

HOUSING ANNUAL ASSURANCE STATEMENT 2020

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Council Homeless Services are subject to scrutiny and inspection by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). The Council must demonstrate that it is meeting the statutory requirements contained in the Scottish Social Housing Charter. Argyll and Bute Council is no longer a social landlord but retains statutory duties to provide services to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Council submits an Annual Return on the Charter (ARC). In 2019 the SHR introduced a requirement for all local authorities to submit an Annual Assurance Statement which will be published on the SHR website. The 2019 Argyll and Bute Council Statement was approved by the SHR and this report details the proposed Statement for 2020.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Full Council approve the Annual Assurance Statement contained in **Appendix 1** of this report.

3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 The SHR produced a document entitled Regulation of Social Housing in Scotland in February 2019. The regulatory requirements are set out in Section 3 of the document and even though Argyll and Bute Council is no longer a social landlord there are requirements for the Council to ensuring that statutory duties are met in relation to preventing and alleviating homelessness.
- 3.2 The SHR issued an Engagement Plan to Argyll and Bute Council Housing Services in March 2019. This plan was not updated in 2020 due to the COVID 19 pandemic. As a result there continues to be 4 areas in which the SHR can engage with the Council in relation to homelessness services:-

- How people access the service
- The assessment of homeless applications
- Access to and quality of temporary accommodation
- Outcomes for people who are homeless

The SHR are engaging with Argyll and Bute Council in relation to Argyll and Bute's assessment of homeless applications and the outcomes for people who are homeless. The elements within these categories are detailed in the Annual Assurance Statement (**Appendix 1**) and the progress made. The only cause for concern is the percentage of intentionally homeless cases in Argyll and Bute (7%) compared to the Scottish average (3%). The 7% equates to 32 out of a total of 436 homeless cases in 2019/20. Housing Services are in the process of analysing the intentionally homeless applications for 2019/20 along with the intentionally homeless cases for the current year, 2020/21. We may ask that Area Housing Officers discuss potential intentionally homeless cases with the Team Lead – Operations or the Team Lead – Housing Strategy before making the decision.

3.3 In addition to the 4 areas of engagement a section on the impact of COVID 19 on the homeless service has been added to the 2020 Annual Assurance Statement.

3.4 Members are kept informed of the Council's performance in relation to statutory and regulatory requirements in relation to housing in various ways:-

- Through the Corporate Pyramid Reporting System
- Through quarterly Housing Performance Reports submitted to Committee
- Through the quarterly reporting produced for the Strategic Housing Forum
- Through the Annual Updates on the Local Housing Strategy
- Through an Annual Housing Activity report submitted to the 4 Area Committees

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 The Development and Growth Service – Housing Team will continue to improve services to households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. The Housing Team will continue to engage with the SHR to report on progress on the housing and homeless services provided in Argyll and Bute.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Policy None

5.2 Financial Sufficient budget is required to deliver statutory services

5.3 Legal None

5.4 HR None

5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:

- 5.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics – access to services across the local authority area provided
- 5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – addressing and preventing homelessness enables households to address other issues such as income maximisation and exploring employment opportunities
- 5.5.3 Islands – homeless advice and prevention services are provided on the islands
- 5.6. Risk – the Council will be subject to censure from the SHR and Scottish Government if statutory duties are not fulfilled
- 5.7 Customer Service – Area teams provided the service across the local authority

Kirsty Flanagan, Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Housing Annual Assurance Statement 2020

Appendix 1



Housing Annual Assurance Statement 2020

Legislative Compliance

We can confirm that Argyll and Bute Council achieves all the standards and outcomes for people who are homeless and others who use our services:-

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

Argyll and Bute Council can confirm that there were no breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in 2019/20.

Argyll and Bute Council can confirm that there were no health and safety breaches in 2019/20 in relation to homelessness resulting in intervention by the Health and Safety Executive.

In 2019 The Scottish Housing Regulator notified Argyll and Bute Council that they would be engaging with the Council over 2 areas of work based on the Scottish Government national statistics for 2017/18 and the Annual Returns of the Charter :-

- Argyll and Bute's assessment of homeless applications
- Outcomes for people who are homeless

Due to Covid-19 the Scottish Housing Regulator was not able to engage with the Council about the 2019/20 position. The tables below provide an update on the areas of engagement previously notified by the Regulator in 2019.

Argyll and Bute's Assessment of Homeless Applications

No.	Area of Engagement	Progress Made
1.	The percentage of households assessed as not homeless nor threatened with homelessness is above the Scottish average	Argyll and Bute figures – 5% of cases at the end of 2019/20 compared to 5% of cases in 2018/19 and 8% of cases in 2017/18 Scottish Average for 2019/20 – 3%
2.	The percentage of households assessed as intentionally homeless is above the Scottish average	Argyll and Bute figures – 7% of cases at the end of 2019/20 compared to 6% of cases at the end of 2018/19 and 7% in 2017/18 Scottish Average for 2019/20 – 3%
3.	The percentage of households withdrawing their homeless application before decision is above the Scottish average	Argyll and Bute figures – 3% of cases at the end of 2019/20 compared to 4% of cases at the end of 2018/19 and 5% of cases in 2017/18 Scottish Average for 2019/20 – 4%

Outcomes for People who are Homeless

No.	Area of Engagement	Progress Made
1.	The percentage of people in Argyll and Bute assessed as unintentionally homeless which it provided with a Scottish Secure Tenancy is below the Scottish average	Argyll and Bute Figure for 2018/19 – 66% 2019/20 – 67% Scottish Figure for 2019/20 – 72% 83% of all unintentionally homeless cases secured settled accommodation in 2019/20 compared to 82% across Scotland
2.	There are a relatively high number of people waiting for more than one year for an outcome	Argyll and Bute Council is working with partners to implement a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) which will address this situation. The RRTP Annual Update was approved by Council and submitted to the Scottish Government in June 2020.

The Impact of COVID 19 on the Homeless Service in Argyll and Bute

The Council has continued to provide a service to households in need of accommodation during the COVID 19 pandemic. Regular contact was maintained with existing households and housing support services continued to support households assessed as requiring specific support. The Council procured additional accommodation in anticipation of an increased demand across the local authority area. The extension of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in May 2020 has presented challenges due to the fact that the additional accommodation procured was emergency accommodation as a direct response to the pandemic. As a Stock Transfer authority the reliance on Registered Social Landlords to secure permanent housing for statutory homeless households has created a backlog due to many RSL's ceasing to allocate for a period of time during the pandemic. An Action Plan has been agreed which will address the many challenges and pressures put on the service as a result of the pandemic.

I can confirm that the Council has sufficient assurance and scrutiny processes in place to support this statement.

Signed
Kirsty Flanagan
Executive Director

Signed

Councillor Robin Currie
Policy Lead for the Economy and Rural Growth