
Report To:	Environment & Regeneration Committee	Date:	2 November 2023
Report By:	Director, Environment & Regeneration	Report No:	ENV051/23/SJ/MM
Contact Officer:	Martin McNab	Contact No:	01475 714246
Subject:	Annual Assurance Statement		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting
- 1.2 To seek the Committee's approval for Inverclyde Council's Annual Assurance Statement.
- 1.3 The Annual Assurance Statement must be approved and returned to the Scottish Housing Regulator by 31st October 2023. The Assurance Statement covers homelessness services and the condition of Council housing stock which in Inverclyde amounts to the former tied houses following stock transfer. The Annual Assurance Statement for 2023/24 is attached at Appendix 1.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Committee approves the Annual Assurance Statement for 2023/24.

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council is required to make two returns to the Scottish Housing Regulator every year. These are the Annual Return on Charter (ARC) and the Annual Assurance Statement. As and when the Council finally transfers the tied houses to a suitable RSL both the Arc and the part of the Annual Assurance Statement relating to stock will no longer be required. This will leave simply the homelessness section of the Annual Assurance Statement to be completed.
- 3.2 Members will note the progress on the Homelessness side with no breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation order. In the previous year 57 breaches were reported, the majority of which related to the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. As reported to Committee this was largely a hangover of difficulties experienced during Covid which have now worked out of the system.
- 3.3 Members will also note the reduction in the number of former tied houses being reported on. Significant progress has been made in reducing this from 10 down to 6 covered by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Good progress is being made in the transfer of the remaining properties to an RSL with tenant consultation to begin shortly.

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 That Committee approves the Annual Assurance Statement for 2023.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial		X
Legal/Risk		X
Human Resources		X
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)		X
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing		X
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

None

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

5.3 Legal/Risk

Final transfer of the remaining housing stock to an RSL will in effect mean that only the homelessness function will be regulated by the Scottish Housing Regulator. This is however dependent on tenant approval.

5.4 Human Resources

N/A

5.5 Strategic

N/A

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

N/A

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA is required.
X	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqIA is required. Provide any other relevant reasons why an EqIA is not necessary/screening statement.

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision:-

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
X	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty for the following reasons: Provide reasons why the report has been assessed as not relevant.

(c) Children and Young People

Has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA is required.
X	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children’s rights.

5.7 Environmental/Sustainability

Summarise any environmental / climate change impacts which relate to this report.

None.

Has a Strategic Environmental Assessment been carried out?

	YES – assessed as relevant and a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required.
X	NO – This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme, strategy or document which is like to have significant environmental effects, if implemented.

5.8 Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
X	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 N/A

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Annual Assurance Statement, Environment & Regeneration Committee 27 October 2022
ENV037/22/MM

Annual Assurance Statement: Inverclyde Council

The purpose of this Annual Assurance Statement is to reassure the Scottish Housing Regulator, our tenants and other service users that Inverclyde Council complies with its regulatory and statutory obligations as set out in section 3 of the regulatory requirements. In areas where there is no (or part) material compliance we have indicated how we are planning to improve in those areas and the timeframe for improvement.

Homelessness Services

As a local authority we can confirm that we meet our statutory duties to prevent and alleviate homelessness, together with our duties regarding our legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness, equality and human rights and tenant and resident safety. As Inverclyde Council only has a limited housing stock, most of which are on secure tenancies, our tenants have a direct relationship with officers and the customer/landlord relationship must be considered within that context.

We can confirm that Inverclyde Council achieves all but the following standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter for tenants, people who are homeless and others who use our services:

The homeless service is undergoing a programme of transformational change, working with all statutory agencies by placing a focus on prevention activity, supporting tenants and improving partnership working with local Registered Social Landlords (RSL's), Third Sector providers and Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) partners in ensuring tenancy sustainment.

We continue to meet our duty to assess homelessness within the designated timescales and provide temporary accommodation for households where homelessness cannot be prevented. Where people have complex needs, the rapid rehousing support team is being embedded into practice and regulated by the care inspectorate to ensure the ethos and principles of housing first. A monitoring framework and team plan, linked to the Inverclyde Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP), housing contribution statement and HSCP Strategic plan is in place.

The service has significantly improved its offer of temporary accommodation in the reporting year covered by this Annual Assurance Statement, with no breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order.

Housing Stock

Last year it was reported that Inverclyde Council had 13 houses, 10 of which fell within the scope of the annual assurance statement, since that time, 4 of these houses have been sold either to the sitting tenants or as they had become vacant. As such it is confirmed that the Council currently has 9 houses, 3 of which do not fall within the scope of the Scottish Housing Regulator as one is vacant and currently on the market and the other two are not on Scottish Secure tenancies. This report focuses on the remaining six houses.

All of Inverclyde Council's housing stock had condition surveys carried out in March 2022 by external agents Brown & Wallace Building Surveyors. The report highlighted a number of repairs and upgrades required to the houses to ensure they met current SHQS and EESSH standards. The council is currently in discussion with Sanctuary Homes regarding transferring their ownership of these 6 houses to Sanctuary and as such only routine maintenance and emergency repairs plus small upgrades to the Whinhill former schoolhouse have been carried out to the houses over the past year. The Council is presently finalising the due diligence required to appoint the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) as the independent tenant advisor during the transfer process. Should the tenants agree to the transfer, then all works confirmed as requiring attention within a 5-year period, as detailed within the condition reports, will be carried out to the houses within the first year of transfer. This will ensure they are all brought up to SHQS and EESSH standard. Should the tenants choose to stay with the council then the council will ensure that all necessary works to ensure compliance will be completed as soon as possible.

Currently 3 of the 6 houses pass both the SHQS and the EESSH, these are St Francis former schoolhouse; Whinhill former schoolhouse; Ardgowan former schoolhouse. In terms of future energy efficiency upgrades St Francis and Whinhill are both timber framed houses which are unsuitable for cavity wall insulation, and Ardgowan former schoolhouse is of solid construction and so has no cavity to insulate. The remaining 3 houses all fail the SHQS as they all require cavity wall insulation, these houses are St Michael's former schoolhouse; Moorfoot former schoolhouse and St Patrick's former schoolhouse. Of the 3 houses failing the SHQS, 2 also fail the EESSH. It is also noted that Moorfoot former schoolhouse would require the permission of an adjacent owner before cavity wall insulation could be considered.

The terms of transfer have almost been agreed and once due diligence has been confirmed, the 6 tenants on Scottish Secure Tenancies will be asked to attend a meeting with council officers and Sanctuary staff, to go over the proposals. The council will also provide for the tenants to be given access to TPAS who will give support to the tenants and advise them of their rights. Following completion of the consultation process, formal Notices and a ballot will be sent to the 6 tenants and, should a majority verdict in favour of the transfer be obtained, the houses will then be transferred to Sanctuary.

The Council has two houses which are located within parks, however, these are not on Scottish Secure Tenancies and are therefore not affected by the legislation. The third park house was sold to the sitting tenant during the past year.

We confirm that we have utilised and considered appropriate evidence to give us this assurance. This Assurance Statement was formally approved by the Council's Environment & Regeneration Committee on 2nd November 2023.

Cllr Michael McCormick
Convenor
Environment & Regeneration Committee
Inverclyde Council