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<b>Report To:</b>	<b>Environment &amp; Regeneration Committee</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>31 October 2024</b>
<b>Report By:</b>	<b>Director Environment &amp; Regeneration</b>	<b>Report No:</b>	<b>ENV055/24/SJMM</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Martin McNab</b>	<b>Contact No:</b>	<b>01475 714246</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Annual Assurance Statement</b>		

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## **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 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024. 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 2024/25 is attached at Appendix 1.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That Committee approves the Annual Assurance Statement for 2024/25.

### 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 the parts of the ARC and the Annual Assurance Statement relating to stock will no longer be required. This will leave simply the homelessness sections to be completed.
- 3.2 Members will note the increased demand on the Homelessness Service over 2023-24. Although overall performance in many areas was very good including short assessment times and a reduction in rent lost due to voids this increased demand did lead to 17 breaches of the Unsuitable Accommodation Order in the period.
- 3.3 Members will also note the ongoing progress towards a potential transfer of the remaining tied houses with meetings having been held with tenants and TPAS appointed as the independent tenant advisor for the process.

### 4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 That Committee approves the Annual Assurance Statement for 2024.

### 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					

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### 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 agreement.

### 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 2 November 2023  
**ENV051/23/SJ/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 continue to meet our statutory duties to provide temporary accommodation and homelessness assistance. Our Assessment and Support Team are focussed on prevention of homelessness and achieve prevention in around 50% of approaches to our Housing Options and Homelessness Advice Service. As a stock transfer authority Inverclyde is wholly reliant on the Section 5 referral process and work is underway to reduce non-compliance by introducing a new Local Lettings Initiative to increase lets to homeless households to between 25%-30% of total lets in a close strategic partnership with the four main local Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

Our ability to meet our statutory duties associated with homelessness, housing support and settled accommodation underpins the work we do to ensure equality, human rights and tenant and resident safety. As Inverclyde Council is reliant on a strategic partnership with local RSLs, individuals using our service have a direct relationship with officers through effective caseload management and assistance with local Choice Based Lettings systems. Therefore, the customer/landlord relationship must be considered within that context.

We can confirm that Inverclyde Council achieves standards and outcomes in the Scottish Social Housing Charter relevant for tenants in a stock transfer authority i.e., 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 in partnership with local RSLs, Third Sector organisations and integrated services within the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to increase successful outcomes in tenancy sustainment.

We continue to meet our duty to assess homelessness within 28 days and provide temporary accommodation for households where homelessness cannot be prevented.

Where people have complex needs, the rapid rehousing support team undertake the statutory duty to provide support, and this service is regulated by the care inspectorate to ensure robust governance and maintain the 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 seen a significant increase in demand for assistance during 2023/24 with a 29% increase in the number of homelessness applications. In spite of this the service has significantly improved its assessment timescale and its offer of temporary accommodation. In the reporting year covered by this Annual Assurance Statement Inverclyde had the shortest average assessment time in Scotland at 9 days. Temporary Accommodation saw a 10% reduction in average void periods and a 32% reduction in the amount of rent lost due to voids. Unfortunately, in Quarter 4 of 2023/24 the Service required to utilise Unsuitable Accommodation to meet demand, with 17 instances of Unsuitable Accommodation being utilised across that period.

## **Housing Stock**

Last year it was reported that Inverclyde Council had nine houses, three of which did not fall within the scope of the Scottish Housing Regulator as one was vacant and, on the market, and the other two are not on Scottish Secure Tenancies. The house which was previously on the market has now sold so the council now has eight houses in total, two of which fall out with the scope of the Regulator.

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 several 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 the ownership of these six houses to Sanctuary. As a result of this only routine maintenance and emergency repairs plus small upgrades to the Moorfoot Primary schoolhouse have been carried out to the houses over the past year.

TPAS has now been appointed to act as the independent tenant advisor and meetings have already been carried out with the tenants, officers from Sanctuary Homes, a council officer and the TPAS representative. Sanctuary have completed further condition surveys of the six houses and discussions regarding upgrading all houses to current SHQS and EESSH standards, plus additional works as considered necessary, are ongoing. Once all tenants have been contacted to discuss the repairs the first formal Notice containing the incentives on offer, which will include a two-year rent freeze as well as upgrades to each house, will be sent to the tenants, this will start the first part of the formal transfer process.

Following a ballot, assuming there is a majority vote in favour of the transfer, all works contained within the final formal notice will be completed by Sanctuary Homes within the first year of transfer. Should the tenants choose to stay with the council then the council confirms that all necessary works to ensure compliance will be completed as soon as possible.

Currently three of the six houses pass both the SHQS and the EESSH, these are St Francis former schoolhouse, St Patrick's former schoolhouse and Ardgowan former schoolhouse. In terms of future energy efficiency upgrades St Francis and St Patrick's 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 three houses all fail the SHQS as they all require cavity wall insulation, these houses are St Michael's former schoolhouse, Moorfoot former schoolhouse and Whinhill former schoolhouse. Of the three houses failing the SHQS, two also fail the EESSH. It is noted that Moorfoot former schoolhouse would require the permission of an adjacent owner before cavity wall insulation could be considered. As part of the works on offer by Sanctuary, external wall insulation is being considered for those houses where cavity wall insulation is unsuitable.

Regardless of whether the transfer is successful or not, the Council will retain the two houses which are located within parks; however, these are not on Scottish Secure Tenancies and are therefore not affected by the legislation.

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 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024.

Cllr Michael McCormick  
Convenor  
Environment & Regeneration Committee  
Inverclyde Council