

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the City of Vancouver's coat of arms. The crest is a shield divided into four quadrants. The top-left quadrant shows a sailing ship on the water. The top-right quadrant shows a stag's head with antlers. The bottom-left quadrant shows a beaver. The bottom-right quadrant shows a grizzly bear. Above the shield is a crown with four maple leaves. A banner at the bottom of the shield contains the motto "A NE FOR A".

## **Agenda Item 7**

### **Housing Annual Assurance Statement**

**Falkirk Council**

**Title:** Housing Annual Assurance Statement

**Meeting:** Executive

**Date:** 17 October 2023

**Submitted By:** Director of Transformation Communities & Corporate Services

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The report provides an Annual Assurance Statement on the activities of the Council's Housing Service for approval. The report and supporting evidence support the Council Plan "Supporting stronger and healthier communities" by evidencing the provision of good quality affordable housing and the delivery of services that meet the needs of those who live in them.

**2. Recommendations**

**2.1 It is recommended that the Executive:**

- (1) Approves the Annual Assurance Statement, prior to its submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator.**

**3. Impact on Climate Change Targets**

- 3.1 Our housing activities consider climate change and promote policies which aim to meet net zero and energy efficiency targets. We consider climate change a priority in our Local Housing Strategy, Council new build programme and Housing Investment Programme. Through the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing, we work to reduce carbon emissions and eradicate fuel poverty.

**4. Background**

- 4.1 The Scottish Housing Regulator was established as part of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010. The Regulator has statutory powers to monitor, assess,

report and, where they deem appropriate, intervene in the performance of housing activities of social landlords.

- 4.2 To comply with the [Regulatory Framework](#), the Council must submit their Annual Assurance Statement to the Regulator by 31 October each year. This statement requires sign off by the delegated Local Authority Committee.
- 4.3 The Annual Assurance Statement confirms the extent to which the Housing Service complies with the standards and outcomes in the [Scottish Social Housing Charter](#) for tenants, people who are homeless, and others who use our services. Assurance is also provided on our compliance with legal obligations relating to housing and homelessness, equalities and human rights, and tenant and resident safety.
- 4.4 The Regulator publishes their engagement plans for all social landlords in Scotland on an annual basis. Our Annual Assurance Statement is part of the evidence that the Regulator uses to assess the required level of engagement with us. The Scottish Housing Regulator is currently engaging with us about services for people who are homeless, service quality, stock quality, and tenant and resident safety.
- 4.5 In response to this engagement, we are required to:
  - provide information requested by the Regulator in relation to our homelessness service.
  - make the Regulator aware of any emerging issues preventing the service from fulfilling our statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation when it should, and compliance with the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.
  - review our performance for tenant satisfaction, complaints handling, rent arrears and repairs right first time, and consider what improvement action the service needs to take.
  - provide the Regulator with quarterly updates on progress with the installation of replacement heating systems for off-gas properties.
  - provide the Regulator with quarterly updates on the work to support and engage with tenants and residents facing difficulties with their heating systems.
  - comply with electrical safety requirements as soon as possible; and
  - provide the Regulator with monthly updates on progress on achieving compliance with electrical safety requirements.
- 4.6 Other evidence used by the Regulator includes our Annual Return on the Charter and our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.

## 5. Considerations

5.1 To prepare our Annual Assurance Statement, we considered:

- The required level of Assurance
- Sources of assurance, the evidence to support this, and the need for independent assurance from Internal Audit.

5.2 We undertook a self-assessment approach on compliance with our regulatory requirements. The evidence checklist relating to each of the requirements is set out in Appendix 2. An Internal Audit report, providing independent assurance on the statement is at Appendix 3. Internal Audit awarded the evidence provided for the report "Substantial Assurance".

5.3 The Regulator published guidance on the completion of the Annual Assurance Statement, including a template which we used to develop our submission (Appendix 1). There is no requirement to send any supporting evidence with the statement, however, this must be available should the Regulator ask to see it. It is therefore up to the Executive to decide whether they have seen sufficient evidence to be assured.

5.4 The evidence checklist provided (Appendix 2) builds on the information provided for last year's statement. This includes evidence of the improvements we have made throughout the year.

5.5 An assessment of the evidence shows that we are meeting most of our regulatory requirements and statutory responsibilities.

5.6 We did not meet our full regulatory requirements for repairs, quality of housing, and outcomes for those who presented as homeless.

5.7 Full details of the standards and outcomes where we are not fully compliant can be viewed in the background paper on the [Scottish Social Housing Charter](#) under outcomes/standards 4, 5 & 12. Our Annual Assurance Statement (Appendix 1) and Evidence Checklist (Appendix 2) provide further details of where we did not meet full compliance. Where performance has been impacted, we aim to become fully compliant in 2024.

5.8 The Annual Assurance Statement complements several internal and external reports that demonstrate the service's commitment to performance reporting and scrutiny. These include the Annual Return to the Charter, which was tenant approved before submitting to the Regulator, and had also been subject to both internal and external audit checks.

## **6. Consultation**

- 6.1 No consultation was carried out on the Annual Assurance Statement as it needs to be confirmed and signed by the Executive exclusively. However, the Housing Service engages extensively with tenants and residents on the design and delivery of services.

## **7. Implications**

### **Financial**

- 7.1 No financial implications are anticipated.

### **Resources**

- 7.2 No additional resources are required.

### **Legal**

- 7.3 No legal implications are anticipated.

### **Risk**

- 7.4 No Additional risk implications are anticipated.

### **Equalities**

- 7.5 The Regulator has requested that landlords have a plan in place to meet their requirements for equalities collection, and for considering a human rights approach in housing. We have developed an Action Plan for equalities monitoring, which we will embed in our approach. We developed and implemented an Equalities First approach to the collection and use of equalities data across the housing service. This will effectively use Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment to provide tenants with good services, improve service delivery, and promote equality of opportunity for all.

### **Sustainability/Environmental Impact**

- 7.6 Sustainability and environmental impacts are considered in the Strategic Environmental Assessment which was submitted for the new Local Housing

Strategy 2023-2028. Feedback indicated that the Strategy is not likely to have significant environmental effects.

## **8. Conclusions**

- 8.1 The Annual Assurance Statement confirms that Falkirk Council Housing Services comply with most of the requirements set out under Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework published by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Where we did not meet these, we have demonstrated and evidenced practices put in place to work towards full compliance. We anticipate that we will return to full compliance in 2024.

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**Director of Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services**

**Author:** Daniel Keast: Performance and Compliance Coordinator, Housing Services, Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services  
[daniel.keast@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:daniel.keast@falkirk.gov.uk)

**Date:** 04 October 2023

### **Appendices:**

- 1 – Copy of Annual Assurance Statement
- 2 – Evidence Checklist
- 3 – Internal Audit Report

### **List of Background Papers:**

[Our Regulation of Scottish Housing: Regulatory Framework.](#)  
[Scottish Social Housing Charter](#)  
[Annual Assurance Statement Statutory Guidance](#)  
[Annual Assurance Statement Frequently Asked Questions](#)



**Falkirk Council**

Transformation, Communities  
& Corporate Services

## **Annual Assurance Statement**

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The following statement confirms that:

We comply with the majority of regulatory requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework. This includes that we:

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

Our review of outcomes 4, 5 & 12 of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, relating to quality of housing, repairs and homeless people have shown that we are not fully compliant with these outcomes in the following ways:

### **Outcomes 4 & 5: Quality of Housing & Repairs**

- Gas safety checks – we were unable to carry out 9 checks within the required timescales in 2022/23.
- We were unable to complete the installation of interlink smoke alarms for over 1,300 properties in 2022/23.
- The number of properties meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard was reported as 70.06% in 22/23. Failures were because of being unable to carry out electrical safety checks.

### **Outcome 12: Homeless People**

- We reported 32 breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in 2022/23. There have been 28 further breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order for Quarter 1 of 2023/24.

- On 3 occasions in 2023/24, we have failed to meet our duties in terms of housing homeless people.

We expect to return to full compliance in 2024.

We have made progress in ensuring our properties are compliant with electrical safety requirements. This is confirmed by our improved compliance with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard, improving from 59.85% in 2021/22 to 70.06% in 2022/23.

We improved how we use external contractors, with those contractors who carry out electrical safety checks now also fitting interlinked smoke alarms as part of this work. Despite repeated attempts to engage with households, access to properties remained the biggest issue. Forced entries, to fit the interlinked smoke alarms, started in June 2023. This led to significant reductions in the number of properties still requiring interlink smoke alarms.

At the end of the financial year, no gas safety checks remained outstanding.

We confirm that we have considered an appropriate level of evidence to give us this assurance. The evidence provided has been reviewed by our Internal Audit Team and was awarded 'Substantial Assurance.' The information required to provide the necessary level of assurance will continue to be reviewed on an on-going basis.

We approved our Annual Assurance Statement at the meeting of our Executive Committee on 17th October 2023.

I sign this statement on behalf of the Executive Committee.

Chairs signature:

Signed









Housing Services



Annual Assurance Statement: Evidence Checklist

Performance Information Period: 2022/23

<p><b>Annual Assurance Statement: Evidence Checklist</b></p>	<p>This checklist will set out and evidence where the Housing Service meets the following requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🕒 all the relevant regulatory requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the <a href="#">Regulatory Framework</a>.</li> <li>🕒 all the relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC)</li> <li>🕒 all relevant legislative duties including those related to homeless people, equalities and human rights and tenant/resident's safety.</li> </ul> <p>All of the information provided has been subject to scrutiny by Internal Audit who reviewed the information. This achieved 'Substantial Assurance' status. A copy of Internal Audit's report is available at appendix 3.</p>
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Annual Assurance Statement Progress	
	Requirement is significantly behind target.
	Requirement is slightly behind target or in danger of not achieving deadline.
	Requirement is on target.
	Requirement is completed.

Assurance and Notification				
Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Prepare an Annual Assurance Statement in accordance with guidance & submit Annual Assurance Statement to Scottish Housing Regulator between April and October each year	ALL	October 2023 	<p>Last year's Annual Assurance Statement was presented at the meeting of the Executive on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 2022, and submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) by 31 October 2022.</p> <p>We are on track to submit this year's statement to the Regulator by 31 October 2023</p>	Performance and Compliance Coordinator
Make Annual Assurance Statement available to tenants and other service users	ALL	October 2023 	<p>There is a link on the Housing Services performance webpage (<a href="http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/housingperformance">www.falkirk.gov.uk/housingperformance</a>) to the Regulators website, where the Annual Assurance Statement is held. Additionally, this has previously been discussed at the Tenants and Residents Forum. Copies will be sent to our Registered Tenant's Organisations (RTO's). We will also provide an update in the winter edition of our Tenant Talk magazine.</p>	Performance and Compliance Coordinator

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Notify Scottish Housing Regulator during the year of any material changes to the assurance in the Annual Assurance Statement	ALL	On-going 	<p>This will be completed as required.</p> <p>There were no notifiable material changes reported during 2022/23</p>	Head of Housing & Communities, Performance and Compliance Coordinator
Have assurance and evidence that we are meeting all our legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness. services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety	4,5 7, 8, 9, 11 & 12	Ongoing 	<p>We have assurance and evidence that we are meeting most of our legal obligations in terms of housing, homelessness services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety.</p> <p><b><u>Homelessness</u></b></p> <p>Our stock of temporary accommodation remains under significant pressure, and we continue to experience increased demand for temporary accommodation. People are experiencing longer stays in temporary accommodation and less availability of council properties, due to increased relet times. In Summer 2023, we developed a new</p>	Performance and Compliance Coordinator, Housing Needs Manager

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Have assurance and evidence that we are meeting all our legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness. services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety			<p>temporary accommodation action plan which focuses on how we can support those in temporary accommodation to be rehoused, to help maintain the flow of people through our properties and continue to ensure availability. We have an action plan in place which has been discussed with the Regulator as part of our ongoing Engagement Plan.</p> <p>With the above challenges to temporary accommodation, we are becoming increasingly stretched in our abilities to provide accommodation which meets people's needs. We recorded 32 breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in 2022-23, and these breaches will continue into this financial year. Regrettably, we also had three instances where we were unable to make any offer of accommodation, in late May/early June 2023. We continue to look at alternative forms of accommodation to allow us to prevent this situation happening again in the future, so we can continue to meet our duty to provide temporary accommodation to those who need it.</p>	

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Have assurance and evidence that we are meeting all our legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness. services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety			<p>We have been using different types of accommodation to try and help with the demand – for example, Bed &amp; Breakfast and Houses of Multiple Occupancy owned by private landlords, and use of shared tenancies in our temporary properties. We are also starting to look at what other kinds of accommodation we can use locally to try and relieve some of the pressure.</p> <p>In addition to the above, through the work of our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (<a href="#">link - Policies &amp; strategies - Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan   Falkirk Council</a>) and our Prevention Team, we are working to develop pathways and strategies to help prevent homelessness occurring, and to help people sustain their tenancies.</p> <p><b><u>Tenant &amp; Resident Safety</u></b></p> <p>We are committed to ensuring the safety of our tenants and residents in our local areas. We have centralised the handling of antisocial behaviour complaints to our Conflict Resolution Service which has received positive feedback</p>	

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Have assurance and evidence that we are meeting all our legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness. services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety			<p>from service users. We collect information on feelings of safety in neighbourhoods, so we can act upon these findings, we have developed the use of mobile CCTV cameras for use in areas where needed. We respond to tenants' concerns and requests about issues in their local areas as required.</p> <p><b><u>Gas Safety</u></b></p> <p>Prior to the covid pandemic we held a 100% record of conducting gas safety checks within the one-year anniversary of the last check. In the reporting year 2022/23 year we carried out 13,993 gas safety checks but we missed 9 of our gas safety check anniversary dates. Five of these were put on hold due to Covid in the household, <i>one</i> because of a bereavement within the household and the remaining three because of an admin issue. As of the 31st of March 2023, none of these remained outstanding. We have a clear record of properties where gas safety checks were put on hold, which shows which properties passed or failed. Comments are attached to each property to show</p>	

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Have assurance and evidence that we are meeting all our legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness. services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety			<p>why we were unable to access on or before the anniversary date. To ensure all gas safety checks are completed by their due date additional reports have been designed to check anomalies and check and confirm incomplete gas safety checks two weeks prior to the statutory annual gas safety check date being reached. We anticipate that we will return to 100% compliance in the next reporting year.</p> <p><b><u>Electrical Safety</u></b></p> <p>Due to moving from a 10-year test cycle to a 5-year cycle in 2020 for Electrical Installation Condition Reports we are in a transitional phase over the next three years. We are working towards full compliance and have increased financial provision in our 5-year investment programme to meet this legislative change. We have utilised additional contractors, and combined electrical checks with installation of interlinked smoke alarms, to help achieve 5-year cycle as soon as possible.</p>	


Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Have assurance and evidence that we are meeting all our legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness. services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety			<p><b><u>Interlinked Smoke Alarm Installation</u></b></p> <p>We were unable to complete the installation of interlinked smoke alarms in over 1300 properties. Despite repeated attempts to engage with households, access to properties remained the biggest issue. We had a very low response (18%) to our letter requesting access before we begun a forced access programme. We lettered households during June 2023 to inform them that we will be seeking a forced entry to fit the interlinked smoke alarms. Forced entries started in June 2023 and have seen a reduction in the number of properties still requiring interlink smoke alarms improving from the 1,307 reported at the end of June 2023 to 603 reported at the end of August 2023. Furthermore, we are on target to have all interlinked smoke alarms fitted by the end of October 2023.</p>	





Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Have assurance and evidence that we are meeting all our legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness. services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety			<p><b><u>Self-Assessment and External Audit</u></b></p> <p>The whole of the Housing Service has now been accredited to the <a href="#">ISO 2015:9001 Standard</a>. This is a first for a Housing Service in Scotland and reinforces the overall commitment of the Service to continuous improvement, self-assessment, and consistently high levels of service delivery. This approach is advocated by the SHR through its <a href="#">Regulatory Framework</a> and <a href="#">Corporate Plan</a>. We have a 3-year audit plan with BSI who visit twice a year to carry out audits on various areas within the scope of registration. We are routinely externally audited by the British Standards Institute (BSI) to ensure compliance with the ISO standard.</p> <p><b><u>Equalities and Human Rights</u></b></p>	

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Have assurance and evidence that we are meeting all our legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness. services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety			<p>The <a href="#">Towards a Fairer and More Equal Falkirk- Mainstreaming Report</a> updated June 2023 provides details of the Council's Equalities duties, and details how consideration of equalities is delivered for all council citizens, communities, and employees.</p> <p>Transformation, Communities, and Corporate Services play a major role in improving and changing the way the Council delivers services and works towards being a Council of the Future. The <a href="#">Council Plan 2022 -2027</a> sets out the vision to build strong communities where inequalities are reduced and lives are improved. The Community Planning Partnership have developed the Falkirk Plan 2022-2030, which aims to tackle inequality in the community.</p> <p>In August 2021 the Scottish Housing Regulator published guidance on collecting equalities information. We have put in place an action plan for Housing to assess our current equalities collection, and how we can embed the use of equalities information into our service delivery.</p>	

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
			<p>The Regulator's, <a href="#">Regulatory Framework</a> makes it clear that landlords must consider human rights in the provision of its service. Further detailed guidance was published, and we will take full account of the recommendations, and act upon as required. Work underway to embed the human right to adequate housing, includes the Local Housing Strategy, Strategic Housing Investment Plan, and support and advice provided to people in all housing tenures about their homes.</p>	


Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Notify Scottish Housing Regulator of safety matters which have been reported to or investigated by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), or reports from other regulatory or statutory authorities or insurance providers, relating to safety concerns.	4, 5 & 6	Ongoing 	<p>Two members of the Housing Services Quality Team have gained health and safety qualifications. This complements the health safety and care team in providing direct advice to the service and identifying risk.</p> <p>When carrying out site audits and risk assessments the two Officers have the knowledge and experience to identify, health and safety risks and assist in creating corrective action plans to eliminate or reduce the risk.</p> <p>There were no safety matters reported to or investigated by the Health and Executive during 2022/23.</p>	Performance and Compliance Coordinator

## Scottish Social Housing Charter Performance

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Submit Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) to the Scottish Housing Regulator in accordance to the published guidance	ALL	May 2023 	This was submitted by 31 May 2023. This was reviewed and agreed by a group of tenants before being submitted to the Regulator. The supporting data is subject to integrity checks through both internal and external audits. This year due to the implementation of the new housing systems we submitted estimated performance for some of the repair's indicators. We discussed this with the Regulator who was happy for us to take this approach and provide corrections when we had them.	Head of Housing & Communities Performance and Compliance Coordinator
Involve tenants, and other where relevant other service users, in	ALL	Ongoing 	We have an active Tenant Scrutiny Panel, who have developed improvement plans for specific areas of the service. We involved tenant groups, including the Tenants'	Performance and Compliance Coordinator & Community

<p>the preparation and scrutiny of performance information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree approach with tenants</li> <li>• Ensure that approach is effective and meaningful and that tenants have a real and demonstratable say in the assessment of performance</li> <li>• Publicise the approach to tenants</li> <li>• Ensure approach can be verified and evidenced</li> <li>• Involve other services users in</li> </ul>			<p>and Residents' Forum and Editorial Panel, in the development of our annual report, and consult with them annually on the content and design.</p> <p>In our most recent Tenant Satisfaction survey 98% of tenants reported that they were happy with the opportunities given to them to participate in their landlord's decision-making processes.</p> <p>We were awarded our Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) gold award.</p> <p>The Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) was agreed and reviewed by a group of tenants before being submitted to the Regulator in May 2023.</p>	<p>Engagement Coordinator</p>
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an appropriate way, having regard to their needs and wishes.				
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Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>Report performance to tenants and other service users no later than October each year:</p> <p>Agree format of performance reporting with tenants and ensure accessible with plain and jargon free language</p> <p>When reporting performance to tenants and other service users we must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide tenants with an assessment of performance in delivering Charter outcomes.</li> <li>• Include relevant comparison</li> </ul>	ALL	October 2023 	<p>Tenant groups are involved in the design and content of our annual Landlord Report. This includes the design format, recommended improvements and level of comparative information provided. The Landlord Report contains information on the indicators that tenants advised were of most interest to them, along with comparisons to previous year's performance, Scottish average figures, and contextual information. We consult with tenant groups on preparing this report each year.</p> <p>We previously consulted with tenant groups on a video format for our annual report, which also includes information on what rent money is spent on. This video was developed and posted online for the first time in 2019. As a result, we won a best practice award in performance reporting from TPAS.</p>	Performance and Compliance Coordinator & Community Engagement Coordinator






<p>including previous years, other landlords and with national performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set out how we intend to address areas for improvement.</li> <li>• Give tenants and service users a way to feedback views on style and form of reporting</li> <li>• Make the SHR report available online.</li> </ul>			<p>All information is publicly available on the Housing Services performance webpage (<a href="http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/housingperformance">www.falkirk.gov.uk/housingperformance</a>).</p> <p>Information is available in hard copies, in different languages, Braille or other formats on request.</p>	
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## Whistleblowing


Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Ensure effective arrangements and a policy for whistleblowing for staff and elected members. Make whistleblowing policy easily available and promote its existence.	ALL	Ongoing 	<p>Falkirk Council has a whistleblowing policy which is publicly available on the internet. Further to this, the Council also ran a 'See Something Say Something' campaign, which involved members of the Corporate Fraud team attending offices to inform staff about how and where they could report any concerns. This campaign is advertised through posters at offices and other related paraphernalia.</p> <p>Elected Members have arrangements in place through their Code of Conduct.</p>	Director of Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services


## Tenant and Service Users Redress


Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Make information on reporting our significant performance failures and make the SHR leaflet available to tenants.	ALL	Ongoing 	<p>A link to the Regulator's webpage on how to report a significant failure is provided on the Housing Services performance website.</p> <p>We have hard copies of the significant performance failure leaflet at relevant reception areas.</p> <p>We sent copies of this leaflet to all RTO's.</p> <p>We updated tenant groups including the Tenant and Residents Forum on how and where to report a significant failure.</p> <p>We attended housing staff meetings to discuss this.</p>	Performance and Compliance Coordinator & Community Engagement Coordinator

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Provide tenants and service users with the information they need to exercise their right to complain and seek redress.	1, 2, 3 & 5	Ongoing 	<p>We have a corporate complaints policy which is in line with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) guidance.</p> <p>We also publish an Annual Complaints Report which is available online or as a hard copy. Information is clearly available on the website for any customer wishing to complain, allowing a variety of contact methods to submit complaints. Training and guidance are available to support staff dealing with complaints.</p>	Performance and Compliance Coordinator & Team Leader Housing Customer Service
Respond to tenant complaints within our service standards timescales and in accordance with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman guidance.	1, 2, 3 & 5	Ongoing 	<p>We can confirm that the Housing Service works to the standards and timescales set out in the SPSO's Model Complaints Handling Procedure. All complaints are recorded on our Customer First system, which allows for management against timescales and sends out reminders to teams as required. We have a dedicated team for overseeing complaints, with performance against timescales reported to management on a regular basis. We recognise that complaints provide us with an invaluable source of feedback which can help us improve the quality of the services we</p>	
Ensure we have effective arrangements in place to				


learn from complaints and other tenant and service user feedback. In accordance with SPSO Guidance			provide. To ensure that we embed a culture of learning from complaints.	
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Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
Have assurance and evidence we consider equality and human rights issues properly when making decisions, in the design and review of internal and external policies, and in our day-to-day service delivery	1	Ongoing 	<p>At a Corporate level, we have evidence of this through the: <a href="#">Towards a Fairer and More Equal Falkirk- Mainstreaming Report.</a></p> <p>This details where equalities and human rights information has been considered when making decisions on the design of services. The Fairer Falkirk Strategy 2019- 2024 also provides evidence of how we will address poverty and work to make the area a fairer place to live.</p> <p>Following publication of the Scottish Housing Regulator's guidance on collecting equalities information in August 2021, we put in place an action plan for Housing to assess what we collect in terms of equalities information and how we can embed the use of equalities information in the service. We are now aware of what we collect and where the gaps in information are. We have updated the Action plan and will progress this further over the coming year. The introduction of the new Housing online platform will make it easier for individuals to update their</p>	Performance and Compliance Coordinator

<p>Collect data relating to protected characteristics for existing tenants, new tenants, people on waiting lists and elected Members. and staff</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>Ongoing </p>	<p>own personal information, including protected characteristics, directly onto their tenancy records.</p> <p>The Scottish Housing Regulator's <a href="#">Regulatory Framework</a> makes it clear that landlords must consider human rights in the provision of its service.</p> <p>The Council's Mainstreaming Report details how we collect and use equalities and human right information in terms of staff.</p> <p>Through the analysis of our Action Plan, we identified a number of tenants that we do not hold all equalities information for. To improve the level of data we hold against existing tenants we are writing to all tenants to ask them to sign up to Housing Online so they can self-serve updating their person details including the protected characteristics. We are also going to work with the Housing Officers to facilitate help doing this during the annual tenant visit.</p> <p>For new tenants, we collect equalities information on the housing application form, which is then held on their person record on our integrated housing management system and</p>	<p>Community Engagement Coordinator. Performance &amp; Compliance Coordinator</p>
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			transferred to their tenancy record once they are allocated a tenancy.	
Collect data on protected characteristics of people who apply as homeless.	1	Ongoing 	We collect equalities information at the homeless application stage, including the protected characteristics.	Performance & Compliance Coordinator



Collect data on protected characteristics of people who use our Gypsy / Traveller services	1	Ongoing 	Our annual consultation survey in March 2022. included questions on equalities .Despite this response rates were low as many declined to supply the information.	Performance & Compliance Coordinator
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# MEMO

## Falkirk Council

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**To:** Kenny Gillespie, Head of Housing and Communities

**Copy To:** Karen Algie, Director of Transformation, Communities, and Corporate Services  
Amanda Templeman, Chief Finance Officer  
Natalie Moore-Young, Strategy and Performance Manager  
Daniel Keast, Performance and Compliance Co-ordinator  
Shirley Ritchie, Performance and Information Officer  
Isabel Wright, Internal Audit, Risk, and Corporate Fraud Manager  
Sarah McPhee, Senior Internal Auditor

**From:** Sarah Callaghan, Internal Auditor

**Date:** 20 September 2023

**Subject:** **INTERNAL AUDIT – SCOTTISH HOUSING REGULATOR ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT**

### Background

1. Internal Audit work on the Scottish Housing Regulator Annual Assurance Statement forms part of our Internal Audit coverage for 2023/24.
2. The Head of Housing and Communities is required to submit an Annual Assurance Statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator. The statement should provide assurance that the Council's Housing and Communities division is compliant with all the relevant requirements of Chapter 3 of the Regulation of Social Housing in Scotland ([https://www.pfhscotland.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Regulatory-Framework-final-February-2019\\_1.pdf](https://www.pfhscotland.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Regulatory-Framework-final-February-2019_1.pdf)). The statement is required to be submitted by the end of October each year and prior to that requires to be approved by the Council's Executive.
3. The approach taken by the Housing and Communities division has been to evidence compliance with the 16 standards and outcomes<sup>1</sup> in the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC), and to highlight whether the Service meets the requirements of Chapter 3 of the Regulation of Social Housing in Scotland. A link to the SSHC is: [Scottish Social Housing Charter November 2022 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-housing-charter-2022/pages/1-introduction-and-standards-outcomes.aspx)

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<sup>1</sup> The SSHC defines a standard as "a level of quality that every social landlord should achieve." The SSHC defines an outcome as "a result we want to happen. The Charter sets out the results that a social landlord should achieve for its tenants and other customers."

4. The standard and outcome statements that have been subject to Internal Audit's validation work are summarised in **Table 1**. More detail on the SSHC standards and outcomes is at **Annex 1**.

**Table 1**  
**Description of Standard / Outcome Statements**

Standard / Outcome Number <sup>2</sup>	Description
1.	Equalities
2.	Communication
3.	Participation
4.	Quality of housing
5.	Repairs, maintenance, and improvements
6.	Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance, and tenancy disputes
7.	Housing options
8.	Housing options
9.	Housing options
10.	Access to social housing
11.	Tenancy sustainment
12.	Homeless people
13.	Value for money
14.	Rents and service charges
15.	Rents and service charges
16.	Gypsy / Travellers

### Internal Audit Work

5. Internal Audit has:
- reviewed the completeness and accuracy of the 16 draft statements, prepared by the Housing and Communities division, for each of the SSHC standards and outcomes that will support the Council's Annual Assurance submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator;
  - ensured that the performance information reported in the draft standard and outcome statements is underpinned by adequate and robust supporting documentation by checking that the statements included valid links to this documentation; and
  - checked the accuracy of all numerical information and percentages being reported in the draft standard and outcome statements by ensuring that these figures matched supporting data.
6. We found that performance and numerical information reported was accurate and agreed to supporting documentation. We are content, therefore, with the standard and outcome statements that will be submitted to the Executive and then to the Scottish Housing Regulator in October 2023.

### Internal Audit Assurance

7. We can provide **SUBSTANTIAL ASSURANCE** in relation to the completeness and accuracy of the performance and numerical information in the standard and outcome statements (see **Annex 2** for assurance category definitions).

<sup>2</sup> Number 4 is a standard, with all others being outcomes.

**Scottish Social Housing Charter  
Standards and Outcomes**

Standard / Outcome Number <sup>3</sup>	Description
1.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The customer / landlord relationship Equalities</b></p> <p>Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.</li> <li>• they support the right to adequate housing.</li> </ul>
2.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The customer / landlord relationship Communication</b></p> <p>Social landlords manage their businesses so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions, and the services it provides.</li> </ul>
3.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The customer / landlord relationship Participation</b></p> <p>Social landlords manage their businesses so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tenants and other customers are offered a range of opportunities that make it easy for them to participate in, and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.</li> </ul>
4.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Housing quality and maintenance Quality of housing</b></p> <p>Social landlords manage their businesses so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tenants' homes, as a minimum, when they are allocated are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), and any other building quality standard in place throughout the tenancy; and also meet the relevant Energy Efficiency and Zero Emission Heat Standard.</li> </ul>
5.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Housing quality and maintenance Repairs, maintenance, and improvements</b></p> <p>Social landlords manage their businesses so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tenants' homes are well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup>Number 4 is a standard, with all others being outcomes.

Standard / Outcome Number <sup>3</sup>	Description
6.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Neighbourhood and community</b> <b>Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance, and tenancy disputes</b></p> <p>Social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure as far as reasonably possible that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.</li> </ul>
7.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Access to housing and support</b> <b>Housing options</b></p> <p>Social landlords work together to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them.</li> </ul>
8.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Access to housing and support</b> <b>Housing options</b></p> <p>Social landlords work together to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options.</li> </ul>
9.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Access to housing and support</b> <b>Housing options</b></p> <p>Social landlords ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness.</li> </ul>
10.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Access to housing and support</b> <b>Access to social housing</b></p> <p>Social landlords ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and on their prospects of being housed.</li> </ul>
11.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Access to housing and support</b> <b>Tenancy sustainment</b></p> <p>Social landlords ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.</li> </ul>

Standard / Outcome Number <sup>3</sup>	Description
12.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Access to housing and support Homeless People</b></p> <p>Local councils perform their duties on homelessness so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness get prompt and easy access to help, advice and information; are provided with suitable, good-quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed; and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.</li> </ul>
13.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Getting good value from rents and service charges Value for money</b></p> <p>Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tenants, owners, and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.</li> </ul>
14.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Getting good value from rents and service charges Rents and service charges</b></p> <p>Social landlords set rents and service charges in consultation with their tenants and other customers so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services, and how far current and prospective tenants and service users can afford them.</li> </ul>
15.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Getting good value from rents and service charges Rents and service charges</b></p> <p>Social landlords set rents and service charges in consultation with their tenants and other customers so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tenants get clear information on how rent and other money is spent, including details of any individual items of expenditure above thresholds agreed between landlords and tenants.</li> </ul>
16.	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Other Customers Gypsy / Travellers</b></p> <p>Local councils and social landlords with responsibility for managing sites for Gypsy / Travellers should manage the sites so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sites are well maintained and managed and meet the minimum site standards set in Scottish Government guidance.</li> </ul>

## DEFINITION OF ASSURANCE CATEGORIES

Level of Assurance	Definition
<b>Substantial assurance</b>	The systems for risk, control, and governance are largely satisfactory, but there is some scope for improvement as the present arrangements could undermine the achievement of business and/or control objectives and/or leave them vulnerable to some risk of error/abuse.
<b>Limited assurance</b>	The systems for risk, control, and governance have some satisfactory aspects, but contain a number of significant weaknesses that are likely to undermine the achievement of business and/or control objectives and leave them vulnerable to an unacceptable risk of error/abuse.
<b>No assurance</b>	The systems for risk, control, and governance are ineffectively designed and/or are operated ineffectively such that business and/or control objectives are not being achieved and the risk of serious error/abuse is unacceptable. Significant improvements are required.