

Item: 14

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 6 September 2023.

Housing Service – Annual Assurance Statement.

Report by Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the Annual Assurance Statement for submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

The requirement to submit an Annual Assurance Statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator by 31 October.

2.2.

That the Scottish Housing Regulator has enhanced its requirements in respect of assurance in relation to equalities, as well as tenant and resident safety, for Assurance Statements to be submitted by 31 October 2023.

It is recommended:

2.3.

That the Annual Assurance Statement, together with supporting Annexes, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, be approved for submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

3. Background

3.1.

The Scottish Housing Regulator has published its Regulatory Framework and associated guidance relating to housing services' performance.

3.2.

From April 2019, there has been a requirement for all local authorities and registered social landlords to prepare an Annual Assurance Statement covering housing services' performance and submit it to the Scottish Housing Regulator between April and October.

3.3.

Accordingly, in order to meet the Scottish Housing Regulator's requirements in respect of publication of an Annual Assurance Statement, on 3 April 2019, the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee noted that a report on the Housing Service's performance would be submitted annually.

4. Background on Performance Structures

4.1.

Members have previously been advised of the broad range of performance measures that are in place across Housing Services, with the following performance reports presented annually to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee:

- Homelessness update.
- Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing.
- Housing Performance.

4.2.

A broad range of returns are submitted by Housing Services including:

- Quarterly submission of homelessness returns to Scottish Government (HL1, HL2, HL3 and Prevent 1).
- Completion of quarterly and annual returns for Scotland's Housing Network.
- Completion of annual return to Scottish Government "Housing Statistics Annual Return".
- Membership of Scotland's Housing Network and benchmarking against peer authorities and also national benchmarking.

4.3.

Housing Services undergo a range of inspections including:

- Care Inspectorate – Sheltered Housing.
- Care Inspectorate – Homelessness and Housing Support Services.
- National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (nationally recognised accreditation).
- Until 2019, Housing Services, in common with other Council Services, undertook How Good is our Council Self-Assessment. This process will be replaced with a suitable corporate alternative following approval by the Council's Corporate Leadership Team.

4.3.1.

The outcome of inspections, together with action plans where required, are reported to the relevant committee.

4.4.

Additionally, the following are in place across Housing Services:

- Housing Services is subject to an annual assessment against eight specific criteria to determine the level of risk posed by relevant services and consequently any need for an internal audit.
- An annual pre-submission audit of the Council's Annual Return against the Charter is undertaken by an independent organisation.
- A quarterly meeting of key staff to consider, analyse and discuss improvements relating to the performance across Housing Services in relation to the indicators underpinning the Annual Return against the Charter.

4.4.1.

The above are in addition to corporate processes such as the monitoring of indicators through the Council's corporate performance monitoring system, Pentana.

4.5.

Some areas of Housing Services' performance are regulated and required by the Scottish Housing Regulator, including:

- Submission of Annual Return against the Charter.
- Publication of Annual Report for Tenants.
- Three Yearly Customer Satisfaction Survey with specific questions and requires a 40% return rate.

4.5.1.

While required on a three yearly basis, the Council undertakes its Customer Satisfaction Survey every two years in order to ensure views collected are representative of the current tenant base. This will next be undertaken in early 2024.

4.6.

From the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 until April 2022, in common with all social housing providers across Scotland, the Council was required to provide additional performance information to the Scottish Housing Regulator, Scottish Government and COSLA so that the impact of COVID-19 could be appropriately quantified on key indicators including homelessness, repairs, allocations and re-lets. A specific staffing return continues to be provided to the Care Inspectorate for all registered services.

4.7.

The Scottish Housing Regulator has produced an engagement plan for all social housing providers. Individual engagement plans highlight performance indicators which the Scottish Housing Regulator has identified as being areas where they may initiate some engagement with the organisation concerned. The engagement plan for Orkney Islands Council is available [here](#).

5. Annual Assurance Statement

5.1.

The Annual Assurance Statement requires to be submitted annually between April and October and it is necessary for the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee to be assured that performance structures and assessments are appropriately robust.

5.2.

The Scottish Housing Regulator has produced [guidance](#) which requires that the Annual Assurance Statement should be completed and agreed by the relevant local authority committee and should:

“Confirm that you have appropriate assurance that you comply with:

- All relevant regulatory requirements set out in [Chapter 3](#) of the Regulatory Framework.
- All relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter.
- All relevant legislative duties”.

5.3.

Although the Scottish Housing Regulator has provided a prescriptive template to be submitted, the Regulator has not been prescriptive in respect of the structure of the information to accompany this. Attached as Appendix 1 to this report is the completed template.

5.4.

Given that the appropriate Council committee is required to issue assurance on the performance of the Housing Service to the Scottish Housing Regulator, it is crucial that Elected Members are provided with information to be satisfied that performance processes are sufficient.

5.5.

Annex 1 draws out the salient points in respect of performance areas, highlighting where performance has declined or would warrant additional explanation.

5.6.

The onus is on the Council to highlight areas where it recognises its performance could be improved or where there are contextual factors which would limit its ability to compete at a national level. This information is also contained in Annex 1.

5.7.

Scotland's Housing Network, the organisation which provides benchmarking services and good practice guidance to the housing sector has developed an action plan which organisations may choose to complete as part of their assurance process,

ahead of submission. Attached as Annex 2 to this report is the action plan completed with local statistics and comments.

5.8.

Annual Assurance Statements are required by the Scottish Housing Regulator for all social housing providers, namely both local authorities and registered social landlords. Consequently, some areas covered in Annex 2 are corporate responsibilities as opposed to being limited to those within Housing Services.

6. Amendments to the Annual Assurance Statement for 2023

6.1.

During Summer 2023, the Scottish Housing Regulator launched a national discussion paper on the future of social housing regulation in Scotland, specifically asking for feedback around assurance on resident safety. The outcome of this consultation will be published in due course and relevant changes made accordingly.

6.2.

The Scottish Housing Regulator has advised that again they would like assurance around the collection of equalities information and consideration of how, as a landlord, a human rights approach can be adopted. This was taken forward in 2021 in the Council's review of its Equalities Policy for Housing Services and relevant procedures and therefore assurance has been given in Annex 2 of Appendix 1 to this report.

6.2.

During Summer 2023, the Scottish Housing Regulator issued guidance to all landlords of social housing in relation to specific assurance that it requires in the Annual Assurance Statement to be submitted in October 2023. This relates to whether landlords meet all duties in relation to tenant and resident safety, and in particular that landlords have obtained appropriate assurance about their compliance with all relevant safety requirements including:

- Gas safety.
- Electrical safety.
- Water safety.
- Fire safety.
- Asbestos.
- Damp and Mould.
- Lift safety.

6.3.

In the context of providing social housing in Orkney, gas safety is not applicable as Orkney has no mains gas and there are no lifts in the Council's social housing so lift safety is not applicable either. All other matters outlined above have been referred to directly in Annex 2 of Appendix 1 to this report, as has radon safety which is relevant locally.

7. Corporate Governance

This report relates to the Council complying with governance and scrutiny and therefore does not directly support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan and the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan.

8. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

9. Legal Aspects

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

10. Contact Officers

James Wylie, Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing, extension 2477, Email james.wylie@orkney.gov.uk.

Frances Troup, Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing, extension 2450, Email frances.troup@orkney.gov.uk.

11. Appendix

Appendix 1: Annual Assurance Statement.

Appendix 1 to Annual Assurance Statement Report

Orkney Islands Council's Housing Service

School Place

Kirkwall

Orkney

KW15 1NY

Annual Assurance Statement

We achieve all of the following standards and outcomes for tenants, people who are homeless and others who use our services:

- All relevant regulatory requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework.
- All relevant standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter.
- All relevant legislative duties.

Where additional explanatory information is required, this is included in annex 1 of the attached report and will be reproduced in the contextual information provided with the Annual Return against the Charter to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

I confirm that the Council's Education, Leisure and Housing Committee have seen and considered appropriate evidence to support the level of assurance we have at the meeting held on 6 September 2023.

Signed

Chair of Education, Leisure and Housing Committee.

Annex 1 – Key points relating to the Council’s performance

Explanatory information has been provided to explain either a change in performance or areas where Orkney’s context is particularly important.

Annual Return Against the Charter

The Annual Return against the Charter (ARC) for financial year 2022/23 has been completed for Orkney Islands Council and was submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator by 31 May 2023. Areas of performance which required additional explanation are as follows (the indicators referred to are nationally required):

Satisfaction Survey

The Council has recently undertaken a wholesale tenant survey in line with the Scottish Social Housing Charter. The Council does this every 2 years as opposed to every 3 to ensure closer alignment with the current tenant base. Results were timed to align with submission of the ARC and accordingly results have been very recently received. This time the survey was undertaken by electronic and paper surveys and fewer telephone surveys were undertaken than was the case during the 2020 pandemic period. Last time the interviewing and fieldwork took place at the very start of the pandemic and the experience of the company which undertook the survey, was that service providers were getting very positive ratings at that point in time. The company undertaking the survey advised in 2022, that they were noticing a drop in customer satisfaction results for Councils undertaking surveys at present. For Orkney, the difference in results for 2022 is predominantly about a shift in the “neither / nor” responses rather than an increase in outright dissatisfaction. Given that the levels of tenant satisfaction were lower than has previously been the case, the results have been considered and an action plan developed to try and improve satisfaction.

The tenant survey was undertaken by an independent body to ensure tenants felt able to openly express their views. Planning will begin shortly to deliver the survey in 2024 and consideration will be given to the methods used to collect customer satisfaction information from tenants accordingly. The aim is to provide the results in the ARC submission in May 2024.

In addition to the wholesale survey the Council undertakes a range of satisfaction surveys covering different parts of the service and these generally show good levels of satisfaction, though the response rate is low (with the exception of repairs customer satisfaction).

The Tenant Participation Officer is working with tenants with a view to increasing their involvement, improving the provision of information and considering alternative ways to collect information. This has included arranging events at the community fridge and parent and child groups in partnership with Orkney Housing Association Limited. She has also started a process of trying to develop an armchair panel and has created a leaflet promoting this accordingly. In addition, a social media page is being developed to improve the Council’s provision of information in an accessible manner across the island group.

Information obtained from customer surveys and other means of obtaining information is used to inform the Housing Service's relevant Service Delivery Plan accordingly.

Given that the repairs customer satisfaction survey is run as a rolling programme, this data has been used for the Annual Return against the Charter rather than the wholesale tenant survey.

Indicators 3 and 4 (Complaints)

During financial year 2022/23, of the 14 stage 2 complaints received, 3 were during March 2022 which were not concluded before year end, resulting in a figure of 77.78% being responded to in full. Without these the Housing Service's percentage responded to in full would have been 94.44%. Some complex stage 2 complaints have been received during the year which have taken longer to conclude than the required timescale. These were about property condition and the approach taken was to ensure that the situation was fully addressed and appropriate remedial action was in place before closing the complaint.

The Housing Service have recognised that the approach taken to complaints should have been tighter, the complaint should have been closed and any work which required to be taken forward should be done separately. Previously in some cases the complaint had remained open. One complex complaint took 248 days, if this were removed alone the average days to respond to a stage two complaint would drop from 44.93 to 29.31 days.

Previously managers responded to stage 1 complaints and due to staff shortages this was taking too long. Frontline Housing Officers will now undertake stage 1 complaints and accordingly training was delivered to all Housing Officers in June 2023.

Indicators 8 and 9 (Repairs)

Delivery of property management services is undertaken by the Council's Neighbourhood Services and Infrastructure (NSI) for the Housing Service.

In April 2022, a restructure was implemented at corporate level (the element affecting Housing Services was implemented a year earlier). The restructure resulted in a range of changes across Neighbourhood Services and Infrastructure (NSI), some being immediate and some resulting slightly later. Consequently, there were changes of personnel within key posts in NSI. This resulted in changes throughout the entire management structure relevant to the field of repairs and maintenance. Due to challenges with recruitment, the Senior Maintenance Surveyor was not filled until May 2023. In addition, one of four Building Inspectors (25% of the resource) was recruited in March 2022 and has been undertaking internal training and becoming established in the role. This combined situation has had an impact on the delivery of services due to the loss of organisational knowledge and experience.

Reference was made previously to the installation and development of the computer system, Concerto. As regards the handheld app being shared with contractors to further enhance the functionality, unexpected problems were encountered. The app

was effective in relation to recording the main contractor's information but didn't work when they sub-contracted work. The Council's measured term contractor sub-contracts electrical and plumbing work particularly. This can be as much as 85-90% of emergency repairs. The supplying company, Concerto, were unable to find a solution and therefore regrettably it was accepted that the app wasn't a viable option accordingly. In order to address this regular spot checks of worker's timesheets had been installed in order to ensure the audit trail between them finishing a job and the main contractor inputting that time onto the system, matched. This process was agreed as appropriate with the company which undertakes the independent review of ARC data, C D Consultancy. However, due to staffing gaps during 2022/23, this process stalled but will now be reinstated.

The time to complete emergency repairs, decreased from 10.06 hours for financial year 2021/2022 to 9.12 hours for 2022/2023. An analysis of emergency repairs figures shows that 24 of 256 (9.4%) were in excess of the 24 hour limit. Half of these, 12 of 24 (50%) were completed between 24 and 29 hours.

The remainder are as follows:

- 75 were 30 - 49 hours.
- 4 were 50 - 79 hours.
- 1 was over 100+ hours

If these worst 9 cases (3.5%) were removed the average would drop from 9.12 hours down to 7.00 hours.

The reasons for some repairs being out of time included contractors, especially on the isles, reporting incorrect dates and times of completions or failing to raise second orders/stopping the clock once an emergency has been addressed but further parts require to be ordered/additional works are needed to fully address the issue. An additional complexity involved mainland contractors undertaking works on the isles and the above issues being exacerbated with weather and travel disruption. Due to changes in key personnel the process which had been set in place to ensure all work orders were reviewed on a monthly basis and information was used actively in meeting with contractors, had stalled but restarted in January 2023.

The Council continues to work closely with its contractors to ensure the performance management culture remains central to service provision despite significant pressures on services and Orkney's remote and rural context.

The time to complete non-emergency repairs decreased slightly to 15.11 days for 2022/2023 from 15.34 days in 2021/2022. A detailed analysis of the cases which are most in excess of the 20 working day limit, has highlighted similar issues to those outlined above for emergency repairs. Serious supply issues continued to impact up to the end of calendar year 2022. This has started to resolve now but can still be a factor. If all repairs above 76 days which are generally due to supply issues, were to be removed, this would bring the figures down to 12.20 days.

The Council continues to work closely with its contractors and aims to improve performance wherever possible. The contractors remain very busy and there are difficulties in obtaining sub-contractors with availability. Some trades are particularly scarce including painters, one contractor has experienced difficulties as a result of a loss of a back of house member of staff. Some contractors have been successful in expanding their staff teams and tried to restructure their processes which is positive. Recruitment remains challenging generally, many contractors are reporting that they are having difficulties. The Council has commissioned a piece of work around the housing needs of essential workers (much wider than purely key workers). The results of this work will be presented to this cycle of meetings.

Repairs customer satisfaction remains high at 89.04%, which is very positive. Some analysis will be undertaken of the reasons behind cases where dissatisfaction is recorded and the outcome of complaints relating to repairs.

In relation to Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), processes are currently being reviewed around property inspections, ensuring robust evidence is in place and readily accessible. Processes are being developed to ensure greater electronic completion of surveys are developed and enhanced.

Data has been compiled on the renewal cycle for core property elements such as windows, doors, kitchens, bathrooms. This provides accurate data based on historic renewal data and update surveys done while Building Inspectors are in the properties. The data is then reviewed and prioritised to ensure the properties are maintained to a good standard, both affordable and planned. This process continues to be further automated. Undertaking works on core property elements should also assist with improving tenant satisfaction with the quality of tenant homes (indicator 7) In addition, given the cost of living crisis, a review of decoration allowances offered to new tenants will be undertaken shortly.

The Council's in-house resource incorporates accredited Energy Assessors (Scotland) staff and has resulted in a significant survey programme. Modern Energy Performance Certificates are held for the majority of the housing stock. A recently recruited Building Inspector has just completed his qualification and will take forward Energy Performance Certificates on properties which require an updated assessment for the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing 1.

Indicator 12 (Repairs Satisfaction)

Repairs customer satisfaction remains high at 89.04%, which is very positive.

Indicator 14 (Tenancy Offers Refused)

The percentage of offers of housing refused has recorded a positive reduction to 29.92% 2022/23 from 32.64% in 2021/22. In general, work has been underway to reduce the numbers of offers refused and this has continued.

It was previously advised that there is an intention to introduce a new lettings policy, based on the principles of choice, by April 2021, while delayed as a result of COVID-19, this is now being progressed with a view to it being implemented during this

financial year. The Lettings Plan to outline percentage targets allocated to groups inside the lettings policy was approved at the June cycle of committee meetings.

Indicator 15 (Anti-Social Behaviour)

The Council has neighbourhoods which are clean and attractive. The level of anti-social behaviour in Orkney remains very low. Along with Orkney Housing Association Limited, joint work is undertaken closely with the Council's corporate Anti-Social Behaviour Co-Ordinator and the Police in order to take a multi-agency approach to any issues which arise.

Orkney has a very low level of anti-social behaviour with few cases of serious anti-social behaviour. The Council's anti-social behaviour policy, was significantly reviewed in 2019 with the addition of realistic and proportionate targets. An appendix to the anti-social behaviour policy on harassment was introduced recently to ensure appropriate processes are in place to address any issues which may arise specifically as a result of harassment and this is related to enhancement of equalities processes.

There has been an increase in anti-social behaviour over recent months, most of it low level but some of it connected to a decision to allocate a sizeable proportion of 44 new build properties to homeless households, many of whom were young people. Staff have worked in partnership with the Police and the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator. The new scheme has been occupied since December 2021 and is becoming more established and settled now. A reduction in cases is expected going forward.

Indicator 16 (Tenancy Sustainment)

Overall tenancy sustainment (indicator 16) shows sustained performance.

An assessment of cases where a tenancy had not been sustained indicated reasons such as death, hospitalisation and leaving Orkney as well as those who had sought housing in another sector.

As regards tenancy sustainment generally, the Council is keen to assist tenants to sustain their tenancies and employs a qualified Social Worker within Housing Services. This allows specialist Social Work skills to be used to assist those with a range of issues including addiction. In addition, the Council employs a Housing Support worker who works directly with tenants in this respect. A new Housing Support Officer has recently been recruited following the resignation of the previous member of staff. The Housing Support and Homelessness aspects of the Housing service are registered with the Care Inspectorate accordingly and these obtain good inspection grades and staff are registered with the SSSC accordingly.

Indicators 18 and 30 (Empty Property Rental Loss and Time taken to Relet Properties)

Void (empty property) loss decreased from £54,453 in 2021/2022 to £53,954 in 2022/2023, which represents a decrease in the percentage of rent due to properties being empty from 1.42% to 1.32%. There were slightly more relets, 80 in 2022/ 2023

as opposed to 78 in 2021/2022. Supply issues affected a range of items including internal doors and issues with electricity meters, while this has generally resolved now, it still had an impact during 2022/23. Pressure on staffing for the measured term contactor is also having an impact.

As regards indicator 30 on the average length of time taken to relet properties, a total of 80 properties were relet during financial year 2022/2023. The time taken to relet properties has increased slightly. The total number of calendar days they were empty was 4,635 giving a relet time of 57.94 which is slightly longer than financial year 2021/22 which recorded 52.10 days.

Various voids were subject to extended void periods including four sheltered properties which together accrued 868 days and 3 isles properties subject to low demand which were void for 595 days. If the value of 7 is excluded from the calculations, it would lead to a reduced average days to let of 43.45. Furthermore, approximately 10% of cases contribute to 31.56% of the total void loss.

Indicator 27 covers gross rent arrears as at 31 March each year as a percentage of rent due for the reporting year.

Gross arrears continued to be challenging throughout financial year 2022/2023. The figures at year end showed a decrease to 12.65% from 14.35% for financial year 2021/2022.

Throughout COVID-19 and beyond a strong focus was maintained on the recovery of arrears. Initially this included undertaking welfare checks for all the Council's tenants throughout lockdown, working with tenants to ensure that those who needed assistance to claim Universal Credit Housing Costs / Housing Benefit, were assisted to do so. Close joint working continues with Orkney Citizen's Advice Bureau in relation to income maximisation and money advice / debt assistance. Every attempt has been made to recover outstanding arrears where this is possible. This included senior management prioritising the pursuit of arrears and significant levels of staffing resource being focused on this aspect. The level of arrears has been reported to the Chief Executive and Senior Councillors throughout.

Although the overall level of arrears remains high, the rent collected as a percentage of rent due in the year stayed relatively stable at 99.33% for financial year 2022/2023 from 99.50% for 2021/2022. This is a positive indication that the strong focus on reducing rent arrears is starting to net results.

The level of housing costs received directly, through Housing Benefit / Universal Credit Housing Costs, increased from the previous financial year with 494 households recorded in comparison to 467 the previous year. The amount rose to £1.61m from £1.52m the year before. However, a system, of inputting payments manually impacted on a small staffing resource adding complexities for a small Housing Revenue Account.

Steps continue to be taken to progress the automation of Universal Credit and bank payments and the relevant software suppliers were asked to remedy this during 2022. However, the combination of an internal restructure and other staffing gaps

has affected the Council's ability to upgrade the system to the most recent release and the Housing test system required to be replaced. The test system has been procured and is in place and upgrades / new releases are progressing. A test plan has been developed and upgrades will be taken forward with the relevant software provider in due course. Unfortunately, staffing changes can have a significant impact given the small size of the Housing Service.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) continue to be publicised through the Council's website, social media etc in an attempt to reach more tenants who are struggling.

The percentage of former tenant arrears in 2022/2023 decreased to 3.00% from 5.71% in 2021/2022.

The Council previously actively and prudently pursued former tenant arrears rather than writing these off, however this had a detrimental impact on overall rent arrears performance – statistics and anecdotal evidence suggested that practice in other organisations is to write-off the majority of former tenant debt. This approach has now been reconsidered as there is a need to ensure resources are being targeted at bringing in current arrears and that tenants who are in arrears are ensuring their focus is on current arrears as opposed to former tenant arrears from the past. Currently a process is underway in relation to the consideration of a wider programme of write off. This will take time to affect the statistics however. Write-offs for financial year 2022/2023 totalled £58,037, or 33.72% of the former tenant arrears outstanding, representing a significant increase from a year previously. A meeting has been arranged to discuss increasing the level of write off for former tenant arrears.

The Housing Service continues to have a specialist post called Housing Officer (Income Collection). In addition, a further specialist officer has been employed on recovery of rent arrears over the last year given the level of arrears. This is to supplement the role of Housing Officers with the aim to reduce the level of rent arrears and other housing debt outstanding.

Mandatory box

For the first time, the Annual Return against the Charter included a new box for completion which was mandatory. This was intended to allow social housing providers to provide information around electrical (and where relevant gas) safety checks.

For the Council, in December 2022, an issue was identified around electrical installation condition reports (EICR) and the process of evidencing compliance. Accordingly, a piece of work was instructed through an independent party, C D Consultancy Ltd, to determine the level of compliance. A programme of works was instigated and weekly meetings were put in place (and remain in place) between senior staff within the Education Leisure and Housing Directorate and also Neighbourhood Services and Infrastructure Directorate. A range of local contractors were sourced to assist with undertaking checks and a structure was implemented to ensure the evidence base was appropriate. C D Consultancy undertook an additional

piece of work around the current status of delivery on 29 May, immediately prior to submission of the ARC and provided a report accordingly.

In addition, the Council had identified an issue with the data around interlinked smoke alarms in autumn 2022, and a programme of works was developed and taken forward with the contractor who had been employed to undertake the contract. A further works programme is currently underway to ensure the final remaining households have their interlinked smoke alarms fitted in the summer of 2023.

While SHQS compliance has been reported to be 52.8% at 31 March 2023, at 30 May 2023, fails had been reduced to 233 properties which equates to 72.6% of properties meeting SHQS. A breakdown of this data is outlined below:

List of Failures (as of 31 March 2023):

- 6 cases failed on all three criteria (Fire, EICR, and EESSH).
- 56 cases failed on Fire and EICR criteria.
- 1 case failed on Fire and EESSH criteria.
- 4 cases failed on EIRC and EESSH criteria.
- 8 cases failed on EESSH criteria only.
- 256 cases failed on EICR criteria only.
- 55 cases failed on Fire criteria only.

Total cases: 386.

List of Failures (as of 30 May 2023):

- 1 case failed on all three criteria (Fire, EICR, and EESSH).
- 37 cases failed on Fire and EICR criteria.
- 4 cases failed on Fire and EESSH criteria.
- 4 cases failed on EICR and EESSH criteria.
- 11 cases failed on EESSH criteria only.
- 129 cases failed on EICR criteria only.
- 47 cases failed on Fire criteria only.

Total cases: 233.

The Council has endeavoured to focus on ensuring it delivers the SHQS as far as is practicably possible. The Council has a strong knowledge of its stock and data held on properties is at an individual level. A process of cloning is not used as a general rule, though have recently moved to having a small number of cloned properties. Information held on Concerto is being enhanced to try and make it more dynamic and facilitate onsite update while Building Inspectors are in properties. This is to ensure the evidence base is updated much more swiftly and that the data can be actively used to ensure delivery of appropriate standards. An action plan has been developed following reports from C D Consultancy and will be taken forward

accordingly. A further piece of work has been arranged for autumn to provide assurance of the level of compliance at that stage.

Annual Report for Tenants

The annual report for tenants will be produced by 31 October 2023 as required by the Scottish Housing Regulator. This will include key information which is of interest to tenants.

The Council has a joint Residents' Panel with Orkney Housing Association Limited which consists of tenants / residents of both organisations. They will be asked for their views on the Annual Report ahead of publication and their views will be taken into account in producing the final document. The Council includes a section in the Annual Report which encourages feedback from tenants more generally on how they feel about the report and the information in it.

The Residents' Panel will also be involved in discussions around the Annual Assurance Statement prior to submission.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

The Council is required to undertake a wholesale tenants' satisfaction survey every three years. This was undertaken most recently during 2022 by an independent body in order to ensure impartiality.

A range of customer satisfaction surveys are in place across the Service in order to assess the quality of the service on an ongoing basis. These include:

- New tenants' survey regarding quality of home and service.
- Repairs Satisfaction survey.
- Improvements satisfaction survey.
- Exit questionnaires for tenants leaving the Council's accommodation.
- Homelessness service, new tenants' questionnaire.
- Homelessness service, exit questionnaire.
- Housing Advice service, exit questionnaire.

In addition, information is used from complaints and general feedback as encouraged by footnotes on all correspondence etc. The information is used to inform the Service Delivery Plan for the relevant part of the Service which underpins service improvements.

This links to standard 3.12 in the National Standards for Information and Advice Providers which is part of the Council's accreditation.

While the Council collects data from its wholesale tenant satisfaction survey, this can lead to some distortion in figures. For example, when questions are raised regarding repairs it should be the most recent repair. It is therefore more effective to collect this data immediately following completion of the repair.

The Council intends to use its ongoing customer satisfaction information so it can evidence that the information collected relates to the present day.

The next wholesale customer satisfaction survey will be undertaken in early 2024 with a view to the results being submitted in the Council's Annual Return against the Charter in May 2024.

Scottish Housing Regulator's Engagement Plan

The Scottish Housing Regulator's engagement plan highlights key indicators, relating to service quality, where they have indicated they wish to engage with the Council.

During 2022/23 they reviewed and compared the data for all local authorities from the Scottish Government's national homelessness statistics and the Annual Returns on the Charter. They also spoke to all local authorities to gather further information and assurance about their homelessness services. To assess the risks to people who are threatened with or experiencing homelessness they will engage with all local authorities during 2023/24 with a focus on the provision of appropriate temporary accommodation.

Specifically, they will engage with Orkney in relation to the following areas:

- Orkney's assessment of homelessness applications; and
- Outcomes for people who are homeless.

Their engagement plan states that in order to assess the risk to social landlord services the Scottish Housing Regulator have reviewed and compared the 2021/22 service quality performance of all social landlords to identify the "weakest performing" landlords. They will therefore engage with Orkney about tenant satisfaction, complaints handling, emergency repairs and rent arrears.

Data on homelessness is not included within the Annual Return against the Charter generally. Instead, this information is provided through returns outlined at section 4.2 of the committee report and is reported to the Council's Education, Leisure and Housing Committee, specifically a report is presented to the June cycle of meetings.

The position relating to the other areas referred to above, is outlined at the relevant parts of this annex.

Annex 2: Assurance Action Plan

Assurance and Notification

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
Prepare an Annual Assurance Statement in accordance with guidance.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing and Data Analysts.	October 2023.	Green.	Committee report and appendices to be presented to Education, Leisure and Housing Committee on 6 September 2023.
Submit Annual Assurance Statement to Scottish Housing Regulator between April and October each year.	Data Analysts.	October 2023.	Green.	On target to be submitted by October 2023.
Make Annual Assurance Statement available to tenants and other service users.	Data Analysts and Tenant Participation Officer.	October 2023.	Green.	To be included in Housing Services' area of website.
Notify Scottish Housing Regulator during the year of any material changes to the assurance in the Annual Assurance Statement.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing and Data Analysts.	As required.	Green.	
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.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing and Team Manager (Maintenance and Heritage).	Ongoing.	Amber*.	In general compliance with our legislative duties links to Standard 1.5 of National Standards for Information and Advice Providers. We were re-accredited by the Scottish Legal Aid Board during 2022. Evidence includes a broad range of Council corporate policies including the Health and Safety Policy; Challenging

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
				<p>Behaviour by Members of the Public: The Role of Customer Service Advisers and All Staff Using the Customer Services Facility; Housing Services' Staff Training and Development Policy; Library Procedure for Housing Services; staff training logs and internal portal which includes a broad range of information on corporate policy areas.</p> <p>Staff management processes are in place across Housing Services including induction, regular one to ones in line with the Line Management Policy and all staff are required to complete the Personal Development Award for Advisors with Shelter at the next intake after taking up post. In addition, structures such as qualified housing officer are in place to encourage housing staff to complete a housing qualification.</p> <p>During 2021 we undertook a review of our equalities policy and the processes relating to equalities data collection and human rights. Our revised Equalities Policy and Action Plan was approved by our Education, Leisure and Housing Committee in June 2021. We sought equalities information from all existing</p>

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
				<p>tenants and housing applicants, in relation to 9 protected characteristics in line with the Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Framework and Scottish Federation of Housing Association Limited's Guidance. Equalities data requested has been expanded across all housing and homelessness service areas accordingly and data will be used as required to ensure continued improvement of service provision.</p> <p>As regards tenant safety, specifically in relation to the points outlined in the Scottish Housing Regulator's guidance of summer 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gas safety is not applicable as Orkney has no mains gas; • As regards electrical safety, we have in place a 5 yearly rolling programme to carry out EICRs and address any remedial works identified from them. An issue arose which affected this in December 2022 and we have been working through a programme to ensure electrical checks and any remedial works

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
				<p>have been undertaken across our stock and have kept the Scottish Housing Regulator informed throughout. At August 2023, 96% of our housing stock holds a valid EICR certificate and we have plans in place in relation to EICRs requiring to be updated over the coming months. In addition, we have implemented an independent check of our performance and data accordingly. We expect to be back to a position of full compliance by autumn 2023.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire safety - We are also working through a programme of implementing the residual aspects of our contract on interlinked smoke alarms. At August 2023, 96% of housing stock is fitted with an interlinked smoke alarm. Again, the Scottish Housing Regulator was kept informed throughout. In addition, we have implemented an independent check of our performance and data accordingly.

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1518 256 2029 730">• Water safety – we have a contract around legionella testing . The contract identifies the requirement to carry out risk assessments to a sample of the housing stock.. We are currently developing a schedule of properties to receive a risk assessment, based on house type and location. We are also in discussion with the contractor who will arrange visits to the identified properties <li data-bbox="1518 772 2007 1023">• Asbestos – The amount of asbestos in our properties is relatively low and is largely confined to common areas that have been surveyed in accordance with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. <li data-bbox="1518 1064 2029 1390">• Our asbestos records are held on an external platform. Details are held of when the property last had an update carried out as well as if any asbestos containing materials were identified.. This platform allows us to monitor and manage through a register, as well as the

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
				<p>online platform, the asbestos present in our properties. In addition we have carried out surveys to our housing stock based on house type and location. These reports have been linked to all houses matching that profile. Additional / update surveys are carried out on a requirement basis with the latest programmed to occur in late September 2023. All of our works orders also have reference to the external platform including its login details for contractor review before commencing work on a property.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radon – we have carried out radon gas testing to 56% of our properties which generated remedial works to 18 properties that have been subsequently completed. The survey data and remedial actions are captured and maintained in a property tracker held by the Council. An update of the review is due to be carried out starting in 2024. This will focus on the properties not

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
				<p>captured in the previous review and those that required remedial works.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damp and mould – a policy on damp and mould is being presented to our Education, Leisure and Housing Committee in September 2023. Staff have received training by the Chartered Institute of Housing this summer and specific procedural training has been arranged for later this year. We are enhancing our structures for the recording, monitoring and addressing cases of damp and mould in our social housing. Where damp and mould has been identified we have put in place joint visits, between Building Inspectors and Housing Officers to provide our tenants with technical and practical assistance and guidance to address the issue. Where fabric issues have been identified as the cause, remedial works have been carried out.

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lift safety – this is not applicable in an Orkney situation as the Council has no social housing which is fitted with lifts. <p>Going forward we will implement revised structures around monitoring of preventative, protective maintenance.</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>Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing / Head of Property, Asset Management and Facilities and Team Manager (Maintenance and Heritage).</p>	<p>In place.</p>	<p>Green.</p>	<p>The Council's Health and Safety Advisor provides guidance on all aspects of health and safety as required. If a report were received from the Health and Safety Executive, immediate steps would be taken to address the issue and the Scottish Housing Regulator would be advised accordingly.</p> <p>We have policies covering issues such as Asbestos and procedures in place regarding Radon / Legionella etc. Our Neighbourhood Services and Infrastructure undertake property inspections and ensure properties are fitted with interlinked smoke alarms etc.</p> <p>Risk assessments and procedural documentation were in place throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure staff and tenants / service users were / are appropriately protected and</p>

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
				supported throughout the COVID-19 crisis and beyond to ensure appropriate protections are in place to mitigate risk.
Make Engagement Plan easily available and accessible to tenants and service users, including online.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing and Data Analysts.	May 2023.	Green.	To be included by link to the Scottish Housing Regulator's website from Housing Services' area of the Council's website.
Register all requirements for providing data to Scottish Housing Regulator and Information Commissioners Office.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing and Head of Legal Services.	In place.	Green.	Housing Services will hold a register of any matters reported to the Scottish Housing Regulator and Legal Services will record all matters reported to the Information Commissioners Office.

Scottish Social Housing Charter Performance

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
Submit Annual Return against the Charter to Scottish Housing Regulator in accordance with published guidance.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing and Data Analysts.	May 2023.	Green.	Submitted by 30 May 2023.
Involve tenants, and where relevant service users, in the preparation and scrutiny of performance information. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree an effective and meaningful approach with tenants. 	Tenant Participation Officer.	In place.	Green.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents' Panel involved in development of annual report as standard. Section in the annual report to encourage feedback. Residents' Panel are invited to an annual presentation on performance from Scotland's Housing; Network

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicise approach to tenants. • Verify approach and evidence involving tenants has happened. • Involve other service users in an appropriate way. 				(from 2019) and discussion at Residents' Panel meeting thereafter.
<p>Report performance to tenants and other service users no later than October each year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree format of performance reporting with tenants and ensure accessible with plain and jargon free language. • Provide 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. 	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing and Data Analysts and Tenant Participation Officer.		Green.	The Council has a joint Residents' Panel with Orkney Housing Association which consists of tenants / residents of both organisations. They are asked for their views on the Annual Report ahead of publication and their views will continue to be taken into account in producing the final document. The Council includes a section in the Annual Report which encourages feedback from tenants more generally on how they feel about the report and the information on it.

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
Make Scottish Housing Regulator report on our performance easily available to tenants including online.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing and Data Analysts.	When produced by SHR.	Green.	To be included as a link to the Scottish Housing Regulator's website from Housing Services' area of the Council's website.

Whistleblowing

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
Ensure effective arrangements and a policy for whistleblowing for staff and elected Members.	Head of HR and Performance.	In place from October 2015.	Green.	Policy on Whistleblowing is available on internal portal or in either electronic or hard copy from HR on request. Trade Unions are also aware of this. There is a monthly meeting with Trade Unions which is corporate and each individual service holds regular meetings with the Trade Unions as well.
Make Whistleblowing policy easily available and promote its existence.	As above.	In place. As above.	Green.	As above.

Tenants and Service Users Redress

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
Make information on reporting any significant performance failures, including the Scottish Housing Regulator's leaflet, available to our tenants.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing and Tenant Participation Officer.	In place from June 2019.	Green.	A link will be provided to the Scottish Housing Regulator's leaflet from the Council's website.

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
Provide tenants and service users with the information they need to exercise right to complain and seek redress.	Team Manager (Housing Strategy, Development and Data).	In place.	Green.	The Council's corporate complaints process is used and corporate policy in line with the guidance from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. Information is available through our website and in hard copy on request.
Respond to tenant complaints within our service standards timescales and in accordance with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman guidance.	Team Manager (Housing Strategy, Development and Data).	In place.	Amber*.	Reporting against timescales is included in the Annual Return against the Charter. Complaints was included in our engagement plan from the Scottish Housing Regulator and complaints data has been provided to the Regulator accordingly. Complaints are being responded to within the required timescales for financial year 2023/24.
Ensure we have effective arrangements to learn from complaints and other tenant and service user feedback, in accordance with SPSO guidance.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing and Head of Legal Services.	In place.	Green.	This links with standard 3.12 of the National Standards for Information and Advice Providers which covers using feedback to inform service provision. Information collected through complaints, comments and customer satisfaction surveys is used to inform the update of the Service Delivery Plan for the relevant service area.

Equality and Human Rights

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
<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>Senior Management Team of the Council.</p>	<p>In place.</p>	<p>Green.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All policies within Housing Services contain a section on equalities. • The Housing Service has a specific Equalities Policy and one on Accessibility and reviewed its Equalities Policy during 2021. Equalities monitoring across 9 protected characteristics has been taken forward in line with the national guidance. We sought equalities information from all existing tenants and housing applicants, in relation to 9 protected characteristics in line with the Scottish Housing Regulator's Regulatory Framework and Guidance from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations. Equalities data requested has been expanded across all housing and homelessness service areas accordingly and data will be used as required to ensure continued improvement of service provision. • Committee reports on policy matters contain a section on equality. • Completion of equality impact assessments is standard.

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Island communities impact assessments are undertaken as required. • The Council monitors its website and ensures it meets website accessibility requirements. • The Council employs a specialist equalities officer to ensure compliance. • Housing staff and staff within our Neighbourhood Services and Infrastructure Service are scheduled to receive refresher training on equalities in the autumn of 2023.
Collect data relating to protected characteristics for existing tenants, new tenants, people on waiting lists and elected Members and staff.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing	In place.	Green.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equalities criteria does not currently apply to elected Members given that they are democratically elected. • Equalities monitoring information across 9 protected characteristics is now collected for new tenants and applicants and information has also been sought in relation to existing tenants also. This is sought along with information relating to requirements for information in a range of formats. • As regards staff, our HR Service collect information relating to 9 protected characteristics for staff

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
				<p>when they apply for any post whether when they initially come into the organisation or where an internal application is submitted. Updates are requested re equalities data through the MyView portal and annual communications are issued to remind staff to update details. The staff survey also requests information relating to the 9 protected characteristics and an annual report is produced on staff diversity which in turn is used to inform any relevant changes to policy required.</p>
Collect data on protected characteristics of people who apply as homeless.	Head of Community Learning, Leisure and Housing.	In place.	Green.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equalities monitoring information is collected for people who apply as homeless. • Our homelessness interview form has been updated to include all 9 protected characteristics.
Collect data on protected characteristics of people who use our Gypsy / Traveller services.	N/A.	N/A.	N/A.	N/A.

* Those requirements marked as “amber” will all revert to green during 2023/24 when the issue has been addressed through ensuring the Council complies with the requirements in the Scottish Housing Regulator’s engagement plan.