

The background of the slide features a large, faint watermark of the Scottish Coat of Arms. It includes a crown at the top with four thistles, a shield divided into four quarters (a saltire, a lion, a unicorn, and a bird), and a motto scroll at the bottom with the text 'AN FUR A'.

## **Agenda Item 4**

# **Scottish Housing Regulator Annual Assurance Statement**

Falkirk Council

**Title:** Scottish Housing Regulator Annual Assurance Statement  
**Meeting:** Executive  
**Date:** 13 October 2020  
**Submitted By:** Director of Corporate and Housing Services

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. This report provides an Annual Assurance Statement on the activities of the Council's Housing Service for approval.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1. **The Executive is asked to approve the Annual Assurance Statement, prior to its submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator (see Appendix 1).**

**3. Background**

- 3.1. The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) was formed as part of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010. The SHR has statutory powers to monitor, assess, report and, where they deem appropriate, intervene in relation to social landlords' performance of housing activities. In order to comply with the requirement contained in SHR's new Regulatory Framework, the Council has to submit their Annual Assurance Statement by no later than the 31<sup>st</sup> of October each year.
- 3.2. This statement is required to be ratified by the delegated Local Authority Committee. The statement will provide assurance that the service is compliant with all the requirements set out in of the Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework.
- 3.3. The Annual Assurance Statement confirms the extent to which the Housing Service complies with the standards and outcomes in the [Scottish Social Housing Charter](#) (SSHC) for tenants, people who are homeless, and others who use our services. Assurance is also provided on our compliance with the legal obligations relating to housing and homelessness, equalities and human rights, and tenant and resident safety.

- 3.4. The framework includes SHR's commitment to publicise engagement plans for all social landlords in Scotland on an annual basis. The Annual Assurance Statement will form part of the evidence used to assess the level of engagement the SHR will have with the Housing Service. Other evidence that will be used to assess the level of engagement includes the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) and the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP).
- 3.5. The SHR published guidance on the completion of the Annual Assurance Statement, including a template for use. This template was used to develop the proposed format for Falkirk Council's submission (Appendix 1). There is no requirement to send any supporting evidence with the statement, however, this must be available should the SHR ask to see it. It is therefore for the Executive to decide whether they have seen sufficient evidence to be assured. The evidence checklist (Appendix 2) offers assurance and provides a detailed evidence checklist of the Housing Services' compliance.
- 3.6. The evidence checklist builds on the information provided for the previous year's statement. This includes evidence of the improvements we have made throughout the year and our continued compliance with all our regulatory requirements and statutory responsibilities. The authority has experienced significant challenges this year, including the coronavirus pandemic and a major gas outage event at many properties in the Falkirk area. Despite this, the service continued to meet all of the regulatory requirements and statutory responsibilities.

#### **4. Considerations/Approach**

- 4.1. In preparing the Annual Assurance Statement, the following was considered:
- the required level of assurance;
  - sources of assurance, and the evidence to support this, and
  - the need for independent assurance from Internal Audit.
- 4.2. The Annual Assurance Statement complements a number of internal and external reports that demonstrate the service's commitment to performance reporting and scrutiny. Performance is also reported to the Council's Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.3. The self-assessment approach is evidenced in Appendix 2. This has been verified by Internal Audit. Their report, which awarded "Substantial Assurance" for the evidence provided, is provided at Appendix 3.
- 4.4. This self-assessment approach is supported by the Housing Service's 'Internal Audit' programme. The International Standard Organisation (ISO) 9001:2015 standard has recently been awarded across the whole of the Housing Service.

4.5. Housing Service will participate in the 'Embedding Excellence' programme, via HouseMark, an external organisation that will work with the Service to strengthen continuous improvement.

4.6. The key points arising from the self-assessment are summarised below:

Housing Services complies with the regulatory requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework. In particular we:

- ✓ achieve all the 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.

## **5. Consultation**

5.1. The Annual Assurance Statement is required to be confirmed and signed by the Executive exclusively.

## **6. Implications**

### **Financial**

6.1 There are no financial implications anticipated.

### **Resources**

6.2 No additional resources are required.

### **Legal**

6.3 There are no legal implications anticipated.

### **Risk**

6.4 There are no additional risk implications anticipated.

### **Equalities**

6.5 There are no further equalities implications anticipated.

### **Sustainability/Environmental Impact**

6.6 There is no sustainability or environmental implications anticipated.

## **7. Conclusions**

- 7.1 The Annual Assurance Statement and the evidence supporting this, including independent assurance from Internal Audit, demonstrate that Falkirk Council's Housing Service is compliant with the requirements as set out under Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework published by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

---

Chief Executive/Director of Service

Author – Daniel Keast, Performance and Compliance Officer 01324 590783,  
daniel.keast@falkirk.gov.uk

## **Appendices**

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

## **List of Background Papers:**

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

- 1 [Our Regulation of Scottish Housing: Final Framework 2019](#)
- 2 [Scottish Social Housing Charter](#)
- 3 [Annual Assurance Statement: Statutory Guidance 2019](#)
- 4 [Annual Assurance Statement: Frequently Asked Questions](#)

**Our Annual Assurance Statement**

The following statement confirms that:

Housing Service comply with the regulatory requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework. In particular :

- ✓ achieve all the 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.

We confirm that we have seen and 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 on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

I sign this statement on behalf of the Executive .

Chairs signature:

Signed

## Housing Services

## Annual Assurance Statement: Evidence Checklist

Performance Information Period: 2019/20

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Annual Assurance Statement: Evidence Checklist</b> | <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 Regulatory Framework;</li> <li>➤ all the relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter &amp;</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 2.</p> |
|---|---|

## 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.

## Annual Assurance Statement Checklist

### 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 2020            | <p>A briefing was provided to members of the Executive on the 8 October 2019 as this was the first year the Council had submitted its Annual Assurance Statement.</p> <p>The committee report and appendices will be presented at the meeting of the Executive on 27 October 2020.</p> <p>On target to be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) by 31 October 2020.</p> | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |
| Make Annual Assurance Statement available to tenants and other service users  | ALL                   | October 2020          | There is a link on the Housing Services performance webpage. 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.   | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |
| Notify Scottish Housing Regulator during the year of any material   | ALL                   | On-going as required  | This will be completed as required.   | Head of Housing   |




| Requirement  | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline  | Progress  | Responsibility  |
|--|-----------------------|---|---|---|
| changes to the assurance in the Annual Assurance Statement   |                       |   | <p>We did contact SHR during 2020 to discuss whether we should be reporting the loss of gas supply to approximately 8000 properties in the Falkirk area during December 2019, as a material change. The areas this affected included Larbert and Stenhousemuir. SHR were happy this was being dealt with and did not see this as needing to be reported as a material change to our Annual Assurance Statement.</p> <p>Further to this, and in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, SHR did query if we were still meeting our statutory duties for those who present as homeless. We provided the letter we had sent to tenants about the disruption to services and confirmed that we were continuing to meet our statutory duties for those who present as homeless. SHR were happy with our response, and that this did not represent a material change. We continue to report monthly to SHR on indicators, including those focused on homelessness, as part our Covid-19 return. All landlords are required to provide this monthly return for the SHR.</p> | Services & Performance and Compliance Officer                 |
| 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 | 7, 8, 9, 11 & 12      | Ongoing  | <p>In terms of meeting our obligations associated with homelessness, this can be evidenced through the actions contained in the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) and the Local Housing Strategy (LHS).</p> <p>The <a href="#">RRTP</a> underwent a second review in July 2020 and feedback from the Scottish Government was positive. It has been a challenging few months for the service to ensure that we are still delivering our core and vital services whilst still trying to</p>  | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |


| Requirement     | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline | Progress   | Responsibility |
|-----------------|-----------------------|----------|--|----------------|
| resident safety |                       |          | <p>continue to move forward our RRTP. Whilst we have strived to keep to the core principles of Rapid Rehousing, the Covid-19 pandemic will no doubt have a lasting impact on our ambitions. Our Choice Based Letting (CBL) system was stopped in March meaning that no movement occurred within our stock and our social housing partners in the area. We almost doubled our numbers in temporary accommodation and are now concentrating on the backlog. This is evidence of this on page 31 of the updated <a href="#">RRTP</a>. From 1 July 2020, we have now started letting properties again.</p> <p>We reviewed our Allocations Policy to allow us to meet the commitments set out in the <a href="#">RRTP</a> and also to improve how we meet our legislative and regulatory requirements. This has been extensively consulted on with both tenants and elected members and is due to implemented during October 2020. The following report, which details the outcome of public consultation, was considered and agreed at the meeting of the Councils' Executive on 10 June 2020.</p> <p>The Allocations Policy is currently being implemented. Letters have been sent out to customers informing them of the changes to the policy</p> <p><a href="#">Elected Members</a> have approved increasing the quota of homeless lets from 33% to 45% to assist with current backlogs. We have therefore revised our budget in light of this to place a focus on moving the current backlog of individuals in temporary and supported accommodation to more secure accommodation</p> |                |

| Requirement | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline | Progress  | Responsibility |
|-------------|-----------------------|----------|---|----------------|
|             |                       |          | <p>such as a mainstream tenancy. To support this, we have created two Temporary Accommodation and Support Review Officer posts. These are temporary posts for the next two years, designed to make a significant impact on the numbers in temporary accommodation and now, following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on lettings, to assist in the reduction of temporary accommodation properties. These new posts will work alongside four new Allocation Officer posts to carry out personal housing plans for all new applications.</p> <p>The second review of our <a href="#">RRTP</a> has a strong focus on prevention of homelessness in the first place, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the launch of the Prevention Fund which was developed through the prevention action plan. This funds prevention activities that are being taken forward in the RRTP such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Public Perceptions Publicity campaign aimed at the worst Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) areas and those in the highest risk of homelessness groups,</li> <li>➤ Tenancy sustainment videos made in conjunction with young people from the Champions Board across the Local Authority.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• the development of a Benefits Calculator , using The LIFT Dashboard product, which enables Local Authorities to identify, target, and track individuals, families, and households who are impacted by the welfare reform changes to the social security</li> </ul> |                |



| Requirement | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline | Progress  | Responsibility |
|-------------|-----------------------|----------|---|----------------|
|             |                       |          | <p>system, living in out of work poverty, experiencing child poverty, or are at risk of becoming homeless,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing an engagement strategy to ensure that we have a co-production approach to the delivery and improvement of our services going forward,</li> <li>• developing a working group with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to look at best practice, and sections 11 and 14 referrals,</li> <li>• we have considered domestic violence in our housing options and homeless services as part of our RRTP. We looked at how services are delivered and accessed by such customers. Falkirk Council are now in the process of reviewing domestic violence policies and procedures all across services,</li> <li>• two Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate posts will be introduced. The two posts will be fixed term and will be aligned to the Scottish Government Ending Homelessness Fund. The posts will help develop new systems and procedures to support those who are affected by domestic abuse and are at risk of homelessness. They will work proactively with people to prevent and resolve their homelessness and develop systems, policies, and training for wider housing and housing support staff;</li> <li>• Housing First - Working closely with our partners in Transform to launch the service, pending the completion of their Care Inspectorate Registration. Due to the pressures within the Care</li> </ul> |                |


| Requirement | SSHC<br>Outcome/Standard | Deadline | Progress  | Responsibility |
|-------------|--------------------------|----------|---|----------------|
|             |                          |          | <p>Inspectorate during the pandemic, this has been significantly delayed. We have worked in the background to keep progress moving, however, we are now faced with a three month delay to our plans.</p> <p>This is also further evidenced through the review of and submission of homeless statistics to the Scottish Government on a quarterly and annual basis. (HL &amp; PREVENT data)</p> <p>In terms of equalities and human rights, evidence of where we meet our obligations is contained in the Council's Mainstreaming Report. This details where equalities and human rights information has been considered when making decisions on the design of services.</p> <p>The Fairer Falkirk Strategy 2019- 2024 also provides evidence of where we meet our obligations in terms of equalities and human rights. It sets out a vision for a fairer Falkirk, with equality and equity for all.</p> <p>In terms of tenant and resident safety we are fitting LD2 standard smoke alarms which are optical smoke alarms in escape routes and rooms of most occupancy. We have also fitted Carbon Monoxide alarms in rooms where there is a gas boiler or a flue passes through and a heat alarm in the kitchen with a test switch. All alarms are Radio Frequency (RF) linked and house coded. We fit mostly a hybrid system where we have</p> |                |

| Requirement   | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline  | Progress   | Responsibility  |
|---|-----------------------|---|--|---|
|   |                       |   | <p>mains operated but also with additional battery alarms with tamperproof 10-year lithium batteries.</p> <p>In addition to and in support of the above the whole of the Housing Service has now been accredited to the ISO 2015:9001 Standard. 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>. As part of this project, we were externally audited during 2020 by the British Standards Institute (BSi) to confirm compliance with the ISO standard across the whole of the Housing Service.</p> <p>We are also continuing our work with the external organisation HouseMark to become the first Housing service in Scotland to be awarded with 'Embedding Excellence' accreditation. This is a great opportunity for the service to understand where we are on our journey to excellence and further demonstrates our commitment to self-awareness and continuous improvement.</p> |   |
| 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 | 4, 5 & 6              | Ongoing  | <p>Two members of the quality team have gained a health and safety qualification this year. Not only does this compliment the health safety and care team in providing direct advice to the service and identify risk.</p> <p>Now when carrying out site audits and risk assessments they have the knowledge and confidence to identify , health and</p>   | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |

| Requirement   | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline  | Progress   | Responsibility  |
|---|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| regulatory or statutory authorities or insurance providers, relating to safety concerns             |                       |   | safety risks and assist in creating corrective action to eliminate or reduce the risk.   |   |
| Make Engagement Plan easily available and accessible to tenants and service users, including online | ALL                   | On-Going (Yearly)  | We have included a link on our Housing Performance webpage to the SHR website where the Engagement Plan is located. This was also discussed at the Tenants and Residents Forum. We also sent copies to our RTOs. | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |


### 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                   | July 2020  | This was submitted by 31 July 2020, which was the revised deadline set by SHR due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This was reviewed and agreed by a group of tenants before being submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator. The supporting data is subject to integrity checks through both internal and external audits. | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |
| Involve tenants, and where relevant, service users in the preparation and  | ALL                   | Ongoing    | We have an active Tenant Scrutiny Panel, who have developed improvement plans for specific areas of the service.   | Performance and Compliance Officer & Community                |


| Requirement  | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline   | Progress   | Responsibility  |
|--|-----------------------|--|--|---|
| <p>scrutiny of performance information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree an effective and meaningful approach with tenants</li> <li>• Publicise approach to tenants<br/>Verify approach and evidence involving tenants has happened</li> <li>• Involve other service users in an appropriate way</li> </ul> |                       |  | <p>We involved tenant groups, including the Tenants' and Residents' Forum and Editorial Panel, in the development of our annual report.</p> <p>We were recently awarded our Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) gold award cover the period 2019 to 2022.</p> <p>As a standard, we host an annual meeting with tenants to discuss and confirm our ARC before submitting to the SHR.</p> <p>The ARC was reviewed and agreed by a group of tenants before submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator. This was done using an online platform this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.</p> | Engagement Coordinator  |
| <p>Report performance to tenants and other service users no later than October each year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree format of performance</li> </ul>  | ALL                   | October 2020  | <p>Tenant groups have been involved in the design and content of our annual Landlord Report. This includes the design format, recommended improvements and level of comparative information provided.</p> <p>We have also previously consulted with tenant groups on a video format for our annual report, which also includes</p>   | Performance and Compliance Officer & Community Engagement Coordinator |





| Requirement   | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline | Progress  | Responsibility |
|---|-----------------------|----------|---|----------------|
| <p>reporting with tenants and ensure accessible with plain and jargon free language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide assessment of performance in delivering Charter outcomes</li> </ul> <p>Include relevant comparison 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> </ul> <p>Give tenants and service users a way to feedback views on style and form of reporting</p> |                       |          | <p>information on what rent money is spent on.</p> <p>This video was developed and posted online for the first time this year and went on to win a best practice award in performance reporting from TPAS.</p> <p>The video can be viewed from the following link:<br/> <a href="https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/homes-property/policies-strategies/housing-performance.aspx">https://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/homes-property/policies-strategies/housing-performance.aspx</a></p> <p>We provide information on the annual report detailing how people can feedback and get involved.</p> <p>All information is publicly available on the Housing Services performance webpage.</p> <p>Information is available in hard copies, in different languages, Braille or other formats on request.</p> |                |



| Requirement  | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline  | Progress   | Responsibility  |
|--|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| Make the Scottish Housing Regulator report on our performance easily available to tenants including online | ALL                   | Ongoing  | We provide a link within the Housing Service performance webpage to the Scottish Housing Regulator's website containing their annual Landlord Report. We also discuss the report with our tenant's groups. | Performance and Compliance Officer & Community Engagement Coordinator |

## Whistleblowing



| Requirement  | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline  | Progress  | Responsibility                           |
|--|-----------------------|---|---|--|
| <p>Ensure effective arrangements and a policy for whistleblowing for staff and elected members</p> <p>Make Whistleblowing policy easily available and promote its existence.</p> | 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 Corporate & Housing Services |


## Tenant and Service Users Redress


| Requirement  | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline  | Progress  | Responsibility  |
|--|-----------------------|---|---|---|
| Make information on reporting our significant performance failures, including the Scottish Housing Regulator's leaflet, available to our tenants | ALL                   | Ongoing    | <p>A link to the Scottish Housing Regulator's webpage on how to report a significant failure is provided on the Housing Services performance webpage.</p> <p>We also provide a link on the Housing Service complaints webpage.</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> | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |
| Provide tenants and service users with the information they need to exercise 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 if requested.</p>   | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |

| Requirement   | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline  | Progress   | Responsibility  |
|---|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| Respond to tenant complaints within our service standards timescales and in accordance with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman guidance | 1, 2, 3 & 5           | Ongoing  | 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.   | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |
| Ensure we have effective arrangements to learn from complaints and other tenant and service user feedback, in accordance with SPSO guidance | 2                     | Ongoing  | <p>We recognise that complaints provide us with an invaluable source of feedback which can help us improve the quality of the services we provide. During 2019/2020, we have been carefully considering how we respond to complaints, and moving ahead we will continue to embed a culture of learning from complaints.</p> <p>This will include establishing a case review group, which will focus primarily on complaints where there have been clear instances of service failure. The group will provide us with a forum to identify improvement actions resulting from those complaints, with group members assigned ownership of those actions. Through the group, a continuous loop of feedback will be established, to ensure that the lessons learned from complaints are acted on.</p> <p>We are also carefully studying trends in our complaints data, to identify the primary themes arising from complaints. Along with other data, such as that gathered through satisfaction surveys, this work will provide us with a clearer picture of how our customers feel about the services we provide.</p> | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |

| Requirement | SSHC<br>Outcome/Standard | Deadline | Progress  | Responsibility |
|-------------|--------------------------|----------|---|----------------|
|             |                          |          | Unfortunately, this work has been affected by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, we hope to begin progressing the work in the coming autumn and winter |                |

| Equality and Human Rights   |                       |  |   |   |
|---|-----------------------|--|---|---|
| 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>We have evidence of this through the Mainstreaming Report. This details where equalities and human rights information has been considered when making decisions on the design of services.</p> <p>The Fairer Falkirk Strategy 2019- 2024 also provides evidence of where we meet our obligations in terms of equalities and human rights. It sets out a vision for a fairer Falkirk, with equality and equity for all.</p>   | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |
| Collect data relating to protected characteristics for existing tenants, new tenants, people on waiting lists and elected Members and staff   | 1                     | March 2021  | <p>The Council's Mainstreaming Report details how we collect and use equalities and human right information in terms of staff.</p> <p>We have consistently reported in previous ARC returns that the ethnic origin for over 50% of our current tenants as unknown. The new emphasis on equalities and human rights and the requirement to collect information on all the protected characteristics means that this will need to be addressed.</p> <p>In 2017/18, our ARC reported the number of tenants who consider themselves as having a disability as 2,962. This is 9.7% of our total number of tenants. Our last large-scale tenant satisfaction survey (2018/19) reported 15% of respondents as having a physical disability, with the previous survey (2016/17) reporting the figure as 18.9%. This would suggest the information we hold for current tenants under-reports the number of people who have a disability. This is the</p> | Head of Housing Services & Performance and Compliance Officer |

| Equality and Human Rights   |                       |   |  |  |
|---|-----------------------|---|--|--|
| Requirement   | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline  | Progress   | Responsibility   |
|   |                       |   | <p>latest reported data we have as this is no longer required to be reported on this in the ARC.</p> <p>In order to address these points, we will look to collect equalities data, including the protected characteristics, during annual tenant visits.</p> <p>We consulted with our tenants to inform them of our requirements to collect this data and also to ask them about the best way of doing this. It was agreed that using the annual tenant visit would be the best approach for the collection of this data.</p> <p>The programme of annual visits went live at the onset of the pandemic which then caused its suspension. Subsequently, virtual annual visits / discussions with tenants have continued resulting in referrals for support and practical assistance. Over 2,000 annual visits have now been completed and these will continue throughout the year and increase as we move out of lock down restrictions. A report on the outcomes of the annual visits, in terms of the collection of equalities data, will be produced during March 2021 as requested by the Scottish Housing Regulator in the their Regulatory Framework.</p> |  |
| 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.  | Housing Needs Manager & Performance and Compliance Officer |

| Equality and Human Rights  |                       |  |  |                                  |
|--|-----------------------|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Requirement  | SSHC Outcome/Standard | Deadline   | Progress   | Responsibility                   |
| Collect data on protected characteristics of people who use our Gypsy / Traveller services | 1                     | March 2021  | We do not routinely collect this. However, it will be built into the annual survey going forward. We will therefore achieve this requirement by March 2021 as requested by the Scottish Housing Regulator. | Community Engagement Coordinator |





# MEMO

## Falkirk Council

*Corporate and Housing Services  
Finance*

---

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

**Copy To:** Stuart Ritchie, Director of Corporate and Housing Services  
Bryan Smail, Chief Finance Officer  
Daniel Keast, Performance and Compliance Officer  
Gordon O'Connor, Internal Audit, Risk, and Corporate Fraud Manager  
Isabel Wright, Senior Internal Auditor

**From:** David Macleod, Internal Auditor

**Date:** 16 September 2020

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

1. Internal Audit work on the Scottish Housing Regulator Annual Assurance Statement forms part of our Internal Audit coverage for 2020/21, agreed by the Audit Committee on 24 August 2020.

### Background

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 Service 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 Service 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: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-housing-charter-april-2017/>
4. The standard and outcome statements that have been subject to Internal Audit's validation work are summarised in **Table 1** overleaf. More detail on the SSHC standards and outcomes is at **Annex 1**.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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." The SSHC defines a standard as "a level of quality that every social landlord should achieve."

**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 Service, 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 2020.

### 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>Numbers 4 and 13 are standards, with all others being outcomes.

**Scottish Social Housing Charter  
Standards and Outcomes**

| <b>Standard / Outcome Number<sup>3</sup></b> | <b>Description</b>   |
|--|--|
| 1.   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The customer / landlord relationship<br/>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> </ul>  |
| 2.   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>The customer / landlord relationship<br/>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<br/>Participation</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 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<br/>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, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) when they are allocated; are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair; and also meet the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH) by December 2020.</li> </ul> |
| 5.   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Housing quality and maintenance<br/>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>Numbers 4 and 13 are standards, with all others being outcomes.

| Standard / Outcome Number <sup>3</sup> | Description   |
|--|---|
| 6.                                     | <p align="center"><b>Neighbourhood and community</b><br/><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 align="center"><b>Access to housing and support</b><br/><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 align="center"><b>Access to housing and support</b><br/><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 align="center"><b>Access to housing and support</b><br/><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 align="center"><b>Access to housing and support</b><br/><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 align="center"><b>Access to housing and support</b><br/><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<br/>Homeless People</b></p> <p>Local councils perform their duties on homelessness so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice; 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<br/>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<br/>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<br/>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<br/>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.        |