
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

5 September 2023

Audit & Scrutiny Committee

Title: Annual Assurance Statement to the Scottish Housing Regulator 2022/23

Purpose: To advise the Committee of the Council's Annual Return on the Charter 2022/23 submission, and request endorsement of the Annual Assurance Statement to be submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Recommendation: That the Committee: (i) notes the Annual Return on the Charter submission 2022/23; (ii) notes the supporting evidence provided to demonstrate compliance with the regulatory framework; (iii) notes the Council's non-compliance with our gas, electrical and fire safety legal responsibilities, but also notes that all outstanding gas safety checks for 2022/23 have now been carried out; and (iv) authorises the Chair to sign the Annual Assurance Statement at Appendix 1.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Scottish Housing Regulator's framework for the regulation of social housing in Scotland includes the requirement for an Annual Assurance Statement to be submitted alongside the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC). The statement must be approved by the appropriate Committee within the organisation prior to submission.
- 1.2 This report provides information on performance reported in the ARC, highlighting areas of high or improving performance, declining performance, or requiring improvement, and areas of non-compliance attributable to no access issues. The report also provides information on how the Council gains assurance that it is compliant with the Regulatory Framework.
- 1.3 Endorsement of the Annual Assurance Statement will ensure that the Council complies with regulatory requirements set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 sets out the statutory objectives, functions, duties, and powers of the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR), a non-ministerial department responsible for regulating social housing in Scotland.

- 2.2 In 2012, the Scottish Government's Social Housing Charter was established. It sets out the standards and outcomes that tenants, homeless people, homeowners, and gypsy/travellers can expect from social landlords. This is monitored via landlords' ARC submissions to the SHR.
- 2.3 In February 2019, the Scottish Housing Regulator issued a revised framework for the regulation of social housing in Scotland. The new framework includes the requirement for landlords to submit an Annual Assurance Statement which has been agreed by a Board or Committee within the organisation. The Council must provide assurance that it complies with the relevant requirements of Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework.
- 2.4 The Assurance Statement is confirmation that, as a landlord, the Council:
- meets all legal duties and responsibilities, and adheres to relevant guidance and the requirements of other regulators
 - meets its statutory duties to prevent and alleviate homelessness
 - adheres to statutory guidance from the Scottish Housing Regulator
 - takes account of regulatory advice from the Scottish Housing Regulator and from other regulators
 - complies with all regulatory requirements

The Council must also confirm plans to fix any instances where there is a material non-compliance and notify the SHR about any material changes in their level of assurance during the year.

- 2.5 North Ayrshire Council's 2022/23 ARC was submitted to the SHR on 31 May 2023. The return provided details of the Council's performance across a range of indicators within the Charter Outcomes. Prior to submission of the ARC, a meeting was held on 26 May 2023 with the North Ayrshire Network (NAN), which is our tenant group with representation from local Tenants and Residents Associations (TARAs). At the meeting a range of indicators were discussed, with information on levels of performance and a comparison to 2021/22 provided to the NAN members.
- 2.6 The SHR requires landlords to provide assurance in their Statement that they have developed an effective approach to the collection of equalities information and that they have considered how they can adopt a human rights approach in their work.
- 2.7 As a landlord, North Ayrshire Council collects data relating to each of the protected characteristics for existing tenants, new tenants, people on waiting lists, governing body members, staff, people who are at risk of homelessness and service users on our Gypsy/ Traveller site. A systems review is currently being undertaken alongside our partner landlords within the North Ayrshire Housing Register, which incorporates further development of our approach to collation of equalities data within the brief for the review. Access to good quality housing is recognised as a basic human right and providing this to everyone in North Ayrshire is a key priority, such as; ensuring accommodation is provided to homeless households, tenancy sustainment, dedicated site to meet the needs of Gypsy/ Travellers, standards of Council-owned accommodation are well maintained and continuing to deliver our new house building programme.

Performance

2.8 Comparative information from other local authorities for the 2022/23 ARC is not yet available; the 2021/22 comparisons from the Scottish Social Housing Charter show that North Ayrshire Council remains a top performing local authority housing service. Of the 37 indicators reported in 2021/22, ranked against other Scottish local authorities North Ayrshire is in:

- The top quartile for 14 indicators (38%)
- The second quartile for 8 indicators (22%)
- The third quartile for 10 indicators (27%)
- The bottom quartile for 5 indicators (13%)

2.9 It was reported in the 2021/22 Annual Assurance Statement report that levels of performance were unlikely to be maintained or improved in the 2022/23 ARC return, due to the continued impact of the pandemic and issues regarding access. This position should, however, be reflected nationally. When the 2022/23 comparisons are published, indicators will be scrutinised to determine areas for improvement, and plans developed accordingly.

2.10 Housing Services have developed a Performance Management Framework to ensure monthly monitoring is in place with regards to future ARC returns and other performance related data required for the SHR and internal scrutiny. A Housing Transformation Board has also been established to monitor improvement workstreams to increase performance in areas such as, rent arrears, aids & adaptations, asset management, repairs policy and homeless prevention.

2.11 The areas highlighted below identify key areas of high/improving performance in 2022/23, alongside areas where there has been a decline, or improvement is required.

Areas of high or improving performance

2.12 Tenant satisfaction is high in terms of overall services as a landlord (88.74%), and opportunities for tenants to participate and keep informed about services (85.49%) and decisions (91.88%). Performance in this area is based on our tri-annual tenant satisfaction survey, which took place during summer 2021 to provide an updated position for the 2021/22 ARC submission. The next survey is scheduled to take place during summer 2024.

2.13 The percentage of antisocial behaviour cases resolved during 2022/23 was 92.82%, an increase of 8.58% on last year's performance of 84.24%. Our performance against locally agreed targets is 99.56% of cases resolved within agreed timescales, against a target of 94%.

2.14 Approaches for homeless assistance in North Ayrshire reduced by 4% in 2022/23 compared to the previous year. The annual national performance statistics have not been released; however, the Scottish Government has reported that homelessness is at the highest level since records began. The main reason for homelessness in North Ayrshire during 2022/23 was as a result of a relationship breakdown, accounting for 239 approaches (22%). This is followed by people being asked to leave the family home, which accounted for 203 (19%) approaches.

2.15 Satisfaction levels of tenants who had repairs or maintenance carried out in the last 12 months has increased from 85.71% to 86.16% since 2021/22. This is based on an increased number of responses (1,254 tenants) received during 2022/23. Work is being carried out to ascertain the most appropriate method of collating this performance information to support continuous improvement in the number of responses received.

Areas with a decline in performance or requiring improvement

2.16 There has been a decline in performance relating to the adaptations process, with the number of households waiting on an adaptation to their home increasing from 142 in 2021/22 to 465 in 2022/23. The average number of days to complete an approved adaptation also increased from 74.33 to 92.38 days. A joint improvement group, with membership from the Health and Social Care Partnership, Housing, Building Services and Property Management and Investment, are currently reviewing existing processes to consider ways to achieve the best possible outcome for tenants and demonstrate best value for their rent.

2.17 The average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs increased slightly from 2.61 hours in 2021/22 to 2.64 hours, and from 7.66 to 8.42 days for non-emergency repairs. The decrease in performance is due to skilled labour shortages, material supply issues, covid absences and increased number of repairs. Despite the decrease in performance, we remain within our four-hour target for emergencies as per North Ayrshire Council's Housing Repairs Policy.

2.18 The average time taken to re-let properties increased slightly from 22.38 days in 2021/22 to 23.99 days in 2022/23. During 2022/23 void performance was impacted slightly due to resources being re-directed to the refurbishment of Glebe Place in Saltcoats to deliver homes for Ukrainians displaced by the war.

2.19 The percentage of tenancy offers refused during the year increased slightly from 34.76% to 37.24%. This is attributable to an increase in refusals from tenants on the housing waiting list who have an identified accessible housing need who are looking to transfer from an existing tenancy. We don't impose any penalties to applicants for refusing offers of housing that are made via the North Ayrshire Housing Allocation Policy. This could have led to applicants receiving multiple offers of housing and refusals being made, therefore the decline in performance may not be a true reflection. Also, through local knowledge and feedback, we have been made aware that applicants' expectations are for housing or re-housing in our new build developments. In order to evidence the impact a detailed analysis of refusals will be carried out as part of the review of the allocation policy during 2023/2024.

2.20 Gross rent arrears as a percentage of rent due increased from 6.63% in 2021/22 to 7.14% in 2022/23. The Scottish Government placed a limited ban on the enforcement of evictions in Scotland for rent arrears under £2,250 which is in place until at least 30 September 2023, it is our expectation that this will be extended until March 2024, through extension of the current legislation by the Scottish Government. Housing Operations staff have been undertaking our escalation process to recover rent arrears where possible and have re-started court action for rent arrears over £2,250. We continue to take a welfare-based approach, contacting tenants and offering general advice/assistance on welfare benefits, income maximisation and alternative ways to

pay rent due to the impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. This will allow us to improve performance and support our tenants.

- 2.21 There were no court actions resulting in eviction during 2021/22, due to - in line with COVID-19 guidance - no court actions being initiated for rent arrears, antisocial behaviour, or other reasons. For 2022/23 the number of court actions resulting in eviction increased to 100%, however this is based on one case for antisocial behaviour.
- 2.22 Rent arrears attributed from tenants in receipt of Universal Credit has increased by 4.5%, in comparison to a decrease of 15% the previous year. A review of our welfare rights and debt advice cases indicates that tenants are experiencing significant financial difficulty following the pandemic and the effects of the cost-of-living crisis. We have a higher number of tenants in crisis and cases are more complex than pre-pandemic. Housing Services' transformation workstream for rent arrears will allow us to analyse tenants affected by further migration to Universal Credit and the impact on rent collection. This will be done alongside Financial Inclusion Services to ensure the impact on tenants is mitigated as far as possible.

Area of non-compliance

- 2.23 During 2022/23, 106 properties did not receive their annual gas safety check within the statutory timescales. The biggest challenge that North Ayrshire Council has faced over the reporting year has been gaining access to properties to carry out statutory compliance works following persistent and unprecedented levels of access refusals post pandemic.
- 2.24 All efforts were made to ensure compliance at the earliest opportunity and appropriate records were kept; we have considered this a material non-compliance and informed the SHR during 2022/23 of the expected outcome. All 106 of the properties which failed compliance during 2022/23 were completed by 28 February 2023.
- 2.25 In April 2020 new legislation was introduced which reduced the statutory inspection regime for electrical installations from ten to five years with a target compliance date of 31 March 2022. The pandemic interrupted the testing programme which resumed during 2021. At the end of 2022/23, 4,555 properties were non-compliant, 34% of our total housing stock.
- 2.26 Property Management & Investment engaged two contractors during 2021 to undertake the testing programme to ensure compliance was achieved by the 31 March 2022 deadline. However, accessing properties remains a challenge as noted above, with an access rate between 40% and 60% dependent on the locality. The Council's access policy has been extended to enable electrical inspections to be undertaken, similar to the arrangements already in place for gas compliance checks.
- 2.27 All efforts were made to ensure compliance at the earliest opportunity and appropriate records were kept; we have considered this a material non-compliance and the SHR was informed during 2022/23 of the expected outcome. Property Management and Investment have been providing monthly updates to the SHR since 31 March 2023.
- 2.28 On 1 February 2022, new legislation was introduced with regards to the installation of interlinked smoke detection equipment. An extensive programme of retrofitting

devices was planned and undertaken by Building Services and an external contractor, however, at the end 2022/23 100 of our 13,253 properties (0.75%) were non-compliant due to access issues.

- 2.29 The Council's access policy has been extended to include this area of compliance. As a result, significant improvement has been made with only three homes remain non-compliant at the present time, these are complex cases and access is currently being pursued.

Assurance

- 2.30 The overall performance of the Housing Service is continuously reviewed by the Head of Service and Housing Senior Management Team, with key performance information and action plans presented to the North Ayrshire Network, Housing Business Plan Group and Council's Cabinet regularly during each year.
- 2.31 Some ARC indicators also form part of the corporate performance monitoring framework, scrutinised by Chief Officers and elected members.
- 2.32 The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) Self Assurance Toolkit has also been utilised as a further method of self-assessment. The toolkit provides guidance to social landlords on gathering evidence to demonstrate compliance with regulatory requirements and standard and focuses on questions that governing bodies should ask to gain assurance that this is being achieved.
- 2.33 The ARC 2022/23, which can be accessed at [Annual Return on the Charter \(north-ayrshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk), demonstrates the Council's performance against the outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter.
- 2.34 Supporting evidence to demonstrate compliance with the regulatory framework and relevant legislation can be accessed at [AAS Supporting Evidence \(north-ayrshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk).
- 2.35 The Annual Assurance Statement, which is attached at Appendix 1, confirms that the Council has complied with the regulatory framework, all standards, and outcomes. It highlights North Ayrshire's non-compliance with our legal responsibilities around gas, electrical and fire safety. It also confirms the equalities data currently captured, and how North Ayrshire adopts a human rights approach in our work. This Statement will be made available to tenants as part of the Council's performance reporting process.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 It is proposed that the Committee (i) notes the Annual Return on the Charter submission 2022/23; (ii) notes the supporting evidence provided to demonstrate compliance with the regulatory framework and relevant legislation; (iii) notes the Council's non-compliance with our legal gas, electrical and fire safety responsibilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also notes that all outstanding gas safety checks for 2022/23 have now been carried out ; and (iv) authorises the Chair to sign the Annual Assurance Statement at Appendix 1.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 None

Human Resources

4.2 None

Legal

4.3 Approval of the Annual Return on the Charter submission 2022/23 and supporting evidence, and signature of the Annual Assurance Statement, will ensure that the Council complies with regulatory requirements set out in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010.

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4 As a landlord, data is collated relating to each of the protected characteristics for existing tenants, new tenants, people on waiting lists, governing body members, staff, people who apply to us as homeless and service users on our Gypsy/Traveller site. This data is used to inform decision making, policy making and day to day service delivery.

Environmental and Sustainability

4.5 None

Key Priorities

4.6 The matters referred to in this report support the delivery of all four Council Plan priorities: Wellbeing; Climate Change; A Sustainable Council; and Communities and Local Democracy.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 None

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation has taken place with Services within Housing and Public Protection; Sustainability, Transport and Corporate Property; Corporate Performance; the Health and Social Care Partnership; Tenant representatives and the Scottish Housing Regulator during the preparation of the Annual Return on the Charter and Annual Assurance Statement.

RUSSELL McCUTCHEON
Executive Director (Place)

For further information please contact **Fiona Ellis, Senior Manager (Housing Strategy & Development)**, on **07795 805570**.

Background Papers

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North Ayrshire Council Annual Assurance Statement 2022/23



North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

North Ayrshire Council complies with the requirements set out in Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework. North Ayrshire Council is assured that we:

- ✓ Adhere to relevant guidance and the requirements of other regulators;
- ✓ Meet our statutory duties to prevent and alleviate homelessness;
- ✓ Adhere to statutory guidance from the Scottish Housing Regulator;
- ✓ Take account of regulatory advice from the Scottish Housing Regulator and from other regulators; and
- ✓ Comply with all regulatory requirements, encompassing:
 - Assurance and notification
 - Tenant and service user redress
 - Whistleblowing
 - Equalities and human rights
 - Scottish Social Housing Charter Performance.

We did not meet our legal obligations around tenant and resident safety as we did not comply with gas safety legislation for 106 properties during 2022/23. Due to new legislation introduced during 2021/22 regarding electrical testing and smoke detection equipment, 4,555 properties were non-compliant with regards to having an EICR and 100 for not having the new smoke detection equipment installed. The biggest challenge during 2022/23 has been gaining access to properties to carry out statutory compliance works following persistent and unprecedented access refusal rates post pandemic. Labour shortages within the electrical industry affected the testing programme, alongside access issues. All efforts were made to ensure compliance at the earliest opportunity and appropriate records were kept. The Scottish Housing Regulator was notified of this expected outcome at the earliest opportunity.

As a landlord, we collect data relating to protected characteristics for existing tenants, new tenants, people on waiting lists, governing body members, staff, people who apply to us as homeless and service users on our Gypsy/Traveller site. A systems review is currently being undertaken alongside our partner landlords within the North Ayrshire Housing Register, which incorporates further development of our approach to collation of equalities data within the brief for the review. We recognise that the right to housing is a human right and providing this to everyone in North Ayrshire is of the highest priority with work already taking place across a range of activities.

North Ayrshire Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee has considered sufficient evidence to give this assurance. The Annual Assurance Statement was approved by Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 05 September 2023.

Authorised by: _____
Chairperson of the Committee

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

North Ayrshire Council
Housing Services

**Annual Assurance Statement
2022/23**

Supporting Evidence
September 2023



North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Introduction

In February 2019, the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) issued a revised framework for the regulation of social housing in Scotland. The new framework includes the requirement for landlords to submit an Annual Assurance Statement which has been agreed by a Board or Committee within the organisation. We must provide assurance that the organisation complies with the relevant requirements of Chapter 3 of the Regulatory Framework.

This document provides evidence to support our Statement that North Ayrshire Council is assured that we:

- ✓ Adhere to relevant guidance and the requirements of other regulators;
- ✓ Meet our statutory duties to prevent and alleviate homelessness;
- ✓ Adhere to statutory guidance from the Scottish Housing Regulator;
- ✓ Take account of regulatory advice from the Scottish Housing Regulator and from other regulators; and
- ✓ Comply with all regulatory requirements, encompassing:
 - Assurance and notification
 - Tenant and service user redress
 - Whistleblowing
 - Equalities and human rights
 - Scottish Social Housing Charter Performance.

As a landlord, we are also required to meet all legal duties and responsibilities. During 2022/23 we were unable to do this, as some properties did not have an annual gas safety check, electrical safety certificate or installation of the new smoke detection equipment within the legal timescales due to issues in gaining access to tenants' homes. We have provided information on this non-compliance in our Annual Assurance Statement and further detail in this supporting evidence.

The Scottish Housing Regulator contacted all local authorities and RSLs in December 2022 to ask landlords to include further assurance around tenant and resident safety in their 2022/23 Annual Assurance Statement, in particular:

- Gas safety
- Electrical safety
- Water safety
- Fire safety
- Asbestos
- Dampness and mould
- Lift safety

The Scottish Housing Regulator has requested that landlords provide assurance in their Statement that they have appropriate plans to implement an effective approach to the collection of equalities information and that they have started to consider how they can adopt a human rights approach in their work.

Regulatory Requirements

Assurance and notification

We prepare an Annual Assurance Statement in accordance with guidance and submit it to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) annually. The statement is available to tenants and other service users. We will notify the SHR during the year of any material changes to our assurance as set out in the Statement.

We can evidence that we meet all legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness services, and equality and human rights.

We have not met our legal obligations around tenant and resident safety as we did not comply with gas safety legislation for 106 properties during 2022/23. Due to new legislation introduced during 2021/22 regarding electrical testing and smoke detection, 4,555 properties were non-compliant with regards to having an electrical installation condition report (EICR) and 100 for not having the required smoke detection equipment in place. There continues to be an ongoing reluctance by some tenants to grant access to their property; this is an issue we are working to address. All efforts were made to ensure compliance at the earliest opportunity and appropriate records were kept. We have considered this a material non-compliance and informed the SHR during 2022/23 of this expected outcome and continue to provide them with monthly updates.

We notify the SHR of any tenant and resident safety matters involving the Health and Safety Executive or reports from other regulatory bodies relating to safety concerns. There were no issues to report during 2022/23.

'Customer Connections', our Customer Participation Strategy, is available to tenants and service users on the Council website.

[Customer Connections Strategy \(north-ayrshire.gov.uk\)](http://north-ayrshire.gov.uk)

Tenant and service user redress

Information on how to report any concerns around significant performance failures is available to tenants. Further information is contained in the Scottish Housing Regulator [leaflet](#).

North Ayrshire Council's [Complaints Handling Procedure](#) is readily available to tenants and other service users. It sets out the information they need to exercise their right to complain and seek redress. Responses are provided within timescales set out in the procedure, in accordance with guidance from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). We have mechanisms in place to learn from complaints and other tenant and service user feedback, in accordance with SPSO guidance.

Whistleblowing

North Ayrshire Council has a policy and procedure in line with the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 for whistleblowing by staff and elected members. This is readily available on the [Council website](#) and promoted through staff bulletins.

Equalities and human rights

[Equality](#) is one of North Ayrshire Council's core values. The principles of equality and fairness are central to all council activities. Our Equality and Children's Rights Impact Assessment process for all policies, procedures and proposals ensures we meet legislative requirements. All decisions made by the Council's committees include an assessment of equalities implications.

As a landlord, we collect data relating to each of the protected characteristics for existing tenants, new tenants, people on waiting lists, governing body members, staff, people who apply to us as homeless and service users on our Gypsy/Traveller site. We use this data to inform decision making, policy making and day to day service delivery. We provide a diverse range of services, and we want to ensure everyone has the same opportunity to access services and that they meet the needs and value the diversity for all our customers. We are currently undergoing a system review alongside our partner landlords within the North Ayrshire Housing Register and have incorporated equalities data into the brief to further develop our approach.

We recognise that access to good quality housing is a basic human right and providing this to everyone in North Ayrshire is of the highest priority. Work already takes place across a range of activities: ensuring that accommodation is provided to homeless households when needed; housing support services are provided to council tenants and homeless households to help sustain tenancies; there is a dedicated site to meet the needs of Gypsy/ Travellers; standards of Council-owned accommodation are well maintained and align to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS); and we carry out adaptations to properties to make them more accessible for households with disabilities.

Scottish Social Housing Charter Performance

We submit an Annual Return on the Charter to the Scottish Housing Regulator annually in accordance with published guidance. We have agreed our approach to this through the North Ayrshire Network (NAN), a group of representatives from the various Registered Tenant Organisations in North Ayrshire. You can read about our approach in 'Customer Connections', our Customer Participation Strategy 2023 - 2028.

Each year, we report on performance in our autumn edition of Tenancy Matters. The NAN work with us to agree the content of the report, which includes comparisons with previous years, other landlords and national performance. Within this report we identify how we will address areas for improvement and ask for feedback on our approach.

Standard 1 – The customer / landlord relationship

Outcomes:

Equalities

We promote equality and embrace diversity in all parts of Housing Services. All the information we produce is in line with the Council's Communications Strategy. All leaflets, and a number of documents, are published in plain English and can be made available in large print, braille, tape or CD, and can be translated on request.

Communication

Housing Services provide a comprehensive range of information which is made available in leaflets, on the Council website and on social media. The Tenant Editorial Panel approves all leaflets prior to issue to ensure they are fit for purpose and easy to understand. Our 'tenant approved' logo shows tenants have endorsed our publications. In recent years we have developed a social media profile through Facebook and Twitter to encourage digital engagement with a wider and more diverse customer base.

We commission an independent organisation to undertake a tenant satisfaction survey at least every three years. The results of these surveys help us to focus our efforts in improving communication and participation and understand what is important to our customers. Our next survey is scheduled for summer 2024.

Participation

The North Ayrshire Network (NAN) customer group has responsibility for ensuring that we continually improve the way we deliver services to tenants and customers. Part of their role is to challenge our performance against the indicators, outcomes, and standards in the Charter. To do this, Housing Services report to the Network through presenting on performance both mid-year and prior to submitting the Charter annually, working together on developing our annual report to tenants and communicating any changes from the Scottish Housing Regulator directly to the group.

Our Tenant Inspection Panel scrutinise one area of service per year. They can decide this independently through review of our performance information, or with support from Officers. Scrutiny provides an opportunity for tenants to drive improvement in the services most important to them.

We have reviewed/ relaunched our Customer Participation Strategy for 2023 - 2028 which encompasses the requirements of the Scottish Social Housing Charter and relevant Council Plan priorities. Collectively these three documents emphasise the importance of supporting our communities' tenants and residents to grow and develop opportunities for active engagement and participation for all citizens by listening to local needs and aspirations.

Alongside developing the Customer Participation Strategy for 2023 – 2028 we received gold level accreditation from Tenant Information Service (TIS Scotland) in August 2022 for Excellence in Scrutiny and Charter Performance. In addition, we received gold level re-accreditation from Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS Scotland) in November 2022 for Excellence in Tenant Participation.

Our latest tenant satisfaction survey told us that 92% of tenants are satisfied with the opportunities given to them to participate in our decision-making processes.

Standard 2 – Housing quality and maintenance

Outcomes:

Quality of housing

Our housing stock is in very good condition and is well maintained. We take a proactive approach to housing asset management and target improvements to ensure that our properties are SHQS and EESSH compliant. Properties are refurbished to ensure they remain attractive, meet energy efficiency targets, meet modern requirements, and tenant expectations. We have a range of planned maintenance programmes which are designed to: optimise investment by replacing major element components before they would otherwise require responsive repairs; anticipate changes in minimum acceptable standards; and reduce future requirements for cyclical maintenance.

We have not met our legal obligations around tenant and resident safety during 2022/23 as we did not comply with gas safety legislation for 106 properties. Due to new legislation introduced during 2021/22 regarding the frequency of electrical testing and the installation of smoke detection equipment, 4,555 properties were non-compliant with regards to having an up to date EICR and 100 properties were non-compliant for not having the required smoke detection equipment installed. There continues to be an ongoing reluctance by some tenants to grant access to their property; this is an issue we are working to address. Additional contracts were put in place to try and achieve this by the date given, however supply chain and labour shortages for contractors have also impacted the programme. All efforts were made to ensure compliance at the earliest opportunity and appropriate records were kept. We aim to have all EICRs and outstanding smoke detection complete by end of March 2024. However, completing the EICR programme in the context of continuing tenant refusal makes this extremely challenging. Resorting to forcing access using our Access Policy is also extremely resource intensive for both the Council and our contractors.

We have a dedicated Contracts, Compliance and Maintenance team who ensure all statutory compliance requirements are met with regards to lift maintenance and legionella. We also have a dedicated asbestos compliance officer who works with all officers conducting any form of refurbishment or alteration to buildings to ensure compliance with legislation in all instances.

Condensation, Dampness & Mould

Awaab Ishak tragically died in December 2020 from a respiratory condition caused by extensive mould in a one-bedroom flat where he lived with his parents in Rochdale, Greater Manchester. The failings noted by the coroner in the handling of the case, has prompted many social housing

providers to reflect on their relevant policies and procedures. We have established a cross service working group to review our current practice and have developed an action plan to ensure we have a robust approach to dealing with cases where dampness and mould are reported. A strategy - which encompasses our approach to both Council homes and the private sector - and an improved “end to end” process have been drafted.

Our Building Services Inspection Officers who inspect instances of dampness and mould are all from a building trade background and are qualified to HNC in Construction standard as a minimum. Further specialist training in dampness, mould, and timber decay has recently been undertaken, with two officers additionally achieving the industry recognised qualification of Certificated Surveyor of Timber and Dampness in Buildings (CSTDB).

Repairs, maintenance and improvements

North Ayrshire Council is committed to delivering a high quality, efficient and effective reactive and planned maintenance service to all our tenants and factored owners in a manner which maintains high customer satisfaction. Our [Repairs Policy](#) sets out the service provided by the Council for repairs and maintenance and aims to ensure the needs of our current and future tenants are met in relation to the provision of high-quality housing. The policy is currently under review and will be developed in consultation with tenant representatives.

The average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs increased slightly from 2.61 in 2021/22 to 2.64 hours in 2022/23, and from 7.66 to 8.42 days for non-emergency repairs. The decrease in performance is due to skilled labour shortages, material supply issues, continued Covid absences and an increase in the number of repairs. Despite the decrease in performance, we remain within our four-hour target for emergencies as per our housing repairs policy.

Satisfaction levels of tenants who had repairs or maintenance carried out in the last 12 months increased from 85.71% to 86.16% during the same period. This is based on responses from 3,785 tenants received during 2022/23.

An efficient and effective void repairs service provides a quick turnaround on empty properties, which helps to speed the repairs process and reduce void rent loss. Void performance is affected by the additional time taken to rehouse tenants affected by our regeneration projects. A general increase in the number of properties requiring major works such as central heating, rewiring and full decoration has also impacted on performance. The average time taken to re-let properties has increased slightly from 22.38 days in 2021/22 to 23.99 days in 2022/23. For 2022/23 void performance was also affected due to resources being re-directed to Glebe Place in Saltcoats to deliver homes for Ukrainians displaced by the war. Despite the slight increase in the number of days taken to re-let voids we are still ranked third from SHN benchmarking for 2022/23.

Standard 3 – Neighbourhood and community

Outcome:

Estate management, antisocial behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes

Estate Management covers a broad range of situations and activities such as new tenant visits, permissions for garages and driveways in garden ground, abandoned tenancies, untidy gardens, neighbour disputes, problems with pets, abandoned vehicles, tackling graffiti and illegal dumping/fly-

tipping. We have a comprehensive Estate Management procedure manual to ensure we meet our responsibilities as a landlord, and to support tenants to meet their responsibilities as detailed in within their Tenancy Agreement. Every effort is made to support tenants to address any breach of the tenancy agreement, however if a tenant is consistently unwilling to do adhere to the tenancy agreement, the Council will pursue appropriate and proportionate action.

The Safer North Ayrshire Partnership (SNAP) is a multi-agency group who work together with local communities and key stakeholders to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour, responding quickly and proportionately to arising issues.

We experienced a 1.5% decrease in reports of ASB during 2022/23 compared to the previous year. The Council has locally agreed targets for the closure of ASB cases, which are based on the complexity and level of investigation required to resolve them. Our performance against the locally agreed targets during 2022/23 was 99.56% of cases resolved within agreed timescales, against a target of 94%.

Our last tenant satisfaction survey was carried out during 2021, therefore there has been no change to the satisfaction levels reported in the previous AAS which detailed a decrease of 12% in tenants satisfied with the management of the neighbourhood they live in compared to the previous survey carried out in 2018.

Standard 4 – Access to housing and support

Outcomes:

Housing options and access to social housing

We, alongside our RSL partners, are currently reviewing our Housing Allocation Policy. This review is looking at key themes that have emerged from our last review in 2019 and any upcoming legislation that could impact housing allocations. We introduced an Arran Local Letting Initiative in April 2021, which allows island residents and key/ essential workers to be given additional priority for housing on the Island.

In relation to our void processes, we commenced a pilot in January 2022 which saw standard void targets being replaced by timescales mutually agreed by the Housing Officer and Building Services supervisor, based on the amount of work required. This pilot improved performance significantly and was rolled out across our stock. Although the average time taken to re-let properties increased slightly from 22.38 days in 2021/22 to 23.99 days in 2022/23, this was due to resources being re-directed to the refurbishment of Glebe Place in Saltcoats to deliver homes for Ukrainians displaced by the war. We have established a cross-service working group to review and analyse our void processes. The group will scrutinise current working practices to identify opportunities to improve our void processes and turnover performance.

Housing management and our Building Services team (who carry out the majority of works in Council dwellings) have periodic meetings with officers from North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership (NAHSCP) who – in accordance with the Integration Scheme - manage the process for aids and adaptations. This allows us to understand demand and agree, set, and monitor performance in relation to expenditure. NAHSCP have a formal Adaptations Criteria and Policy for staff to adhere to; this ensures a consistent and high-quality adaptations assessment process. Joint complex case reviews are held monthly between NAHSCP and Housing professionals to agree the scope of the works to be undertaken. OT staff have been trained to explore the housing options of housing applicants with long term health conditions, to ensure that accessible housing needs are met where

adaptations are not appropriate. These tiers of governance provide a formal procedure for all decision making, ensuring resources are targeted to those most in need of adaptations.

There has been a significant increase in the number of households waiting for an adaptation to their home, increasing from 142 in 2021/22 to 465 in 2022/23. The average number of days to complete an approved adaptation has also increased from 74.33 to 92.40 days. The joint improvement group comprising of Housing Services, Building Services, Property Management and Investment and the Health and Social Care Partnership are currently reviewing the reasons for the rise in demand and current work processes, in order to deliver the best outcome and value for money for tenants.

Homeless people

Approaches for homeless assistance

Approaches for homeless assistance in North Ayrshire reduced by 4% during 2022/23 compared to the previous year. Whilst the annual national statistics are not yet released, the Scottish Government and national partners are reporting that levels of homelessness in Scotland are at their highest since records began in 2001.

Reasons for approach for homeless assistance

The main reason for homelessness in North Ayrshire during 2022/23 was as a result of a relationship breakdown, accounting for 239 approaches (22%); this is followed by people being asked to leave the family home, which accounted for 203 (19%) approaches.

Applications from households fleeing domestic abuse accounts for 152 homeless approaches (14%) during 2022/23, compared to 154 approaches (13%) in 2021/22.

We have had no breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order and have ensured that temporary accommodation continues to be available for anyone who needs it. We have continued the delivery of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) and met the year four target to deliver 80 Housing First tenancies for the most vulnerable homeless households in North Ayrshire.

The North Ayrshire Homelessness Task Force has reviewed the above performance to inform our homeless prevention strategy moving forward.

Standard 5 – Getting good value from rents and service charges

Outcomes:

Value for money

Our robust Housing Revenue Account Business Plan provides clear strategic direction, ensuring that effective short, medium, and long-term financial planning is undertaken. This clearly details how we will plan for, and deliver, key priorities such as compliance with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and EESSH, investment in our current stock, our Council house building programme and rent setting.

The Business Plan was developed by a cross stakeholder working group which included representation from elected members, tenant representatives and officers from within Housing, Property Management and Investment, Building Services and Finance. This approach ensured balanced decision-making that can stand up to both internal and external scrutiny.

The plan provides a platform to support an effective performance management and reporting framework that makes certain that we continue to provide value for money services to our tenants and, at the same time, keep rents at affordable levels. This is achieved while recognising that we are currently operating within an extremely challenging and evolving economic environment which requires sufficient flexibility to be able to change and adapt investment plans.

The Business Plan is easily accessible to stakeholders. It provides information to demonstrate that the Council has a clear picture of its strategic direction and the associated financial position of the service to deliver this, over the 30-year planning period. This plan is reviewed annually, and we are focused on providing value for money through a number of measures, such as operating robust financial management processes, implementing value for money principles, exploring efficiency opportunities, and managing competitive contractual arrangements.

During our last tenant satisfaction survey 89.47% of tenants confirmed they felt that the rent for their property represents good value for money.

Rents and service charges

Our rent levels remain lower than the national average, however we continue to invest significantly in our existing stock and new house building programme. We face challenges in, for example, changes to welfare reform, demographics, and the housing stock profile. We are committed to delivering services in new, improved and more cost-effective ways.

Standard 6 – Other customers

Outcomes:

Gypsy/travellers

North Ayrshire Council provides services, advice and assistance to Gypsy/Travellers who live permanently in North Ayrshire and to those who visit on a temporary basis. North Ayrshire manages one permanent site at Redburn Grove, Irvine. The site has 16 pitches, and each pitch has its own amenity block with separate kitchen, shower, toilet facilities and utility room. A community room is available on site for partner services to meet tenants and their children within a safe and comfortable environment. The room is used by several Services, including Education, the Welfare Reform Advice team, Tenancy Support, the Community Link team, and a regular GP surgery. Our Tenant Participation Team also support Redburn Grove tenants to hold regular tenants' meetings. The meetings allow tenants the opportunity to work in partnership with Council staff as we consider the options for current and future service provision.

In 2016 the Scottish Government introduced minimum standards for Gypsy Traveller Sites across Scotland. North Ayrshire Council achieved the minimum standards at Redburn Grove; however, we recognise that significant capital investment is required to ensure that it continues to meet expected standards.

The Scottish Government has developed a draft design guide for Gypsy/Traveller sites to be used for new sites or major refurbishments of existing sites. The design guide has been provided to give advice on what good quality, culturally appropriate accommodation should look like. The Scottish Government have also made available a new capital fund for five years from 2021-25. The Scottish Government has outlined the criteria for the fund, including how residents and travelling community members must be involved, together with a process for project selection. Following consultation with current tenants in April 2023, future improvement proposals for the Redburn site are being developed reflecting on feedback gathered in relation to their preferences for future housing.

Our response to unauthorised encampments fully complies with Scottish Government policy. Our Gypsy/Traveller Encampment Officer works to build relationships with visiting families to assess their needs. Where necessary they make referrals to partner organisations and provide advice on housing options, if required. The Officer also works closely with other landowners and members of the settled community and provides advice and assistance regarding the rights and responsibilities of Gypsy/Travellers who visit North Ayrshire.

Refugees

North Ayrshire Council is fully committed to supporting the UK Humanitarian programmes in place to accommodate and support refugees. This work is coordinated by our inter-agency Refugee Task Force comprising of senior officers from across the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) including Housing, the Health and Social Care Partnership, Education, Department of Work and Pensions, Police Scotland, and voluntary organisations.

Our Refugee Support Team work together with the CPP partners to deliver robust resettlement support to assist families to integrate into the local communities and access vital services to meet their individual needs.

During 2022/23, the Council and community planning partners have supported 160 Ukrainian households, comprising of 349 individuals, to resettle in North Ayrshire across the different Scottish Government sponsorship schemes.

We have provided 110 units of social housing stock to provide long term accommodation for households. We have also supported a Welcome Hub set up within a local hotel which provides interim emergency accommodation and support to individuals and families while they await a more appropriate housing solution. In the last 12 months, in partnership with the Scottish Government, we have redeveloped a large vacant property to provide temporary accommodation for a further three Ukrainian families.

Housing Services are monitoring resettlement provision carefully to ensure we continue to meet our statutory responsibilities in relation to other priority groups including homeless people.