

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 26 SEPTEMBER 2023**

**HOUSING SERVICES PERFORMANCE UPDATE - ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT**

**REPORT BY ALISON SMITH, DIRECTOR OF VIBRANT COMMUNITIES AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH**

**ABSTRACT**

This report gives an update on the Council's performance in relation to housing services, what action is being taken to improve performance, and provides information to support members to agree the annual assurance statement required by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR).

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) notes the Council's performance in relation to its statutory obligations for housing services;
- (ii) agrees that the evidence provided is sufficient to assure members that the Council is meeting its statutory obligations in relation to housing services with the exceptions noted;
- (iii) approves the draft Annual Assurance Statement attached as Appendix 1; and
- (iv) notes the Scottish Social Housing Charter Return results detailed in Appendix 2.

**2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN**

2.1 This report contributes to the following priorities contained within the Council Plan 2023 – 2028.

- **Caring for Our Place**

We will ensure that our housing estate is well maintained and invest in improvements.

**3. BACKGROUND**

3.1 As outlined in detail in Report No 175/19 in May 2019, all Scottish social landlords are required to ensure their governing bodies are assured that they are meeting their statutory obligations in relation to housing. This is demonstrated by the submission of an Annual Assurance Statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR).

3.2 Members agreed the above report which outlined what evidence would be provided to members to ensure they could be assured that the Council continues to meet its statutory obligations in relation to housing.

**4. CURRENT POSITION**

4.1 Through the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC), the Scottish Housing Regulator assesses the level of risk associated with the activities carried out by all social landlords. In March of each year, they publish an annual engagement plan which outlines why they are working with each landlord, what the landlord needs to do and what it needs to provide. This year, Angus Council's engagement plan identified us as a medium risk landlord based on a number of areas including services for people who are homeless, service quality, stock quality and tenant and resident safety. We are therefore providing regular updates to the Regulator on how we are addressing any concerns. The engagement plan is published [here](#).

- 4.2 While the current engagement plan is based on performance reported for the year 2021/22, it should be noted that although performance has improved in a small number of areas in 2022/23 (the period covered by this Annual Assurance Statement), there are others where it has worsened. Performance against the ARC Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is outlined in Appendix 2.
- 4.3 Many of the challenges being faced by the Service are part of a wider set of issues being experienced across the housing sector, particularly those related to homelessness, availability of housing supply, rent arrears and voids. These issues and possible solutions, are being examined at a national level and have been described in some detail in a recent report by [SOLACE](#), written in collaboration with the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers. These strategic and systemic issues are coupled with some unique challenges for Angus resulting from multiple service reviews (Community Housing Teams and Homelessness) which have impacted on the Service's resilience, serious contract failures and changes to the allocation policy. This means that while the overall trends in relation to performance reductions are consistent with what it being experienced right across the country, Angus has started from a lower base and found it challenging to identify and respond to the issues promptly.
- 4.4 It should also be noted that in the past few weeks some specific issues with reporting information related to voids performance have been identified. This has highlighted that there may be inaccuracies in data supplied to the Regulator specifically on void rent loss. Work is ongoing to identify the issue and address it and the Service has notified the Regulator.
- 4.5 The Housing Services' current Performance Management Framework (PMF) has been in place since 2018. A review of this is underway which will also consider the relationship between the PMF and the Service's governance arrangements. In response to particular areas of concern around voids, customer service and complaints, communication, allocations and performance management, a number of short-term service priority projects have been established to take forward improvements in these areas. Some of these projects crossover with the existing PMF and others have identified gaps in governance which need to be addressed. It is anticipated that the service priority areas will form the basis of the new PMF and governance arrangements. Members should be aware that this Annual Assurance Statement represents a period of transition as the Service navigates through some complex changes to how it manages performance and delivers critical improvements.
- 4.6 The following evidence is or has been provided in accordance with Report No 175/19:
- Charter Return Results (Appendix 2): this appendix summarises how the Council is performing in relation to each of the areas covered by the Charter and what we are doing to deal with any areas of poor or declining performance. All indicators used to compile the ARC return, are defined in the [Technical Guidance](#) issued and regularly reviewed by the Regulator.
  - Housing capital and revenue budget performance – Report No 38/23 was agreed by Committee in February 2023 and it set out the actual Capital and Revenue spend to 31 December each year together with projected outturns for the full financial year and any required updated capital funding proposals
  - HRA Rent setting and budget strategy – Report No 39/23 was agreed by Committee in February 2023 and it set out the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget strategy for the period of 2023/24 to 2026/27 and sought approval of rent levels and other associated charges for the forthcoming year. It also set out estimated income and expenditure for the following year, capital investment proposals, affordability assessment and recommended a continued programme of investment in new and existing stock.
  - Scrutiny Panel: We were unable to hold Scrutiny Panels in 2020/21 and 2021/22 due to the reluctance of tenants to engage with this online, which was the only option available to us due to restrictions and despite advertising this widely through our engagement channels. We resurrected some activity in 2022/23 but there was exceptionally low interest from tenants. Tenant Participation was for several years carried out by the former Communities Team on behalf of the Housing Division. Following the restructuring of Vibrant Communities, it was agreed that Tenant Participation moves back into the Housing Division structure. It is hoped that this new

structuring will enable better engagement with our tenants and be more aligned to Housing priorities.

- Housing Improvement Team (HIT) reports: Annual reports from each HIT are provided at the [How We Perform](#) pages on angus.gov.

## **5. ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT**

- 5.1 To comply with the Regulatory Framework, the governing body must decide whether the service is meeting all its statutory obligations. The governing body must provide an annual assurance statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator by October of each year either stating that they are assured the landlord is meeting all its statutory obligations or outlining areas of material non-compliance and steps being taken to rectify them.
- 5.2 In light of the information provided to members, it is recommended that the draft Annual Assurance Statement attached as **Appendix 1** is submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator stating that the Council is meeting all its statutory obligations, with some exceptions noted. The agreed statement must also be published so that service users are aware of the Council's position, and, as such, we intend to publish the finalised statement on the Housing Blog.
- 5.3 The Regulator has asked all social landlords to refer to their equalities data collection systems and consideration of adopting a human rights approach to their services in this year's statement. In addition, the Regulator has also asked landlords to refer specifically to various factors affecting tenant safety.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (IF APPLICABLE)**

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

An Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

**NOTE:** The background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) which were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report are:

- Report No 175/19 - New Regulatory Framework for Housing Services and Annual Assurance Statement

**REPORT AUTHOR: CATHERINE JOHNSON, SERVICE LEADER - HOUSING**

**EMAIL DETAILS: [communities@angus.gov.uk](mailto:communities@angus.gov.uk)**

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Draft Annual Assurance Statement

Appendix 2 – Scottish Social Housing Charter Return: Results