already underway and has to date, predicted an £80K reduction void rent loss. It should be noted that whilst the successful new build programme is an area of good performance, the associated lettings work has a detrimental impact on void rent loss due to number of existing tenants moving to these new homes which increases the number of void properties. In addition the service has faced significant difficulties in addressing staff vacancies through the existing labour market which is making service delivery challenging.
- Rent Arrears – Housing Services are currently developing a Rent Arrears Strategy aimed at maximising resources to engage and support tenants to pay their rent arrears to improve income collection.

Other Performance Areas to Note

24. Members will note that the rent levels have been assessed as affordable and the Council rents are considerably lower than any social or private landlord in the East Renfrewshire area.

25. Members may also note that performance in gas safety dropped in 2019/20. All cases that failed were the result of tenants shielding or fearful of home visits during the high infection periods of the pandemic. Whilst the service has legal powers to force entry, Housing Services reviewed the age and repair history of each gas appliance to ensure gas safety but could have utilised this legal power if deemed necessary. This action was not required and all systems were serviced at a later date in discussion with the tenant. Through our annual engagement discussions with the SHR, no concerns were raised with this approach.

26. Throughout the pandemic, there was a significant pressure on the council's resources to provide both temporary and permanent accommodation for homeless households. Despite this pressure and despite the significant shortage of accommodation in East Renfrewshire the council met all its legal duties and this is not an area marked for improvement in our AAS. The SHR continues to closely monitor homeless services and outcomes across all 32 local authorities, and homelessness features in the engagement plans for all 32 local authorities.

27. Housing Services are undertaking a redesign of homeless service provision in East Renfrewshire. This was the subject of a cabinet paper submitted 24 September 2020, where a service design approach is being taken to permit service users to inform how services are provided. In addition the review seeks to ensure a corporate approach to the prevention of homelessness. A report will be submitted to Cabinet in early 2022/23 with key recommendations.

28. Despite the many challenges that the service faced during 2020/21 new construction began on the delivery of 116 new council homes with more sites planned for development.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

29. Housing Services must demonstrate annually that the service it provides meets the needs of its customers and provides value for money. Ongoing monitoring of the HRA Business Plan will continue to inform the level of recovery required in light of COVID-19 and to influence any alterations to our original business plan.

30. The improvements identified in relation to the AAS will also contribute towards improving the efficiency of the service and reinforce that tenants' rents are both collected effectively and spent wisely.

CONSULTATION

31. In line with the national publication of Charter results, East Renfrewshire Council is required to produce an annual performance report to tenants by October 2021. The detail of our performance will be distributed to each tenant through our tenant's newsletter as well as making the full report available online and on request to other customers.

32. The details of the AAS and action plan will also be considered by our Registered Tenants Forum as part of their performance scrutiny and made available more widely with the annual Performance Report.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

33. Many of the services provided by East Renfrewshire Council's Housing Services are provided in partnership with internal and external bodies. Services continue to work together to demonstrate that the outcomes of the Charter are met. The outputs from these partnerships form a key part of our evaluation of service performance and quality. Key partners include:

- East Renfrewshire's Health & Social Care Partnership
- Our Corporate & Community Services Department

IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSALS

34. There are no implications associated with this report in terms of staffing, finance, property, legal, IT, equalities and sustainability.

CONCLUSIONS

35. East Renfrewshire's AAS addresses the areas required for improvement in our housing services. The key areas of priority are listed in section 14 of the report and they include income maximisation and homelessness.

36. Housing Services are completing a full service redesign which includes a full review of the staffing structure and replacement of existing IT systems which are no longer fit for purpose and the introduction of new technologies. The progress was delayed due to essential COVID response and the work required for these improvements is particularly resource intensive. However these improvements are essential to improve existing service delivery.

37. As with many Council services, 2020/21 was an extremely challenging year. COVID presented many challenges to service delivery. However the council staff within Housing Services worked incredibly hard to maintain services. The service continues to manage the ongoing issues that remain.

RECOMMENDATIONS

38. It is recommended that the Cabinet:

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- b) Note the proposed Action Plan to further strengthen our compliance against the Regulatory Framework and SSHC; and
- c) Approve the AAS 2021 which has been prepared taking into account the outcomes of Housing Services self- evaluation of our performance.

Director of Environment

Further details can be obtained from Phil Daws Head of Environment (Strategic Services) on 0141 577 3186.

Convener contact details

Councillor Danny Devlin
(Convener for Housing and Maintenance Services)

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October 2021

Appendix 1
Scottish Social Housing Charter
Housing Services Annual Performance Review 2020-21

This report provides East Renfrewshire Council Housing Services' performance in key areas of our work and services in 2020-21.

This performance report will assess our achievement against set indicators and measures in the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) and inform our Annual Assurance Statement 2021. We will also compare our performance in previous years and against the average of all local authorities in Scotland, which will highlight where we are performing well and areas in need of improvement through a traffic light system:



= Performance in 2020-21 is better than 2019-20 and the average of local authorities in Scotland;



= Performance in 2020-21 is better than either 2019-20 or the average of local authorities in Scotland:



= Performance in 2020-21 is worse than 2019-20 and the average of local authorities in Scotland.

Rents, Empty Homes and Value for Money

East Renfrewshire Council Housing Services own 2994 homes including 244 sheltered homes and a number of temporary and supported properties.

We had a turnover of 7.46% of properties and we made 233 lets in the year to our tenants and applicants who are homeless and waiting on a home through our Choice Based Letting system.

Rents

Average Weekly Rent	ERC Housing 2020-21	Local Authority Average 2020-21	Housing Sector Average 2020-21
All Properties	£82.80	£78.09	£83.70
1 Apartment	£69.94	£62.36	£76.61
2 Apartment (One bedroom)	£74.78	£72.75	£79.48
3 Apartment (Two bedroom)	£84.77	£77.83	£82.60
4 apartment (Three bedroom)	£94.14	£83.59	£89.81
5 Apartment (Four bedroom)	£95.87	£90.32	£99.97

Value for Money

Indicator	ERC Housing 2020-21	ERC Housing 2019-20	Local Authority Average 2020-21	Housing Sector 2020-21	Position
Gross rent arrears as % of total rent due	9.51%	6.47%	8.2%	6.1%	
% of tenants satisfied rent represents value for money	87.04%	87.04%	81.8%	82.8%	

Empty Homes

Indicator	ERC Housing 2020-21	ERC Housing 2019-20	Local Authority Average 2020-21	Housing Sector 2020-21	Position
Average length of time to re-let properties.	72.7 days	58.29 days	59.4 days	56.3 days	
% of rent due lost through empty homes	1.8%	1.78%	1.4%	1.4%	

Repairs and Maintenance**Repairs**

Indicator	ERC Housing 2020-21	ERC Housing 2019-20	Local Authority Average 2020-21	Housing Sector 2020-21	Position
Average time to complete emergency repairs	2.4 Hours	2.52 hours	5.0 Hours	4.2 Hours	
Average time to complete non- emergency repairs	6.2 days	5.39 days	7.3 days	6.7 days	
% of day to day repairs completed 'Right First Time'.	99.5%	99.41%	92.6%	91.5%	
% of tenants satisfied with the repairs service	86.4%	87.61%	88.8%	90.1%	

Maintenance

Indicator	ERC Housing 2020-21	ERC Housing 2019-20	Local Authority Average 2020-21	Housing Sector 2020-21	Position
% of tenants satisfied with their home	86.5%	86.5%	83.4%	87.1%	
% of our tenants' homes meeting SHQS*	91.4%	97.9%***	90.3%	91.0%	
% of tenants' homes meeting EESSH**	93.2%	79%	86.4%	89.0%	
No of properties that failed to have a gas safety check by anniversary date	25	0	288	488	

* - *Scottish Housing Quality Standard – National standards set for all social landlords in Scotland*

** - *Energy Efficiency Standards in Social Housing – Energy standards set for all social landlords in Scotland*

*** *The SHR has amended the guidance for the SHQS to include EESSH compliance, hence the reduced compliance rate in 2020-21*

Estates & Tenancies

Indicator	ERC Housing 2020-21	ERC Housing 2019-20	Local Authority Average 2020-21	Housing Sector 2020-21	Position
% of new tenants housed who were still in their tenancy 12 months later	94.14%	90.2%	91.3%	90.9%	
Average time to complete medical adaptations	18.56 days	25.7 days	46.2 days	58 days	
% of tenants satisfied with their landlords management of their neighbourhood	88.47%	87%	83.4%	86.1%	
% of anti-social behaviour cases resolved	95.4%	96.3%	92.7%	94.4%	

Housing Options and Access to Housing

Indicator	ERC Housing 2020-21	ERC Housing 2019-20	Local Authority Average 2020-21	Housing Sector 2020-21	Position
% of lettable houses that became vacant in the year.	7.46%	8.8%	6.7%	6.9%	
% of tenancy offers refused	40.64%	38.3%	38.5%	31.9%	

Overall Satisfaction & Engagement

Indicator	ERC Housing 2020-21	ERC Housing 2019-20	Local Authority Average 2020-21	Housing Sector 2020-21	Position
% of tenants satisfied with overall service	84.8%	84.8%	84.2%	89.0%	
% of tenants satisfied on keep them informed about our work and activities	88.2%	88.2%	85.6%	91.7%	
% of tenants satisfied with opportunities to participate in landlord's decision making	91.1%	91.1%	79.5%	86.6%	

Appendix 2

Assurance Statement 2021 – Improvement Plan				
Compliance Issue	Service Area	What we need to address	When will we do it?	Who is responsible?
Meeting Charter Standards	Void Management	Empty Homes Improvement in the management of empty homes aimed at reducing lost rent and providing improved allocation outcomes.	March 2022	Senior Housing Manager
Meeting Charter Standards	Rent Collection and Arrears Management	Rent Arrears Development of a Rent Arrears Strategy aimed at maximising resources to engage and support tenants to pay their rent arrears to improve income collection.	December 2021	Senior Housing Manager

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East Renfrewshire Council
(Housing Services)

Annual Assurance Report 2021



East Renfrewshire Council gives assurance that:

- ✓ We comply with the regulatory requirements set out in section 3 of the Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Framework document.
- ✓ We achieve all the standards and outcomes in the Social Housing Charter for tenants and other customers who use our service.
- ✓ We comply with our legal obligations as a landlords, specifically in relation to housing, homeless, equality and human rights and tenant safety.

Through our self-assessment to inform our Assurance Statement we know we need to improve in the following areas to strengthen our compliance with the Scottish Social Housing Charter:

❖ Income Maximisation

We are making improvements in our management of empty houses, specifically to improve our efficiency in re-letting properties to mitigate lost rent and to deliver good outcomes in our allocations process.

We have seen a significant increase in current tenant arrears through the period of the Covid pandemic. We will maximise our resources in arrears recovery to engage and support our tenants with the aim to maximise rent collection.

The Assurance Statement was approved at the Cabinet meeting on 21 October 2021 and I sign this statement on their behalf.

Signed: (Convenor): Councillor Danny Devlin



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