

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the University of Victoria crest. The crest is a shield with a crown on top. The shield is divided into four quadrants: top-left shows a building, top-right shows a stag's head, bottom-left shows a sailing ship, and bottom-right shows an eagle. A banner at the bottom contains the motto 'ANE FOR A'.

Agenda Item 7

Housing Annual Assurance Report

Falkirk Council

Title: Housing Annual Assurance Statement
Meeting: Executive
Date: 10 October 2024
Submitted By: Director of Transformation Communities & Corporate Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides an Annual Assurance Statement on the activities of the Council's Housing Division for approval.
- 1.2 The report and linked evidence support the Council Plan priority of "Supporting stronger and healthier communities", by evidencing the provision of good quality affordable housing and the delivery of services that meet the needs of tenants.

2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Executive:

(1) Approves the Annual Assurance Statement for submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

3. Climate Change Implications

- 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](#), we must submit our Annual Assurance Statement to the Regulator by 31 October each year. This statement requires to be signed off by the delegated Local Authority Committee.
- 4.3 The Annual Assurance Statement confirms the extent to which Housing 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 regarding:
- Services for people who are homeless, provision of temporary accommodation and outcomes for people who are homeless.
 - Our energy efficiency improvement plan for the off-gas villages.
 - Compliance with electrical safety requirements.
 - Percentage of anti-social behaviour cases resolved.
 - Void management, rent collection and rent arrears.
- 4.5 In response to this engagement, we are required to:
- Provide the Scottish Housing Regulator with information requested in relation to homelessness services.
 - Provide updates on emerging issues which prevent fulfilment of our statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation and compliance with the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.
 - Send six-monthly updates on progress with the implementation of the plans for the installation of replacement heating systems in the off-gas areas.
 - Send six-monthly updates on the work to support and engage with tenants and residents facing difficulties with the heating systems.
 - Provide monthly updates on progress in achieving compliance with electrical safety requirements.
 - Review our performance for anti-social behaviour cases, void management, rent collection and rent arrears and consider what improvement action it needs to take.
- 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.
- The requirement to provide specific assurance in relation to tenant and resident safety issues.

5.2 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 supporting evidence with the statement, however, this must be available should the Regulator ask to see it. It is therefore for the Executive to decide whether they have seen sufficient evidence to be assured.

5.3 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 as “Substantial Assurance”.

5.4 The evidence checklist (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 the Scottish Housing Quality Standard in relation to electrical safety, interlinked smoke alarms and outcomes for those who presented as homeless. Actions are being taken in relation to all of these areas.

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 2025.

5.8 The Annual Assurance Statement complements several internal and external reports that demonstrate the Division’s commitment to performance reporting and scrutiny. These include the Annual Return to the Charter, which was tenant approved and checked by internal and external audit before submitting to the Regulator.

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,

Housing engages extensively with tenants and residents on the design and delivery of services.

6.2 The Scottish Housing Regulator requires local authority landlords to carry out satisfaction surveys at least every 3 years. Falkirk Councils most recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey was carried out by an independent external agency in summer 2024 which surveyed 1000 tenants, in line with previous methodology. Results showed that tenant satisfaction has increased significantly since 2021.

- 93.4% of tenants reported overall satisfaction with the housing service (increased from 75.3%)
- 96.4% were satisfied with the quality of their home (increased from 77%)
- 96.9% of tenants believe their rent offers good value for money (increase from 76.6%)

The results from the survey will inform the development of the new Tenant and Customer Participation Strategy 2025-28.

7. Implications

Financial

7.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Resources

7.2 There are no additional resource implications arising from this report.

Legal

7.3 There are no legal implications arising from this report, although there is a statutory requirement for the Council to submit the return to the Housing Regulator by 31 October 2024.

Risk

7.4 There are no new risks arising from this report.

Equalities

7.5 An initial Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment was completed. This showed that as this report does not propose any changes to funding or service delivery a full assessment is not required.

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 help us to use Equality and Poverty Impact Assessments effectively to provide tenants with good services, improve service delivery, and promote equality of opportunity for all.

7.6 Sustainability/Environmental Impact

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 expect to return to full compliance in 2025.

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Director of Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services

Author: Shirley Ritchie Performance and Information Officer
shirley.ritchie@falkirk.gov.uk

Date: 18 September 2024

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Housing Annual Assurance Statement
Appendix 2 - Housing Annual Assurance Statement Evidence Checklist
Appendix 3 - Internal Audit Report on Assurance

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

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 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.

Our review of outcomes 4, 5 and 12 of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, relating to quality of housing, repairs and maintenance and homelessness services has 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 a gas safety check on one occasion within the required timescales in 2023/24.
- We were unable to complete the installation of interlinked smoke alarms for 61 properties in 2023/24.
- The number of properties meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard was reported as 79.40% in 23/24. Failures were because of being unable to carry out electrical safety checks.

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 70.06% in 2022/23 to 79.4% in 23/24. We have 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 has remained the biggest issue. Forced entries, to fit interlinked smoke

alarms, started in June 2023. This has 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.

Outcome 12: Homeless People

- We reported 39 breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in 2023/24.

Our homeless services are under significant pressure, and we continue to experience unprecedented demand for temporary accommodation. Abolition of the local connection has also placing additional pressure on the service. We have a temporary accommodation action plan in place and continue to explore ways to meet demand and secure positive outcomes for homeless households.

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 10th October 2024.

I sign this statement on behalf of the Executive Committee.





Chairs signature:




Signed


**Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services
(Housing Services)
Annual Assurance Statement: Evidence Checklist
Performance Information Period: 2023/24**

<p>Annual Assurance Statement: Evidence Checklist</p>	<p>This checklist will set out and evidence where the Housing Service meets the following requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🕒 all the relevant regulatory requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework. 🕒 all the relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) 🕒 all relevant legislative duties including those related to homeless people, equalities and human rights and tenant/resident’s safety. <p>All 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 slightly 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 the guidance & submit the Annual Assurance Statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator between April and October each year.	ALL	October 2024 	Last year's Annual Assurance Statement was presented at the meeting of the Executive on the 17 ^h of October 2023 and submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) by 31 October 2023. We are on track to submit this year's statement to the Regulator by 31 October 2024.	Performance and Compliance Coordinator
Make the Annual Assurance Statement available to tenants and other service users	ALL	October 2024 	There is a direct link on the Housing Services performance webpage 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.	Performance and Compliance Coordinator
Notify Scottish Housing Regulator during the year of any material changes to the assurance in the Annual Assurance Statement	ALL	On-going 	This will be completed as required. There were no notifiable material changes to the Annual Assurance Statement reported to the Scottish Housing Regulator during 2023/24.	Head of Housing & Communities, Performance and Compliance Coordinator


Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>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> <p>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>	4,5, 7, 8, 9, 11 & 12	Ongoing 	<p><u>Homelessness</u></p> <p>Our homeless services are under significant pressure, and we continue to experience unprecedented demand for temporary accommodation. The number of homeless households who require temporary accommodation has increased significantly and during 2023/24, 60.5% of homeless households required temporary accommodation. The abolition of the local connection test is also placing additional pressure on the service. Internal analysis has shown that of people presenting to us with no local connection to the area, over 75% of them took up temporary accommodation.</p> <p>Over the past few years, we have seen a reduction in the number of Council properties becoming available for let each year. While this recovered in 2023/24, the number of properties available is still not sufficient to meet demand for rehousing. Increased re-let times for carrying out repairs to these properties is having a detrimental impact on our ability to rehouse people permanently. As a result, people are experiencing longer stays in temporary accommodation.</p>	Performance and Compliance Coordinator, Housing Needs Manager



Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>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>			<p>In Summer 2023, we developed a new temporary accommodation action plan which focuses on how we can support those in temporary accommodation to be rehoused as quickly and efficiently as possible. We have increased our pool of temporary accommodation properties; however, this reduces the number of stock available for permanent reletting. We have been using different types of accommodation to try and help with the demand – for example, Bed & 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>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 39 breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in 2023-24. We have a dedicated Booking Team in place, to manage offers and refusals of temporary accommodation. We have an action plan in place which has been discussed with the Regulator as part of our ongoing Engagement Plan.</p>	



Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>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>		<p>On-going </p>	<p>Through the work of our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 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><u>Antisocial Behaviour</u></p> <p>We are committed to ensuring the safety of our tenants and residents in our local areas and aim to create a positive environment free from conflict and antisocial behaviour. To achieve this, we work together with partner organisations and communities to deliver a range of interventions and solutions to reports of Antisocial behaviour (ASB). Our ASB strategy is based on the following key themes Prevention, Early Intervention, Rehabilitation and Communication.</p> <p>Our Housing Community Estates Team and Conflict Resolution Service are part of the Falkirk Council Community Safety Partnership who work alongside partner organisations to ensure everyone feels safe in their community.</p> <p>Centralising the handling of antisocial behaviour complaints through our contact centre has received positive feedback from service users. We collect information on feelings of safety in our neighbourhoods, so we can act upon these</p>	


Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>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>		<p>On-going </p>	<p>findings, we have developed the use of mobile CCTV cameras for use in areas where needed. All reports of ASB are thoroughly investigated and we respond to tenants' concerns and requests about issues in their local areas as required.</p> <p><u>Gas Safety</u> In 2023/24 we reported via our ARC return that we failed to meet our statutory obligation to carry out a gas safety check on one occasion. In this instance we were unable to use our forced access procedure because of potential concerns for employee safety. We hold clear records that provide details of gas safety checks due dates. Comments are attached to each property to show why we were unable to gain access. To improve quality control and ensure all gas safety checks are completed on or by their due date we have additional reports that check for anomalies and confirm incomplete gas safety checks two weeks prior to the statutory annual gas safety check being reached. As at the 31st March 2024 the annual gas safety for the outstanding property on our database had been completed. We anticipate that we will return to 100% compliance in the next reporting year.</p>	

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>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>	<p>4, 5 & 6</p>	<p>On-going</p> 	<p><u>Electrical Safety</u></p> <p>Previously we operated a 10-year test cycle for EICRs and due to the change in legislation we have moved to a 5-year cycle. The change to electrical safety requirements came into force in early 2022 and Electrical Installation Condition Reports (EICRs) now form part of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS). An EICR which is not renewed within the reporting year in which the 5-year anniversary date is applicable should now be reported as a failure for SHQS. We are currently operating under a transitional phase and are progressing inspections to conduct the oldest EICRs first. To meet the requirements, we have increased financial provision in our Housing Investment programme.</p> <p>Despite making progress during 2023/24 at present we are not fully compliant with electrical safety requirements and one of the biggest challenges is tenants refusing access. An improvement plan is in place to improve compliance in this area. The Scottish Housing Regulator monitors progress toward compliance with electrical safety requirements through our current Engagement Plan.</p>	



Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>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>	<p>4, 5 & 6</p>	<p>On-going </p>	<p><u>Interlinked Smoke Alarm Installation</u></p> <p>In our 2023 Annual Assurance Statement we reported that 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 initially had a very low response rate (18%) to our letter requesting access to fit interlinked smoke alarms. In June 2023 we lettered households to inform them that we would be beginning a forced access programme for those households who did not respond to our request for access. Our forced access programme began in June 2023, and we have now seen a significant reduction in the number of properties still requiring interlinked smoke alarms.</p> <p>In our Annual Return on the Charter 2023/24 we reported that we had 61 properties still requiring to be fitted with an interlinked smoke alarm. We provide monthly updates to the Scottish Housing Regulator on compliance with fitting interlinked smoke alarms. We anticipate we will achieve full compliance in the coming year.</p>	


Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>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>	4, 5 & 6	<p>On-going</p> 	<p><u>Damp and Mould</u></p> <p>All complaints regarding damp and mould are fully investigated in line with our complaints handling procedure. A Technical officer is initially sent to investigate the report to ascertain the cause. We offer advice and support on preventative measures including reducing levels of condensation and utilising heating effectively to reduce the level of condensation in the home. Advice on energy grants and cost of living support is also provided.</p>	
<p>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>	4, 5 & 6	<p>On-going</p> 	<p><u>Water Safety</u></p> <p>Ensuring water safety and managing the risks of legionella is part of the council's well-being and safety management system. This approach involves risk assessment, management controls and planned preventative measures. Risk assessments are available for all council housing stock including sheltered accommodation.</p>	


Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>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>		<p>On-going</p> 	<p><u>Asbestos</u> We fully comply with our legal obligation in terms of Asbestos management and have a clear Asbestos policy in place which adheres to Health and Safety Executive guidance. The Council and Housing Services have robust procedures and mechanisms in place to ensure the safety of our tenants, residents and staff. We hold a comprehensive asbestos register maintained by housing services which contains asbestos data in respect of our domestic properties.</p>	
<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 regulatory or statutory authorities or insurance providers, relating to safety concerns.</p>		<p>On-going</p> 	<p><u>Self-Assessment and External Audit</u> Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services and Place Services BMD section are accredited to ISO 2015:9001 Standard. We are the first housing service in Scotland to receive this accreditation. This reinforces our overall commitment to continuous improvement, self-assessment, and consistently high levels of service delivery. This approach is advocated by the SHR through its Regulatory Framework and Corporate Plan. To maintain this standard, we are routinely externally audited by the British Standards Institute (BSi).</p>	

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<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 regulatory or statutory authorities or insurance providers, relating to safety concerns.</p>		<p>On-going</p> 	<p>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 operate an ISO quality management system which ensures effective control and minimisation of non-conformances, continuous attention to processes, procedures and performance reviews.</p> <p><u>Risk Assessment</u></p> <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 these 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>No safety matters were reported to or investigated by the Health and Executive during 2023/24.</p>	


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 with the published guidance	ALL	May 2024 	Our Annual Return on the Charter (ARC) was submitted on the 31 st May 2024. Prior to submission the ARC was presented to and agreed by a group of tenants at our annual tenant sign off meeting. The supporting data is subject to integrity checks through both internal and external audits. them.	Head of Housing & Communities Performance and Compliance Coordinator
Involve tenants, and where relevant other service users, in the preparation and scrutiny of performance information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree approach with tenants. • Ensure that approach is effective and meaningful and that tenants have a real and demonstrable say in the assessment of performance • Publicise the approach to tenants 	ALL	On-going 	We have a Tenant and Customer Participation strategy (2022 – 2025) which outlines and publishes our approach to customer participation. This was developed following extensive consultation with our tenants and other customers. The Strategy is based on 4 pillars, Communication, Engagement, Participation and Scrutiny, and reflects what tenants and customers have told us following extensive consultation. The Housing Service engages with and supports many Registered Tenant Organisations (RTO's) across the council area.	Performance and Compliance Coordinator & Community Engagement Coordinator


Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
	ALL	On-going 	<p>Our Tenant and Resident Forum plays a crucial role in shaping the way we deliver our housing services by representing the views of tenants and customers who use the service. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutinizing performance • Engaging in consultations and providing feedback where appropriate • Overseeing various sub-groups that are engaged in consultation projects <p>Tenant voices get together is a tenant led panel who look at various aspects of the housing service and facilitate a platform for tenants to engage with the service on topics such as voids and allocations. Their aim is to ensure that tenants and residents who use Falkirk Housing Services have a voice in all aspects of service planning and delivery.</p> <p>Our Service Improvement Scrutiny panel scrutinize various aspects of the service and developed a specific</p>	


Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>When reporting performance to tenants and other service users we must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide tenants with an assessment of performance in delivering Charter outcomes. • Include relevant comparison including previous years, other landlords and with national performance. • Set out how we intend to address areas for improvement. • Give tenants and service users a way to feedback views on • style and form of reporting. 			<p>All information is publicly available on the Housing Services performance webpage. Our landlord report is available in hard copies, in different languages, Braille or other formats on request.</p> <p>We publish performance information in our magazine Tenant Talk which is sent out to all tenants. The editorial panel for our Tenant talk magazine is made up of tenant and resident volunteers. The aim of the panel is to make the magazine more user friendly and ensure that the content is interesting and useful to readers.</p> <p>Prior to publication our customer Editorial Panel approves information produced by the Housing Service to make sure it is relevant and easy to understand.</p>	

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>	<p>ALL</p>	<p>On-going</p> <p></p>	<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>	<p>Director of Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services</p>


Tenant and Service Users Redress



Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>Make information on reporting our significant performance failures and make the SHR leaflet available to tenants.</p>	<p>ALL</p>	<p>On-going </p>	<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>	<p>Performance and Compliance Coordinator & Community Engagement Coordinator</p>

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>Provide tenants and service users with the information they need to exercise their right to complain and seek redress.</p> <p>Respond to tenant complaints within our service standards timescales and in accordance with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman guidance.</p> <p>Ensure we have effective arrangements in place to learn from complaints and other tenant and service user feedback. In accordance with SPSO Guidance</p>	1, 2, 3 & 5	<p>On-going</p> 	<p>We have a corporate complaints policy which is in line with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) guidance.</p> <p>We have previously published an Annual Complaints Report. 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> <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 provide. To ensure that we embed a culture of learning from complaints.</p>	<p>Performance and Compliance Coordinator & Team Leader Housing Customer Service</p>

Equality and Human Rights

Requirement	SSHC Outcome/Standard	Deadline	Progress	Responsibility
<p>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</p>	<p>1</p>	<p>On-going </p>	<p>At a Corporate level, equality is considered through the: Towards a Fairer and More Equal Falkirk- Mainstreaming Report.</p> <p>This outlines how equalities and human rights information has been considered when making decisions on the design of services. This also provides evidence of how we will address poverty and work to make the area a fairer place to live.</p> <p>The Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Framework makes it clear that landlords must consider equalities and human rights in the provision of its service.</p> <p>We use equalities data on protected characteristics in key planning documents produced by the Housing Service, including the Housing Need & Demand Assessment (HNDA), and the Local Housing Strategy (LHS). The Local Housing Strategy (LHS) 2023 -2028 and the corresponding outcomes in this look at tackling a number of equalities issues. We carry out Equality</p>	<p>Performance and Compliance Coordinator</p> <p>Community Engagement Coordinator. Performance & Compliance Coordinator</p>

<p>Collect data relating to protected characteristics for existing tenants, new tenants, people on waiting lists and elected Members. and staff</p>		<p>Ongoing</p> 	<p>and Poverty Impact Assessments to assess whether any proposed changes would inadvertently disadvantage anyone, and to proactively advance equality, diversity and inclusion.</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 makes it easier for individuals to update their own personal information, including protected characteristics, directly onto their tenancy records.</p> <p>Through the analysis of our Action Plan, we identified 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. For those who cannot self-serve we are working with Housing Officers to raise awareness of the need to collect equalities information from existing tenants and facilitate help with training to enable them to collect this via tenant visits.</p>	
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			<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 transferred to their tenancy record once they are allocated a tenancy.</p> <p>The Council's Mainstreaming Report details how we collect and use equalities information for staff.</p>	
Collect data on protected characteristics of people who apply as homeless.	1	<p>On-going</p> 	We collect equalities information at the homeless application stage, including the protected characteristics. This information is reported to the Scottish Government via HL1 and HL3 returns.	Performance & Compliance Coordinator
Collect data on protected characteristics of people who use our Gypsy / Traveller services	1	<p>Ongoing</p> 	During our annual resident satisfaction survey equalities questions are included. However, as collection of equalities data is voluntary response rates remain extremely low as many decline to supply the requested information.	Performance & Compliance Coordinator



MEMO

Falkirk Council

To: Kenny Gillespie, Head of Housing and Communities

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

From: Sarah McPhee, Senior Internal Auditor

Date: 30 August 2024

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 2024/25.
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 ([Regulatory Framework | Scottish Housing Regulator](#)). 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 outcomes¹ 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 \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

¹ 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 ²	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 2024.

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).

² Number 4 is a standard, with all others being outcomes.

**Scottish Social Housing Charter
Standards and Outcomes**

Standard / Outcome Number ³	Description
1.	<p style="text-align: center;">The customer / landlord relationship Equalities</p> <p>Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they support the right to adequate housing. • 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.
2.	<p style="text-align: center;">The customer / landlord relationship Communication</p> <p>Social landlords manage their businesses so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
3.	<p style="text-align: center;">The customer / landlord relationship Participation</p> <p>Social landlords manage their businesses so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tenants and other customers are offered a range of opportunities that make it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.
4.	<p style="text-align: center;">Housing quality and maintenance Quality of housing</p> <p>Social landlords manage their businesses so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
5.	<p style="text-align: center;">Housing quality and maintenance Repairs, maintenance, and improvements</p> <p>Social landlords manage their businesses so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tenants' homes are well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done.

³Number 4 is a standard, with all others being outcomes.

Standard / Outcome Number ³	Description
6.	<p style="text-align: center;">Neighbourhood and community Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance, and tenancy disputes</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"> • tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.
7.	<p style="text-align: center;">Access to housing and support Housing options</p> <p>Social landlords work together to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them.
8.	<p style="text-align: center;">Access to housing and support Housing options</p> <p>Social landlords work together to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options.
9.	<p style="text-align: center;">Access to housing and support Housing options</p> <p>Social landlords ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people at risk of losing their homes get advice and information on preventing homelessness.
10.	<p style="text-align: center;">Access to housing and support Access to social housing</p> <p>Social landlords ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
11.	<p style="text-align: center;">Access to housing and support Tenancy sustainment</p> <p>Social landlords ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

Standard / Outcome Number ³	Description
12.	<p style="text-align: center;">Access to housing and support Homeless People</p> <p>Local councils perform their duties on homelessness so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
13.	<p style="text-align: center;">Getting good value from rents and service charges Value for money</p> <p>Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tenants, owners, and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.
14.	<p style="text-align: center;">Getting good value from rents and service charges Rents and service charges</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"> • 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.
15.	<p style="text-align: center;">Getting good value from rents and service charges Rents and service charges</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"> • 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.
16.	<p style="text-align: center;">Other Customers Gypsy / Travellers</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"> • sites are well maintained and managed and do not fall below the minimum site standards set in Scottish Government guidance.

DEFINITION OF ASSURANCE CATEGORIES

Level of Assurance	Definition
Substantial assurance	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.
Limited assurance	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.
No assurance	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.