

Item: 8

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 31 March 2021.

Housing Services – Performance Monitoring.

Report by Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing.

1. Purpose of Report

To advise on the performance of Housing Services during financial year 2019/20.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That housing organisations are required to report performance against a number of service areas and indicators within the Scottish Social Housing Charter.

2.2.

Performance in relation to the undernoted range of service areas within Housing Services for the reporting period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, as detailed in Appendix 1 to this report:

- Customer Satisfaction.
- Housing Quality and Maintenance.
- Access to Housing and Support.
- Homelessness.
- Neighbourhood and Community.
- Getting Good Value from Rents.
- Re-lets and Voids.
- Customer/Landlord Relationship.

2.3.

Areas of positive performance within Housing Services for the reporting period, as follows:

- High levels of customer satisfaction.
- Low levels of repairs reported as emergencies.
- Low levels of repairs per property.
- Low levels of abandonments/evictions.
- Reductions in re-let times.

- Improved void performance.
- Low levels of former tenant arrears written off.

2.4.

Areas where performance within Housing Services could potentially be improved or continue to be improved, as follows:

- Slightly higher levels of properties recorded as being exemptions from the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.
- Time to complete non-emergency repairs.
- High percentage of tenancies ending in arrears and rising debt.
- Rising rent arrears.

2.5.

That, as part of the performance monitoring processes for 2019/20, the Annual Assurance Statement required by the Scottish Housing Regulator was approved by Council in October 2020.

The Committee is invited to scrutinise:

2.6.

Performance in relation to the range of service areas within Housing Services for the reporting period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, as detailed in Appendix 1 to this report, in order to obtain assurance.

3. Background

3.1.

The Council is a member of Scotland's Housing Network, previously known as Scottish Housing Best Value Network having joined a number of years ago.

3.2.

Scotland's Housing Network is an organisation that offers a benchmarking service to councils who wish to be members. It also offers other related services including sub-groups to discuss good practice and peer review to use council staff to assess services offered by other councils as a reciprocal arrangement.

3.3.

Membership is optional, as is attendance at sub-groups and taking part in peer reviews. However, in order to benefit from the service, each council must provide detailed data on its performance in relation to a range of service areas.

3.4.

Scotland's Housing Network undertakes a benchmarking service amongst all member councils. This is useful as it allows a comparison and identification of each council's weaker areas and also allows identification of top performers which can be beneficial when seeking to improve service areas. Most members are happy to share information and provide guidance in areas where their performance is good.

3.5.

Membership of the peer group is detailed at section 6.2 below. Western Isles Council, being an authority which has transferred its housing stock, is part of a separate peer group.

3.6.

The service areas covered include void management, stock turnover, rent arrears, homelessness, repairs and Scottish Housing Quality Standard.

3.7.

Members were previously advised of offers made to the Council in relation to making the best use of membership of Scotland's Housing Network, including training opportunities.

3.8.

Representatives from Scotland's Housing Network presented a report to the Housing and Homelessness Service of Orkney Islands Council, by Microsoft Teams, on the Council's performance relative to other councils during 2019/20 and also gave their analysis of the findings.

3.9.

Scotland's Housing Network also offer discussion forums online and has developed a self-assessment website to assist member authorities make progress in relation to adopting a greater emphasis on performance management and improve services accordingly.

4. Scottish Social Housing Charter

4.1.

Housing organisations are required to report against the Scottish Social Housing Charter which was introduced in 2012 and reviewed in 2017.

4.2.

Councils are required to publish an Annual Report against the Charter and this was done in October 2020. The Annual Report is available from:

<https://www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/H/housing-services-annual-reports.htm>

4.3.

Information on the Scottish Social Housing Charter is available from:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-housing-charter-april-2017/>

5. Recent Changes

5.1.

The Scottish Housing Regulator introduced the requirement for an annual assurance statement to be submitted from October 2019. This is a process whereby the Scottish Housing Regulator looks for assurances from local authorities that Elected Members have been informed of performance across the Housing Service and are satisfied that the governance process is sufficiently robust to allow them to sign off the certificate of assurance.

5.2.

The Annual Assurance Statement for Orkney was recommended for approval by the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee on 9 September 2020 and subsequently approved by Council on 6 October 2020.

5.3.

The Annual Assurance Statement for Orkney is available from:

<https://www.orkney.gov.uk/Service-Directory/H/annual-assurance-statement-housing-services.htm>

6. Orkney's Performance by Comparison

6.1.

Scotland's Housing Network has implemented a system of peer groups in order to compare performance with other relevant Councils. Orkney's peer group includes "all small councils" which is deemed to be those which hold housing stock of less than 10,000.

6.2.

The peer group includes:

- Angus Council.
- Clackmannanshire Council.
- East Dunbartonshire Council.
- East Lothian Council.
- East Renfrewshire Council.
- Midlothian Council.
- Perth and Kinross Council.
- Shetland Islands Council.
- South Ayrshire Council.

- Stirling Council.
- The Moray Council.
- Hebridean Housing Partnership.
- Orkney Housing Association Limited.

6.3.

As well as looking at comparison in performance between Orkney and other members of the peer group, as detailed in section 6.2 above, it is important to assess performance for various other reasons, including:

- To ensure that ‘the direction of travel’ is towards improvement.
- To critically assess and analyse where further improvements could be made.
- Where another Council has performed better, to consider whether any of their practices would assist in this area.
- To ensure that, in Orkney, the Council continues to look at the areas where performance can be assessed and a determination made as to whether there are other areas that could be included.
- To ensure that assessment is continual, but equally to ensure that this information is used for valid purposes, being to consistently improve the services offered.

6.4.

The following areas have been covered:

- Customer Satisfaction.
- Housing Quality and Maintenance.
- Access to Housing and Support.
- Homelessness.
- Neighbourhood and Community.
- Getting Good Value from Rents.
- Re-lets and Voids.
- Customer/Landlord Relationship.

6.5.

The performance information is detailed in Appendix 1 to this report. Where available, data is displayed for a three-year period.

7. Direction of Travel

7.1.

Scotland’s Housing Network provides a summary outlining good performance and areas where improvements could be made.

7.2.

Positive performance for Orkney for 2019/20 includes:

- High levels of customer satisfaction.
- Low levels of repairs reported as emergencies.
- Low levels of repairs per property.
- Low levels of abandonments/evictions.
- Reductions in re-let times.
- Improved void performance.
- Low levels of former tenant arrears written off.

7.3.

Areas where performance could potentially be improved or continue to be improved for Orkney are as follows:

- Slightly higher levels of properties recorded as being exemptions from the Scottish Housing Quality Standard.
- Time to complete non-emergency repairs.
- High percentage of tenancies ending in arrears and rising debt.
- Rising rent arrears.

8. 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.

9. Financial Implications

There are no significant financial implications arising directly from the recommendations to this noting report.

10. Legal Aspects

10.1.

Housing (Scotland) Act 2010, Section 31, provides Scottish Ministers with the power to set standards for social landlords. The standards are enforced by the Scottish Housing Regulator through such actions as their inspections of Local Authorities.

10.2.

Various national performance indicators are set and all Local Authorities are required to report against these on an annual basis.

10.3.

In terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003 the Council has a duty to deliver services in terms of best value principles, and an aspect of best value is continuous improvement. An integral part of complying with the above is performance monitoring.

11. Contact Officers

James Wylie, Executive Director of Education, Leisure and Housing, extension 2401, Email james.wylie@orkney.gov.uk.

Frances Troup, Head of Housing, Homelessness and Schoolcare Accommodation Services, extension 2177, Email frances.troup@orkney.gov.uk.

12. Appendix

Appendix 1: Performance Information.

Appendix 1: Performance Information

1. Customer Satisfaction

1.1.

Members were previously advised of the outcome of the wholesale tenant satisfaction survey that the Council is required to do every three years. The Council has undertaken to do this every two years in order to ensure the data is more current.

1.2.

The table below shows the level of tenant satisfaction relating to key charter outcomes in comparison to Scotland's Housing Network and peer group averages:

Indicator from the Scottish Social Housing Charter at time of Survey.	Orkney level.	Scotland's Housing Network average.	Peer Group Average.
Overall service provided by landlord (indicator 1).	91.9%.	89.2%.	86.2%.
Percentage of tenants who feel their landlord is good at keeping them informed about their services and decisions (indicator 2).	92.4%.	92.0%.	88.1%.
Percentage of tenants satisfied with the opportunities given to them to participate in their landlord's decision making processes (indicator 5).	83.8%.	87.2%.	81.8%.
Percentage of tenants satisfied with the quality of their home (indicator 7).	87.8%.	87.2%.	85.4%.
Percentage of tenants who have had repairs or maintenance carried out in the last 12 months satisfied with repairs and maintenance service (indicator 12).	91.0%.	90.8%.	90.7%.
Percentage of tenants satisfied with the management of the neighbourhood they live in (indicator 13).	86.0%.	87.4%.	86.6%.
Percentage of tenants who feel the rent for their property represents good value for money (indicator 29).	80.7%.	83.6%.	83.5%.

1.3.

While the above satisfaction figures relate to the wholesale tenant satisfaction survey of 2020 and are therefore current, consideration needs to be given to updating tenant satisfaction information between major surveys which some councils have done. In Orkney, while information is collected in various forms, response rates are generally low which may result in statistical distortions. The wholesale tenant satisfaction survey requires a 40% response rate.

2. Housing Quality

2.1.

The area of repairs is one where context is particularly relevant with some councils setting very challenging timescales for completion well ahead of the legislative requirement. Orkney's geography presents some challenges in that respect.

2.2.

The number of repairs per property is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	1.6.	3.3.	3.0.
2018/19.	1.6.	3.4.	3.2.
2017/18.	1.7.	3.4.	3.3.

2.3.

The figures above are positive and would indicate that the Council's stock is in good condition.

2.4.

The level of repairs raised as emergencies is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019 to 2020.	15.6%.	29.7%.	28.4%.
2018 to 2019.	15.3%.	29.0%.	30.3%.
2017 to 2018.	16.3%.	32.1%.	26.8%.

2.5.

The time taken to complete emergency repairs in hours is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	6.3.	3.6.	4.0.
2018/19.	8.3.	3.7.	4.2.
2017/18.	7.3.	4.0.	3.9.

2.6.

The percentage of emergency repairs completed on time are as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	92.7%.	98.0%.	95.1%.
2018/19.	83.8%.	97.4%.	93.1%.
2017/18.	92.9%.	96.9%.	92.9%.

2.7.

The time taken to complete non-emergency repairs in days is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	11.5.	6.4.	7.5.
2018/19.	10.3.	6.6.	8.9.
2017/18.	10.9.	6.4.	7.7.

2.8.

All reactive repairs completed Right First Time were:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	88.3%.	92.4%.	89.5%.
2018/19.	87.9%.	95.2%.	89.8%.
2017/18.	88.7%.	93.6%.	91.4%.

2.9.

The percentage of all categories of repairs completed on time is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	87.2%.	95.2%.	91.4%.
2018/19.	85.6%.	95.3%.	91.9%.
2017/18.	88.6%.	92.2%.	91.4%.

2.10.

The time taken to deliver non-emergency repairs has declined slightly from the previous year. Some analysis has been undertaken of cases 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 overall timescales. Contractors will endeavour to increase their staffing where this is relevant and viable.

2.11.

However, the time taken to deliver emergency repairs has improved over the year. New processes have been implemented where our 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 implementation of a mobile app is now well underway with the Council's main Measured Term Contractor trialling the system prior to full implementation with their service. It is anticipated this will allow increased accuracy of reporting time to complete repairs.

2.12.

While the contractor operates an appointments system for repairs, this is not within the control of the Council and consequently the Council states that it does not offer a repairs appointments system. Ideally the Council should be fully involved in this process. Many landlords do offer an appointments system and report against this accordingly. We are considering how to further develop this process.

2.13.

The average time to complete a medical adaptation in days is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	31.4.	41.5.	34.9.
2018/19.	33.3.	49.4.	41.7.
2017/18.	30.2.	48.1.	41.8.

2.14.

The Council was required to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by March 2015 and maintain the standard thereafter. The Council must also ensure that its properties meet the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing with the first target was December 2020. Consequently, Committee receives an annual update report at the June cycle of meetings, regarding progress towards this.

2.15.

The level of stock meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	92.3%.	94.4%.	95.6%.
2018/19.	89.8%.	94.1%.	96.4%.
2017/18.	91.8%.	94.2%.	96.5%.

2.16.

Traditionally Orkney has recorded a higher proportion of properties recorded as an exemption or abeyance than is true for Scotland generally. At present this is broadly average at 3.47% of the Council's stock in comparison to a peer group average of 3.32% and an average of all Scottish Local Authorities of 4.02%.

2.17.

A property may be classified as being in abeyance when work cannot be done for 'social' reasons relating to tenants' or owner-occupiers' behaviour for example where owner-occupiers in a mixed ownership block do not wish to pay a share of a secure door entry system and do not consider it to be necessary. Another example would be where the tenant is elderly or suffering from a medical condition that has led them to feel that they do not wish work to be undertaken on their home at this point in time.

2.18.

A property can be classified as an exemption where the property is capable of meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard on a particular element but the landlord believes it is not possible to meet it for technical or legal reasons or because the cost is considered disproportionate.

2.19.

During the year 2019 to 2020 a specific module has been being developed in the Concerto computer system. The opportunity was taken to refresh data held and undertake an initial stock review. This has led to a reduction in the level of abeyances and exemptions. There have also been improvements in the depth of information held on the Council's stock. This has led to a significant reduction in abeyances and exemptions. Abeyances have reduced from 31 in 2017 to 2018 to 16 by 2019 to 2020. Exemptions have reduced from 34 in 2017 to 2018 to 17 by 2019 to 2020. However, in turn this has caused a temporary increase in the number of properties failing the Scottish Housing Quality Standard. Fails have risen from 3 properties at year end in 2017 to 2018 to 40 recorded as failing the Scottish Housing Quality Standard over the next year in 2019 to 2020. Most of these are marginal fails and works are ongoing to address the reason for failure on the majority of the properties concerned during this financial year.

2.20.

Progress towards meeting the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing, by December 2020, is well underway. The level of stock meeting the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	86.8%.	85.8%.	78.5%.
2018/19.	84.7%.	84.5%.	77.1%.
2017/18.	81.5%.	79.9%.	73.7%.

2.21.

Overall, for the category of housing quality, the Council is showing positive performance towards meeting the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing, the Council scores positively in respect of the timescale for medical adaptations and a low number of repairs are undertaken per property. Delivery of the repairs service generally is broadly average with some repairs taking longer than the average across Scotland. The level of exemptions for Scottish Housing Quality Standard locally at 1.79% is higher than the national Local Authority average of 1.16% and energy efficiency presents some challenges.

3. Access to Housing and Support

3.1.

Lets to households by type are shown in the table below:

Year.	Homeless Households.	Waiting List Applicants.	Transfer Applicants.	Other.
2019/20.	31.0%.	49.0%.	21%.	0%.
2018/19.	28.7%.	56.4%.	12.8%.	0.2%.
2017/18.	31.3%.	54.7%.	14.1%.	0.0%.

3.2.

Lets to homeless households were 42% across Scotland's Housing Network and 47.11% in respect of the peer group average.

3.3.

The turnover of properties is shown in the table below:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	8.6%.	8.4%.	7.4%.
2018/19.	10.9%.	8.6%.	8.1%.
2017/18.	14.3%.	8.6%.	7.8%.

3.4.

Tenancy turnover impacts on void rental loss, former tenant arrears and tenancy sustainment.

3.5.

The percentage of tenancy offers refused is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	36.6%.	34.2%.	38.8%.
2018/19.	34.8%.	36.3%.	39.2%.
2017/18.	49.3%.	35.9%.	38.7%.

3.6.

The percentage of offers refused has improved significantly from 49.3% in 2017 to 2018 to 36.6% for financial year 2019 to 2020.

3.7.

The reasons for this are that operational procedures have been enhanced. While applicants are given four area choices, in practice they may not take an offer if it is not in the area of first choice. Therefore, additional steps have been introduced to contact the prospective tenant, prior to offer, (where possible) to ensure their circumstances have not changed and that they would be interested in the potential offer etc. This has greatly reduced the number of refusals received.

3.8.

A revised lettings policy is scheduled to be implemented from 1 April 2021. The COVID-19 situation has delayed implementation, but it is anticipated to be implemented in the near future. The new policy will include increasing the level of choice in Council housing allocations.

3.9.

Tenancy offers may be refused for various reasons. For example, their circumstances may have changed and they no longer wish to live in that area.

3.10.

Abandonments as a percentage of housing stock is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	0.12%.	0.57%.	0.5%.
2018/19.	0.1%.	0.6%.	0.6%.
2017/18.	0.5%.	0.6%.	0.5%.

3.11.

The percentage of all new tenancies sustained from the previous year was as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	90.4%.	89.1%.	88.8%.
2018/19.	88.4%.	88.8%.	89.5%.
2017/18.	90.3%.	88.4%.	89.9%.

3.12.

The reasons for some tenancies not being sustained included households leaving Orkney, health or employment reasons, being rehoused elsewhere and other changes in family circumstances. This indicator is about the personal circumstances of the households concerned and not necessarily within the control of the council.

3.13.

As regards the level of sustainment of new homeless tenancies, this was as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	88.9%.	88.1%.	86.5%.
2018/19.	87.5%.	87.9%.	87.2%.
2017/18.	88.4%.	87.5%.	87.5%.

3.14.

Tenancies not being sustained for longer than a year, where the tenant was previously homeless, are affected by individual household circumstances. In 2017 to 2018, this related to 5 households. Of these three were rehoused either by the Council or in the private sector and two households left Orkney. For 2018 to 2019 the reasons related to households moving outwith Orkney, returning to the family home and other changes in family circumstances. For financial year 2019 to 2020, two households did not sustain their tenancies one moved outwith Orkney and the other returned the family home.

3.15.

The level of evictions as a percentage of housing stock was as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	0.12%.	0.31%.	0.26%.
2018/19.	0.0%.	0.4%.	0.3%.
2017/18.	0.4%.	0.4%.	0.3%.

3.16.

Overall for the category for Access to Housing and Support, the level of evictions and abandonments remain very low. Tenancy sustainment has improved in respect of both all new tenancies and new homeless tenancies, the level of refusal of offers has risen slightly and the turnover of tenancies has improved. No areas show cause for concern.

4. Homelessness

4.1.

The Committee receives an update report on the level of homelessness in Orkney annually at the June cycle. That report contains significant levels of performance information. Consequently, only key indicators are covered below.

4.2.

The number of homeless presentations was as follows:

Year.	No of homelessness presentations.
2019/20.	118.
2018/19.	134.
2017/18.	119.

4.3.

As a national comparator, the national average for homeless presentations per 1,000 people is 6.9 cases. In Orkney there are 5.1 cases per 1,000 people.

4.4.

Locally the number of homelessness presentations peaked at 208 in 2004 to 2005 and annual figures have been lower since then. It is unlikely this trend will continue when legislative changes affecting people's entitlements are factored in. Under normal circumstances utilising a housing options approach and the implementation of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan may assist in the reduction of cases. The COVID-19 impact has seen a rise in homelessness presentations and this will affect performance for 2020 to 2021.

4.5.

From 1 April to 15 February 2021, homeless presentations totalled 111. If it continues at that level until 31 March 2021, a total of 127 presentations could be expected. It is anticipated that a significant increase in homelessness presentations will be evidenced as a result of the COVID-19 situation. It is important to remember that homelessness may not happen at a continuous pace throughout the year, instead there can be periods with higher and lower presentations so this calculation may or may not be accurate.

4.6.

The average time from homeless presentations to completion of duty in weeks was as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.
2019/20.	30.	34.
2018/19.	18.9.	34.8.
2017/18.	24.	34.

4.7.

The assessment outcomes were as follows:

Outcome.	Orkney.		Scotland's Housing Network	
	2018/19.	2019/20.	2018/19.	2019/20.
Housed by Council.	40.0%.	29.4%.	40.9%.	55.2%.
Housing by Housing Association.	40.0%.	41.2%.	25.0%.	16.5%.
Private Rented Sector.	0.0%.	5.9%.	4.72%.	5.5%.
Returned to friends etc.	6.7%.	11.8%.	4.17%.	4.2%.
Lost Contact.	0.0%.	0.0%.	12.7%.	
Hostel.	0.0%.	0.0%.	1.0%.	0.1%.
Returned to previous accommodation.	13.3%.	5.9%.	4.5%.	5.0%.
Other outcomes.	0.0%.	5.9%.	7.1%.	13.5%.

4.8.

The length of stay (in days) in the Council's furnished temporary accommodation is as detailed below:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.
2019 to 2020.	193.	184.
2018 to 2019.	111.	180.
2017 to 2018.	138.	171.

4.9.

Overall for the category of Homelessness, the Council is good at tenancy outcomes, the average time to close a case and time in temporary accommodation. No areas show cause for concern.

5. Neighbourhood and Community

5.1.

The prevalence of anti-social behaviour is determined by the number of complaints per 100 tenancies, as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer group.
2019/20.	1.1.	7.6.	5.3.
2018/19.	1.9.	7.5.	7.6.
2017/18.	1.9.	7.9.	8.0.

5.2.

Orkney generally has a low level of anti-social behaviour with few cases of serious anti-social behaviour. Issues generally constitute complaints of noise including parties, disposal of waste or failure to dispose of waste appropriately and disputes regarding parking and shared gardens.

5.3.

The level of anti-social behaviour cases, resolved within locally agreed targets, is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer group.
2019/20.	66.7%.	94.1%.	88.6%.
2018/19.	83.3%.	87.9%.	84.3%.
2017/18.	55.6%.	83.5%.	76.1%.

5.4.

This indicator is slightly problematic in that "locally agreed targets" may differ significantly from each other.

5.5.

While a review of the policy and procedures on anti-social behaviour has been undertaken to ensure targets are similar to those used elsewhere in Scotland, our tiny numbers lead to statistical distortions. In financial year 2019 to 2020 – the figures represent a total of 9 cases where 2 remained open. This is in comparison to 2018 to 2019 where there were 18 cases and 1 remained open.

6. Getting Good Value from Rents

6.1.

The average weekly rent is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer group.
2019/20.	£79.56.	£80.76.	£75.91.
2018/19.	£77.85.	£79.08.	£69.53.
2017/18.	£75.55.	£75.44.	£67.10.

6.2.

The annual rental increase at 1.8% is below the Scotland's Housing Network average of 2.5% and peer group average of 2.9%.

6.3.

The level of rent collected as a percentage of rent due is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	94.8%.	99.3%.	99.1%.
2018/19.	98.2%.	99.1%.	98.9%.
2017/18.	98.8%.	99.4%.	99.2%.

6.4.

The information outlined above represents the total amount of rent collected over the year from both current and former tenants for the current and previous years as a percentage of rent due in the reporting year.

6.5.

The gross rent arrears (including both current and former tenants) as a percentage of rent due is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	11.3%.	5.8%.	7.6%.
2018/19.	9.1%.	5.7%.	7.7%.
2017/18.	8.4%.	5.4%.	7.5%.

6.6.

Current rent arrears as a percentage of annual gross rent due is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	7.0%.	3.8%.	4.6%.
2018/19.	4.7%.	3.6%.	4.2%.
2017/18.	3.4%.	3.5%.	4.3%.

6.7.

While generally Orkney's performance in relation to collecting rent from current tenants has been consistently above average across Scotland as a whole, the roll out of Universal Credit in September 2018 impacted on rent collection generally. This situation was replicated nationally. However, rent collection has declined and recovery of arrears is vital to the health of the Housing Revenue Account. The Council continues to actively pursue rent arrears and has consistently increased its focus on arrears recovery over the course of financial year 2020 to 2021.

6.8.

The table below shows the percentage of tenants in arrears annually at 31 March:

Date.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.
31 March 2020.	20.9%.	31.9%.
31 March 2019.	20.2%.	32.6%.
31 March 2018.	17.5%.	32.0%.

6.9.

As regards the service of notices of proceedings for recovery of possession (NOP), the data is as follows:

Year.	Number of Notices Served.	Number proceeding to court.	Number of eviction decrees obtained.
2019/20.	20.	3.	1.
2018/19.	24.	11.	0.
2017/18.	38.	16.	0.

6.10.

The level of Notices served has changed in recent years due to pre-action requirements being introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010.

6.11.

Obtaining an eviction decree does not always result in the tenant being evicted. For instance, the tenant may clear their arrears or begin making regular payments towards the debt and the decision may be taken to offer a new tenancy instead. The Council may have duties under the homelessness legislation to re-house households they have previously evicted.

6.12.

The percentage of tenants who had arrears at the point their tenancy ended was as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.
2019/20.	61.1%.	39.2%.
2018/19.	49.5%.	36.6%.
2017/18.	45.2%.	37.4%.

6.13.

The average debt at termination of tenancy was as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.
2019/20.	£839.	£750.
2018/19.	£712.	£692.
2017/18.	£786.	£656.

6.14.

The level of former tenant arrears as a percentage of rent due was as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	4.2%.	2.0%.	2.9%.
2018/19.	4.4%.	2.0%.	3.5%.
2017/18.	5.0%.	2.1%.	3.1%.

6.15.

Nationally there are high levels of former tenant arrears written-off. Orkney adopts a prudent approach to write-offs and endeavours to collect former tenant arrears. However, at 31 March 2020, the process of writing off former tenant arrears was delayed due to COVID-19. Had write-off been completed on time, it would have been 9.1%. The figures are as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	0.0%.	34.4%.	31.4%.
2018/19.	19.8%.	38.0%.	31.4%.
2017/18.	17.0%.	34.8%.	24.1%.

6.16.

It remains important to ensure that former tenant arrears are continually reviewed to ensure that the most appropriate action continues to be taken to recover the debts outstanding and to analyse procedures to see if improvements can be made. These are difficult types of debt to recover and in some instances may take many years to clear.

7. Re-Lets and Voids

7.1.

Overall, the average time in days for re-let of properties was as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	35.8.	31.8.	41.0.
2018/19.	52.9.	31.9.	38.7.
2017/18.	49.1.	30.7.	36.6.

7.2.

As regards the reduction in the average time to re-let properties at 7.1 above, 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. This compares with four properties which in total were vacant for 2922 days in 2018 to 2019.

7.3.

Void rental loss percentages are shown in the table below:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer Group.
2019/20.	0.6%.	0.9%.	1.1%.
2018/19.	1.1%.	0.9%.	1.0%.
2017/18.	1.8%.	0.7%.	0.9%.

7.4.

Various factors contribute to the reduction in void rental loss outlined at paragraph 7.3 above. There have been fewer new tenancies - 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, there have been sustained improvements in the operational procedures surrounding voids. There are regular joint meetings between frontline staff in Housing Services and Development and Infrastructure with the specific aim of reducing void periods.

7.5.

As regards the category of Value for Money, the Council can evidence positive performance in respect of the level of its annual rental increase and level of former tenant arrears written off. However, rent collection has declined and gross arrears (both current and former tenant arrears) have increased. The percentage of tenants who had arrears at the point at which their tenancy ended has increased as has the level of the arrears at that point in time. A consistent focus on arrears is being maintained to try and improve the position surrounding rent collection.

7.6.

As regards the situation with re-lets and voids however, it is important to remember that these can be affected by a small sample size being disproportionately affected by a differential in respect of longer term vacancies in low demand and sheltered stock. A small differential in respect of sample size can lead to potentially large percentage increases in this figure. However, for financial year 2019 to 2020, both indicators evidence significant improvement.

8. Customer/Landlord Relationship

8.1.

In 2019 to 2020, the Council had a budget of £22,400 assigned to tenant participation. The budget covers our part-time Tenant Participation Officer, the cost of setting up tenants' meetings and focus groups, providing grants to tenants' groups and attending meetings. Orkney's small size creates a distortion in terms of the level of spend per tenant.

8.2.

Orkney's level of spend on tenant participation is compared to the Scotland's Housing Network and peer group average in the table below:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer group.
2019/20.	£23.98.	£8.96.	£13.49.
2018/19.	£26.17.	£13.25.	£16.06.
2017/18.	£27.29.	£9.97.	£11.92.

8.3.

As regards complaints per 100 homes, this is as follows:

Year.	Orkney.	Scotland's Housing Network.	Peer group.
2019/20.	5.9.	5.1.	4.0.
2018/19.	4.3.	4.7.	3.8.
2017/18.	4.6.	4.1.	3.0.