

Minute

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee

Wednesday, 9 September 2020, 10:30.

Microsoft Teams.



Present

Councillors Gwenda M Shearer, Alexander G Cowie, Stephen G Clackson, Barbara Foulkes, Steven B Heddle, J Harvey Johnston, W Leslie Manson, John T Richards, John A R Scott, James W Stockan, Magnus O Thomson and Owen Tierney.

Jo Hill.

Clerk

- Sandra Craigie, Committees Officer.

In Attendance

- James Wylie, Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.
- Peter Diamond, Head of Education (Leisure, Culture and Inclusion).
- Frances Troup, Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services.
- Edward Abbott-Halpin, Principal, Orkney College.
- Garry Burton, Sport and Leisure Service Manager (for Items 1 to 4).
- Avril Litts, Accounting Manager (Strategic Finance).
- Lesley Mulraine, Service Manager (Housing and Homelessness).
- Peter Trodden, Solicitor.
- Luke Fraser, Team Leader (Policy and Planning).
- Hazel Flett, Senior Committees Officer.

Observing

- Gareth Waterson, Head of Finance.
- Hayley Green, Head of IT and Facilities (for Items 1 and 2).
- Carol McManus, Service Improvement Officer (for Items 1 to 5).
- Jonathan McCabe, Head Teacher, Eday Primary School (for Items 1 to 5).
- Steven Burnett, Education Resources Manager.
- Keith Foubister, Works and Inspection Manager (for Items 1 to 4).
- Ellis Inkster, Press Officer.

Apologies

- Hugh Halcro-Johnston.
- Mary Maley.

Declarations of Interest

- No declarations of interest were intimated.

Chair

- Councillor Gwenda M Shearer.

1. Revenue Expenditure Outturn

After consideration of a joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, the Executive Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Accounting Manager (Strategic Finance), the Committee:

Noted:

1.1. The revenue expenditure outturn statement in respect of Education, Leisure and Housing for financial year 2019/20, attached as Annex 1 to the joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, the Executive Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Finance, indicating the following:

- A net General Fund underspend of £260,700.
- A net Non-General Fund underspend of £58,200.

The Committee scrutinised:

1.2. The explanations given and actions proposed in respect of significant budget variances, as outlined in the Budget Action Plan, attached as Annex 2 to the joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, the Executive Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Finance, and obtained assurance that action was being taken with regard to significant budget variances.

2. Revenue Expenditure Monitoring

After consideration of a joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, the Executive Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Accounting Manager (Strategic Finance), the Committee:

Noted:

2.1. The revenue financial summary statement, in respect of services for which the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee was responsible, for the period 1 April to 30 June 2020, attached as Annex 1 to the joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, the Executive Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Finance, indicating the following:

- A net General Fund overspend of £253,300.
- A net Non-General Fund overspend of £112,100.

2.2. The revenue financial detail by service area statement, in respect of service areas for which the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee was responsible, for the period 1 April to 30 June 2020, attached as Annex 2 to the joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, the Executive Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Finance.

The Committee scrutinised:

2.3. The explanations given and actions proposed in respect of significant budget variances, as outlined in the Budget Action Plan, attached as Annex 3 to joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, the Executive Director of Corporate Services and the Head of Finance, and obtained assurance that action was being taken with regard to significant budget variances.

3. Housing Revenue Account

Revenue Repairs and Maintenance Programme – Expenditure Outturn

After consideration of a joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services, the Committee:

Noted:

3.1. The summary outturn position of expenditure incurred for financial year 2019/20 against the approved revenue repairs and maintenance programme in respect of the Housing Revenue Account, as detailed in section 4.2 of the joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance, which indicated an underspend of £55,800 as at 31 March 2020, against an approved budget totalling £1,303,200.

The Committee scrutinised:

3.2. The detailed analysis of expenditure figures and progress updates against the approved programme, attached as Appendix 1 to the joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance, and obtained assurance with regard to significant budget variances and progress made with delivery of the approved revenue repairs and maintenance programme in respect of the Housing Revenue Account.

4. Housing Revenue Account

Revenue Repairs and Maintenance Programme – Expenditure Monitoring

After consideration of a joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services, the Committee:

Noted:

4.1. The summary position of expenditure incurred, as at 30 June 2020, against the approved revenue repairs and maintenance programme in respect of the Housing Revenue Account, as detailed in section 4.2 of the joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance.

The Committee scrutinised:

4.2. The detailed analysis of expenditure figures and progress updates against the approved programme, attached as Appendix 1 to the joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance report, and obtained assurance with regard to significant budget variances and progress made with delivery of the approved revenue repairs and maintenance programme in respect of the Housing Revenue Account.

5. Education Scotland

Inspection of Eday Primary School and Nursery Class

After consideration of a report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Head of Education (Leisure, Culture and Inclusion), the Committee:

Noted:

5.1. That, on 5 February 2020, the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee scrutinised Education Scotland's evaluation of Eday Primary School and Nursery Class and recommended that an update on progress made in respect of the improvement areas identified be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee scrutinised:

5.2. Progress made in respect of the improvement areas identified by Education Scotland in relation to the inspection of Eday Primary School and Nursery Class, as detailed in sections 4 to 6 of the report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, and obtained assurance that action had been taken or agreed as necessary.

6. College Management Council Sub-committee

After consideration of the draft Minute of the Meeting of the College Management Council Sub-committee held on 31 August 2020, copies of which had been circulated, the Committee:

Resolved, on the motion of Councillor Gwenda M Shearer, seconded by Councillor W Leslie Manson, to approve the Minute of the Meeting of the College Management Council Sub-committee held on 31 August 2020, attached as Appendix 1 to this Minute, as a true record.

7. Low Cost Home Ownership Scheme – Proposed Golden Share

After consideration of a report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Team Leader (Policy and Planning), the Committee:

Noted:

7.1. That, on 5 February 2020, the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee deferred consideration of a request from Orkney Housing Association Limited towards implementation of a Golden Share in new supply Shared Equity properties developed in Kirkwall, to the next meeting of the Committee, to enable officers to provide clarity on the concept of Golden Share.

7.2. Further information in relation to the Golden Share scheme, as detailed in section 5 of the report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, together with the Scottish Government guidance, attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Committee resolved to **recommend to the Council:**

7.3. That the request from Orkney Housing Association Limited towards implementation of a Golden Share in new supply Shared Equity properties developed in Kirkwall be supported.

8. Housing Service – Annual Assurance Statement

After consideration of a report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services, the Committee:

Noted:

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

The Committee resolved to **recommend to the Council:**

8.2. That the Annual Assurance Statement, together with supporting Annexes 1 and 2, attached as Appendix 2 to this Minute, be approved for submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

9. Tenant Satisfaction Survey

After consideration of a report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Service Manager (Housing and Homelessness), the Committee:

Noted:

9.1. That a wholesale tenant satisfaction survey was required by the Scottish Social Housing Charter, the process for which was detailed and prescriptive for landlords with up to 1,500 tenants, including achieving a return rate of 40%.

9.2. That the results of the process, referred to at paragraph 9.1 above, were used by the Scottish Housing Regulator as part of the process of regulating Local Authority Housing Services.

9.3. That, between March and May 2020, a tenant satisfaction survey was undertaken by an independent body, IBP Strategy and Research, on behalf of the Council, the results of which were summarised in section 4 of the report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.

9.4. That, due to COVID-19, a higher proportion of replies to the tenant satisfaction survey was obtained by telephone interview.

10. Modifying Local Connection Referrals in Scotland

Consultation of Ministerial Statement

After consideration of a report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services, the Committee:

Noted:

10.1. That the current homelessness legislation, including that covering local connection, had worked well for Orkney.

10.2. That, in April 2019, the Council submitted a response to the previous consultation by the Scottish Government on Local Connection and Intentionality Provisions in the Homelessness Legislation.

10.3. That, following consideration of the results of the consultation referred to at paragraph 10.2 above, the Scottish Government gave a commitment to prepare and publish a Ministerial Statement setting out the circumstances in which, and the general criteria by reference to which, the power to modify local connection was to be exercised.

10.4. That the Scottish Government had issued a consultation on the Ministerial Statement for Modifying Local Connection Referrals in Scotland, for which responses were required by 23 October 2020.

10.5. The Council's draft response to the consultation on the Ministerial Statement for Modifying Local Connection Referrals in Scotland, attached as Appendix 1 to the report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.

The Committee resolved to **recommend to the Council:**

10.6. That powers be delegated to the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee, to amend the Council's response to the consultation by the Scottish Government on the Ministerial Statement for Modifying Local Connection Referrals in Scotland and thereafter submit the response, on behalf of the Council, by the deadline of 23 October 2020.

11. Conclusion of Meeting

At 12:05 the Chair declared# the meeting concluded.

Signed: Gwenda M Shearer.

Minute

College Management Council Sub-committee

Monday, 31 August 2020, 13:30.

Microsoft Teams.



Present

Councillors Alexander G Cowie, J Harvey Johnston, W Leslie Manson and Gwenda M Shearer.

Community Representatives:

Beverly Clubley and Peter Slater.

Student Representative:

Francesca Meneghetti.

Clerk

- Sandra Craigie, Committees Officer.

In Attendance

- James Wylie, Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.
- Paul Kemp, Strategic Finance Manager.
- Peter Trodden, Solicitor.
- Craig Walker, Senior HR Adviser.

Observing

- Hazel Flett, Senior Committees Officer.
- David Hartley, Communications Team Leader.

Orkney College

- Edward Abbott-Halpin, Principal.
- Andie John Seatter, Staff Representative.
- Iain Wilkie, Staff Representative.

Apologies

- Councillor Stephen G Clackson.
- Malcolm Graves, Community Representative.
- Rebecca May, Business Representative.
- Steven Sinclair, Business Representative.

Not Present:

- Roy Brown, Business Representative.
- Mark Jones, Business Representative.

Declaration of Interests

- No declarations of interest were intimated.

Chair

- Beverly Clubley.

1. Form of Voting

The Sub-committee resolved that, should a vote be required in respect of the matters to be considered at this meeting, notwithstanding Standing Order 21.4, the form of voting should be by calling the roll or recorded vote.

2. Revenue Expenditure Outturn

After consideration of a joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Principal, Orkney College, the Sub-committee:

Noted:

2.1. The revenue outturn statement in respect of Orkney College for financial year 2019/20, attached as Annex 1 to the joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance, indicating a net surplus of £58,200, and a total reserve of £62,900.

The Sub-committee scrutinised:

2.2. The explanations given and actions proposed in respect of significant budget variances, as outlined in the Budget Action Plan, attached as Annex 2 to joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance, and obtained assurance that action was being taken with regard to significant budget variances.

3. Revenue Expenditure Monitoring

After consideration of a joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance, copies of which had been circulated, and after hearing a report from the Principal, Orkney College, the Sub-committee:

Noted:

3.1. The revenue financial detail in respect of Orkney College for the period 1 April to 30 June 2020, attached as Annex 1 to the joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance, indicating a net surplus of £84,100.

The Sub-committee scrutinised:

3.2. The explanations given and actions proposed in respect of significant budget variances, as outlined in the Budget Action Plan, attached as Annex 2 to the joint report by the Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing and the Head of Finance, and obtained assurance that action was being taken with regard to significant budget variances.

4. Conclusion of Meeting

At 13:51 the Chair declared the meeting concluded.

Signed: B Clublely.

Annual Assurance Statement

Organisation: 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 of 9 September 2020.

Signed

(Chair of Education, Leisure and Housing Committee).

Annex 1.

Key points relating to the Council's performance

The information in this annex relates to performance areas of the report. 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 for financial year 2019 to 2020 has been completed for Orkney Islands Council for submission to the Scottish Housing Regulator by 31 May 2020. Areas of performance which required additional explanation are as follows (the indicators referred to are nationally required):

Satisfaction Survey

The Council undertook a wholesale tenant survey in 2020 in line with the Scottish Social Housing Charter. It was determined that it was appropriate to do this every 2 years as opposed to every 3 to ensure closer alignment with the current tenant base. This recorded high levels of tenant satisfaction with the majority of indicators relating to satisfaction recording improvements from the previous survey.

The tenant survey was undertaken by an independent body to ensure tenants felt able to openly express their views. This exercise has been undertaken jointly with Orkney Housing Association Ltd to share costs.

The tenant survey has been completed during lockdown with a proportion of surveys being completed by telephone. The Customer Satisfaction Survey is the topic of another report being presented to this cycle of meetings.

As regards the indicator "opportunities to participate", there has been a significant rise in satisfaction from 63.22% in 2018 to 2019 to 83.78% in 2019 to 2020. During 2019 to 2020, the Council undertook a significant review of its lettings policy and also its policy on suspensions. There was a sizeable consultation process as part of that and tenants were involved through surveys and two meetings, one in Kirkwall and one in Stromness.

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, although the response rate is low (with the exception of repairs customer satisfaction).

This information is used to inform the Housing Service's relevant Service Delivery Plan.

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.

Indicator 6 (Scottish Housing Quality Standard Compliance)

The Council has assessed 31.2% of its stock over the last 5 years as a result of surveys undertaken relative to energy performance and new build completion. In addition, a rolling programme of stock condition / assessment of compliance will be undertaken on 10% of housing stock annually.

Data has been compiled on the renewal cycle for core property elements such as windows, doors, kitchens and bathrooms. This provides accurate data based on historic renewal data and update surveys are carried out 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 will be further automated over the next period subject to issues with gaining access due to COVID-19 guidance regarding social distancing. Undertaking works on core property elements should also assist with improving tenant satisfaction with the quality of tenant homes (indicator 7) in older stock, and satisfaction has risen from 75.99% in 2018 to 2019 to 87.76% for 2019 to 2020.

The Council's in-house resource incorporates accredited Energy Assessors (Scotland) staff and has resulted in a significant survey programme and modern EPCs are held for the majority of the housing stock. The Council also complies with statutory testing procedures – for example, electrical periodic inspection reporting, legionella, radon etc – which ensures that it is reviewing and inspecting properties at regular intervals.

The Council has focused on ensuring it delivers the Scottish Housing Quality Standard 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, although recently there has been a movement towards having a small number of cloned properties.

A specific module has been developed in the asset management system, Concerto, which now facilitates recording of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. While the module was being developed, the opportunity was taken to undertake a refresh of data and an initial stock review with a view to reducing the level of abeyances and exemptions and ensuring data held was appropriately robust. At the same time the depth of information held on Concerto has been enhanced. This has led to a sustained reduction in abeyances and exemptions. It has however resulted in an increase in the number of properties failing the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. However, most of these are marginal fails and the intention would be to address nearly all to a Scottish Housing Quality Standard pass in 2020 to 2021.

The properties which currently fail the Scottish Housing Quality Standard have been reappraised and a detailed plan agreed regarding relevant measures. There is some overlap with properties which are currently Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing fails and these will be addressed as one process to ensure whichever is the higher of the standards, is the priority to allow a pass. An updated report of current fails is provided regularly and as the opportunity arises, these are addressed. The hard to treat properties are being looked at on the basis of fitting positive pressure heat pump systems, however there were difficulties with finding a contractor who was able to progress this over the last year.

There is a recognition that challenges may arise in an island context given that contractors have recently resumed work following lockdown and relatively small contractors now have a backlog of work whether non-emergency repairs, Scottish Housing Quality Standard / Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing works and a short timescale for completion. However, currently this remains an aspiration and discussions with contractors will be ongoing.

Indicator 9

The installation and development of the new computer system, Concerto, has been completed. Possibilities surrounding a handheld app to be shared with contractors are being investigated which would further enhance the current functionality. While this continues to be investigated, currently it cannot be rolled out due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The time to complete emergency repairs decreased from 8.34 hours for financial year 2018 to 2019 to 6.28 hours for 2019 to 2020. New processes have been implemented where the Council's in-house Building Inspectors / Clerk of Works undertake some of the emergency repairs themselves where they are able to do so. This has been a key factor in reducing the time taken to undertake emergency repairs.

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 increased from 10.27 days for financial year 2018 to 2019 year to 11.53 days in 2019 to 2020. The Council continues to work closely with contractors and aims to improve its performance indicators wherever possible. One of the main factors in the decline in performance for non-emergency repairs relates to contractors being very busy and there being difficulties in obtaining sub-contractors with availability. Some of the contractors have been successful in expanding their staff teams and tried to restructure their processes which is positive. In general terms, prior to the COVID-19 crisis, Orkney held the lowest unemployment level in the UK so recruitment can be challenging.

Some analysis of cases has been undertaken where the time to complete the repair was in excess of 20 days to determine what the key issues were in such cases. While this relates to a minority position (approximately 12% of non-emergency repairs), it is generally as a result of shortages in key trades including electricians. This has impacted negatively on our overall timescales. The contractors have endeavoured to increase their staffing but recruitment can remain challenging given the traditionally low unemployment level in Orkney.

Repairs customer satisfaction is high at 91.04% which is very positive. Our recorded number of completed surveys for this year is lower than previously recorded for this indicator. This is because it was identified as an area for improvement in our last audit by an independent assessor, and this related to ensuring that the data used definitely related purely to the last repair which had been undertaken.

Indicator 14

The percentage of offers of housing refused has risen from 34.75% for financial year 2018 to 2019 to 37.17% for 2019 to 2020.

Previously operational procedures were enhanced to ensure that the prospective tenants were being contacted prior to an offer being made, and this had greatly reduced the number of refusals received. Over the last year 60% of prospective tenants either could not be reached by telephone or were homeless applicants who were being offered in relation to discharge of duty and therefore issues with being given 4 area choices were not applicable.

However, while these operational procedures will continue in relation to contacting prospective tenants ahead of offer, the Council's lettings policy was substantially reviewed during 2019 to 2020 and therefore a new lettings policy will be implemented, based on the principles of choice, by April 2021.

Indicator 15

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 Ltd 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.

Indicator 16

Statistics relating to the Council's overall tenancy sustainment (indicator 16) shows either improved or sustained performance. As regards the indicator relating to tenancy sustainment (others) this relates to the Syrian Resettlement Programme. Given the small statistical group, the reasons for this are not detailed in this paper.

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. The Housing Support and Homelessness aspects of our service are registered with the Care Inspectorate and these obtain good inspection grades and staff are registered with the SSSC accordingly.

Indicator 17

Void (empty property) loss decreased from £40,470 in 2018 to 2019 to £23,480 in 2019 to 2020, which represents a decrease in the percentage of rent due to properties being empty from 1.13% to 0.64%. Various factors contribute to this reduction. Fewer new tenancies have been created totalling 72 in 2019 to 2020 as opposed to 94 in 2018 to 2019 and no new builds have been completed during the year. In addition, improvements have continued in relation to the Council's voids procedures. There are regular joint

meetings between our Building Inspectors and Housing Officers with the specific aim of reducing void periods.

Indicator 20

As regards data relating to medical adaptations, the number of adaptations required is demand led and this totalled just 31 adaptations during financial year 2019 to 2020 as opposed to 50 during 2018 to 2019.

Indicator 22

During 2019 to 2020, the Council recorded one eviction from just three court cases initiated. Eviction is always treated as an absolute last resort. Unfortunately, in this set of circumstances there was simply no alternative after all other options were exhausted.

Indicator 27

The customer satisfaction survey shows that 81% of Council tenants stated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the value for money of their rents.

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

Gross arrears have risen to 11.22% for financial year 2019 to 2020 from 9.09% for financial year 2018 to 2019. A further analysis of this figure shows that current tenant arrears have risen to 7.03% for financial year 2019 to 2020 from 4.72% in 2018 to 2019.

The introduction of Full Service Universal Credit in September 2018 has adversely impacted on the Council's performance in relation to recovery of rent arrears and this has been a factor nationally. The level of housing costs received directly has fallen from £1.49 million in 2018 to 2019 to £1.45 million in 2019 to 2020 and a system of inputting payments manually has impacted on a small staffing resource adding complexities for a small Housing Revenue Account.

Investigations are underway surrounding the potential to automate Universal Credit payments. This project is currently on hold due to COVID-19 restrictions. Future progression of automation will depend on affordability.

In order to endeavour to mitigate the rise in arrears, joint working has been increased with Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau and implemented procedures to refer tenants in arrears for advice at the initial point of contact whether that contact is with Housing Services or Revenues.

A review of the Council's policy on discretionary housing payments has been undertaken so that discretionary housing payments go directly into rent accounts to prevent misdirection by the tenant.

As a result of COVID-19, improvements have been made to IT structures to facilitate home working and accordingly investigations have begun into the potential for an SMS automatic messaging system to interconnect with the rent system to notify tenants as soon as a payment is missed. Again, progression will depend on affordability.

Housing staff have been asked to treat rent arrears as an absolute priority (though from a perspective of support and understanding given the situation currently surrounding COVID-19). Challenges are affecting the ability to recover arrears as a result of the impact of COVID-19. It is likely there will be increased economic impacts on jobs in the near future and staff are ensuring that tenants are given appropriate advice on applying for Universal Credit where this is applicable and are referred for debt counselling as appropriate.

The percentage of former tenant arrears in 2019 to 2020 decreased to 4.2% from 4.37% in 2018 to 2019.

The Council continues to actively and prudently pursue former tenant arrears rather than write-off, although this continues to be detrimental to the overall rent arrears performance. Write-offs for financial year 2019 to 2020 were reduced due to the impact of COVID-19 on a small staff base in late March and otherwise would have been in the region of £15,000.

A specialist post called Housing Officer (Income Collection) was established some years ago to supplement the role of Housing Officers with the aim to reduce the level of rent arrears and other housing debt outstanding. Currently this post is vacant and recruitment difficulties have been experienced as a result of Orkney, prior to the COVID-19 crisis, recording the lowest unemployment rate in the UK. The post is currently being restructured with a view to being able to undertake recruitment shortly and it is hoped there may be greater success with recruitment in the future.

Indicator 30

As regards the average length of time taken to relet properties, a total of 72 properties were relet during financial year 2019 to 2020. The total number of calendar days they were empty was 2,577 giving a relet time of 35.79 days which is lower than financial year 2018 to 2019 which recorded 52.93 days. This figure is affected by a small number of properties which are subject to low demand and consequently were vacant for an extended period of time. During 2019 to 2020 this applied to just two properties with 224 and 287 days void respectively.

Annual Report for Tenants

The annual report for tenants will be produced by 31 October 2020 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 Ltd 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 on it.

The Residents' Panel will also be involved in discussions around the Annual Assurance Statement prior to submission. Remote communication methods will be explored accordingly.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

The Council is required to undertake a wholesale tenants' satisfaction survey every 3 years. The Council does this in partnership with Orkney Housing Association Ltd in order to reduce costs and produces the customer satisfaction survey biennially. This is undertaken by an independent body in order to ensure impartiality and was most recently done during 2020.

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 to inform any service improvements accordingly.

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.

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. Their engagement plan related to financial year 2019 to 2020 and will be reviewed in due course. Currently the indicators where it has indicated it wishes engagement with the Council are:

- Tenants satisfied with the opportunities to participate in the landlord's decision-making.
- Satisfaction with the quality of home.
- Hours to complete emergency repairs.
- Days to complete non-emergency repairs.
- Anti-social behaviour cases resolved within local targets.

- Average days to re-let properties.
- Gross rent arrears of rent due.

The results of these indicators have been explained in the section above relating to the Annual Return against the Charter and the section on Customer Satisfaction. More detail on the Customer Satisfaction Survey for 2020 is the topic of another report to this cycle of meetings.

COVID-19 has impacted on the production of the Scottish Housing Regulator's Engagement Plan for 2020 to 2021 and it is anticipated that this will be published in due course.

It is anticipated that three areas may be highlighted as requiring additional focus and these are likely to be:

- Days to complete non-emergency repairs.
- Gross rent arrears of rent due.
- Percentage of stock meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

The results of these indicators have been explained in the section above relating to the Annual Return against the Charter.

Impact of COVID-19

The information above relates to the position surrounding performance predominantly in relation to service delivery in a "normal" operating context.

While Housing Services endeavoured to operate as normally as possible throughout lockdown, there was still significant disruption. Face to face provision of services has been removed currently and throughout the lockdown period the focus was on delivery of essential services including homelessness, housing support and emergency repairs.

While many services have now resumed, COVID-19 is likely to continue to cause disruption for the foreseeable future and consequently the likelihood is that there will be an impact on performance figures for financial year 2020 to 2021.

The impact on the economy, along with a rising number of people either being on furlough (and therefore a reduced income) or facing unemployment is likely to impact negatively on rent arrears. In addition, demand for Council housing is also anticipated to rise.

It is anticipated that homelessness will continue to rise predominantly as a result of family breakdown including domestic abuse, as restrictions are released. Similarly, there is the potential for tenancy sustainment to be affected.

Restrictions on house moves, along with related services being closed including removal firms, carpet layers, furniture stores etc, has meant that for a 3 month period, Council properties were not been allocated as normal.

Contractors resumed operation on 29 June 2020 after three months of being unable to function. Consequently a backlog of work is being progressed including non-emergency repairs, the turnover of void (empty) properties, works required to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing. In addition, delivery of the Council's house build projects will have been delayed.

While every attempt will be made to ensure that performance remains as high as possible, there is a need to recognise that the precise impact on financial year 2020 to 2021 cannot yet be determined and will remain under close scrutiny.

In common with all other social housing providers across Scotland, the Council is currently providing additional performance information to the Scottish Housing Regulator, Scottish Government and COSLA so that the impact of COVID-19 can be appropriately quantified on key indicators including homelessness, repairs, allocations and re-lets.

Assurance Action Plan

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
Assurance and Notification.				
Prepare an Annual Assurance Statement in accordance with guidance.	Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services and Technology Officers.	October 2020.	Green.	Committee report and appendices to be presented to Education, Leisure and Housing Committee on 9 September 2020.
Submit Annual Assurance Statement to Scottish Housing Regulator between April and October each year.	Technology Officers.	October 2019.	Green.	On target to be submitted by October 2020.
Make Annual Assurance Statement available to tenants and other service users.	Technology Officers and Tenant Participation Officer.	October 2020.		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 Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services and Technology Officers.	As required.	Green.	

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
<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>Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services and Works and Inspection Manager.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p>	<p>Green.</p>	<p>This links to Standard 1.5 of National Standards for Information and Advice Providers. Evidence includes a broad range of Council corporate policies including the Health and Safety Policy; Challenging 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. 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>Notify Scottish Housing Regulator of safety matters which have been reported to or investigated by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or</p>	<p>Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services / Works and Inspection Manager.</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>

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
reports from other regulatory or statutory authorities or insurance providers, relating to safety concerns.				<p>We have policies covering issues such as Asbestos and procedures in place regarding Radon / Legionella etc. Our Development and Infrastructure Services undertake property inspections and ensure properties are fitted with smoke alarms etc.</p> <p>Recently we have introduced risk assessments and procedural documentation to ensure staff and tenants / service users are appropriately protected and supported throughout the COVID-19 crisis.</p>
Make Engagement Plan easily available and accessible to tenants and service users, including online.	Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services and Technology Officers.	May 2019.	Green.	<p>To be included by link to the Scottish Housing Regulator's website from Housing Services' area of the Council's website.</p> <p>Once the revised engagement plan is issued for 2020, this will be updated accordingly.</p>
Register all requirements for providing data to Scottish Housing Regulator and Information Commissioners Office.	Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services 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.

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
Scottish Social Housing Charter Performance.				
Submit Annual Return against the Charter to Scottish Housing Regulator in accordance with published guidance.	Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services and Technology Officers.	May 2020.	Green.	Submitted by 31 May 2020.
<p>Involve tenants, and where relevant service users, in the preparation and scrutiny of performance information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree an effective and meaningful approach with tenants. • Publicise approach to tenants. • Verify approach and evidence involving tenants has happened. • Involve other service users in an appropriate way. 	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. • Invite Residents' Panel to annual presentation on performance from Scotland's Housing; Network (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 	Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services and Technology Officers 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

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
<p>with tenants and ensure accessible with plain and jargon free language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 				<p>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.</p>
<p>Make Scottish Housing Regulator report on our performance easily available to tenants including online.</p>	<p>Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services and Technology Officers.</p>	<p>When produced by SHR.</p>	<p>Green.</p>	<p>To be included as a link to the Scottish Housing Regulator's website from Housing Services' area of the Council's website.</p>

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
Whistleblowing.				
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.

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
Tenants and Service Users Redress.				
Make information on reporting any significant performance failures, including the Scottish Housing Regulator's leaflet, available to our tenants.	Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services and Tenant Participation Officer.	June 2019.	Green.	A link will be provided to the Scottish Housing Regulator's leaflet from the Council's website.
Provide tenants and service users with the information they need to exercise right to complain and seek redress.	Team Leader (Policy and Planning).	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 Leader (Policy and Planning).	In place.	Green.	Reporting against timescales is included in the Annual Return against the Charter.
Ensure we have effective arrangements to learn from complaints and other tenant and service user feedback, in accordance with SPSO guidance.	Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services 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.

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
Equality and Human Rights.				
<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. • Committee reports on policy matters contain a section on equality. • Completion of equality impact assessments is standard. • The Council monitors its website and ensures it meets website accessibility requirements. • The Council employs a specialist equalities officer to ensure compliance.
<p>Collect data relating to protected characteristics for existing tenants, new tenants, people on waiting lists and elected Members and staff.</p>	<p>Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services.</p>	<p>In place.</p>	<p>Green.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equalities criteria does not apply to Elected Members given that they are democratically elected. • Equalities monitoring information is collected for new tenants along with information relating to requirements for information in a range of formats. Information collected includes age, disability, race and sex. We do not collect this for all protected characteristics on the basis of data protection. We have to be clear on the reason why we need the information.

Requirement.	Who.	When.	RAG.	Comments.
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will review the information collected on a regular basis and will follow best practice.
Collect data on protected characteristics of people who apply as homeless.	Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services.	In place.	Green.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equalities monitoring information is collected for people who apply as homeless as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age, disability, marriage, race, sex, pregnancy and maternity. We do not collect this for all protected characteristics on the basis of data protection. We have to be clear on the reason why we need the information. We will review the information collected on a regular basis and will follow best practice.
Collect data on protected characteristics of people who use our Gypsy / Traveller services.	N/A.	N/A.	N/A.	N/A.