

ANGUS COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 11 JUNE 2024

HOUSING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2024-2025

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

1. ABSTRACT

- 1.1 This report presents the Housing Service Improvement Plan for 2024-25 and proposed governance and reporting arrangements. The Improvement Plan has been developed in response to actions required to improve performance and meet the requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulator's annual engagement plan with Angus Council.

2. ALIGNMENT TO THE COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

- 2.1 Caring for our people.
- Reduce inequalities in all our communities.
 - Provide the best start in life for children.
 - Create more opportunities for people to live well and achieve their personal goals.
 - Improve physical, mental health and wellbeing.
- 2.2 Caring for our place.
- Protect and enhance our natural and built environment.
 - Enable inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe communities across Angus.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) approves the Housing Service Improvement Plan 2024-25 (Appendix 1), noting that a longer-term improvement plan will be developed by the end of this financial year; and
- (ii) approves the proposed governance and reporting arrangements (Appendix 1).

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Housing Service Performance Update and Annual Assurance Statement was reported to Communities Committee in September 2023, Report 259/23, and presented the Annual Return of the Charter Return results for 2022/23. This highlighted particular areas of concern around voids, customer service and complaints, communication and performance management and also highlighted concerns around meeting two of 62 elements of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (Electrical Installations and Smoke and Heat Alarms).
- 4.2 The report set out the requirement to take forward focussed improvement work against these critical service areas. It also required that a new Performance Management Framework was developed alongside governance arrangements aligned with the service improvement priorities identified.
- 4.3 The report also highlighted that there were inaccuracies identified in data supplied to the Scottish Housing Regulator on void rent loss. When officers reviewed the detailed source data the report brought back, it showed that duplicate records were being extracted for each void rent loss transaction, which was inflating the amount of rent loss being reported for a number of years.

- 4.4 The severe flooding from Storm Babet in October 2023 impacted a significant number of households, homes and infrastructure, leading to the Housing Service implementing an emergency response and refocussing activities on the delivery of a recovery strategy. This meant that the development and implementation of the Improvement Plan was paused until early 2024 to focus on the recovery efforts. A notification was sent to the Scottish Housing Regulator to inform them of the emergency response.
- 4.5 The Angus Local Housing Strategy 2023-28 (LHS), approved by Communities Committee in May 2023 (Report 149/23) provides the framework for how we deliver housing and related services, providing an assessment of housing need and demand, and addressing national and local strategic priorities alongside statutory responsibilities. The LHS vision is that everyone in Angus has a good quality, safe, secure and warm home that they can afford and is served by two themes, Our Places and Our People. The Our Places theme addresses the volume of new affordable homes and what type they should be as well as the quality, condition and function of all our housing stock, and how housing can positively contribute to our places to help them thrive. The Our People theme addresses access to housing and any necessary support and how we can promote fairness and equalities through housing.

5. CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 The Housing Service Improvement Plan 2024-2025 (the Improvement Plan) sets out how the Service will make the operational improvements needed during 2024/25 to meet the vision of the LHS, the mission of the Service to 'create places that people are proud to call home' and provide a consistently high-quality service to customers.
- 5.2 The service improvement priorities are informed by the Annual Return of the Charter Return (ARC) results for 2022/23, the current Annual Engagement Plan with the Scottish Housing Regulator as well as customer feedback from our 2023 Tenant Satisfaction Survey and an evaluation of customer complaints.
- 5.3 A number of improvement actions have been identified across three service improvement priority areas for 2023/24: Customer Excellence, Housing Quality and Place, and Prevention and Homelessness. The delivery of the Local Housing Strategy, embedding a programme of continuous improvement and the development of a digital strategy have been identified as enablers for the delivery of the improvements.
- 5.4 The improvement actions and milestones are detailed in Appendix 1. The Improvement Plan is ambitious and recognises the need to undertake several key programmes of work concurrently due to the interdependencies of the actions required to refocus and improve service delivery, improve efficiency and performance and ensure regulatory and legislative compliance. While ambitious, it sets out the commitment from staff to deliver improvement and deliver it at pace. The service is confident that it is deliverable in the timescales detailed.
- 5.5 Housing Delivery groups have been established to manage the delivery of the respective improvement activities and performance management framework. The groups will be supported by additional staff resources from the Housing Service Performance and Improvement team which has been formed on a temporary basis from existing staff with a responsibility for performance management and policy development and additional staff resources to provide an increased focus on performance and improvement activities across the Housing Service.
- 5.6 A new report for extracting data on void rent loss has been written and tested against a sample of void properties to ensure accuracy. Using the revised report, we now believe the correct figure for in exempt void loss in 2022/23 to be 2.02% as opposed to 4.33%, reported in September 2023. To ensure our data integrity, we are replicating this approach for each report which forms the Council's ARC return and undertaking a programme of data integrity checks. Further guidance has also been developed for staff around the use of coding voids considered exempt to ensure the accuracy of exempt void loss reported, albeit this could result in less voids being recorded as 'exempt'.

6. PROPOSALS

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Communities Committee approve the Improvement Plan and proposed governance and reporting arrangements and note that an update on progress will be provided in October along with the Annual Assurance Statement and thereafter quarterly progress updates will be provided.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Any financial implications arising from the Improvement Plan will be met by existing resources.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 There are no risks arising directly from this report but risk and risk mitigation forms part of each priority of the Improvement Plan and will be managed by the respective Delivery Group.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

10. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT, HUMAN RIGHTS AND FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY

10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is attached.

11. CONSULTATION

11.1 The Director of Finance and the Director of Legal, Governance and Change have been consulted on the contents of this report.

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 149/23 – Local Housing Strategy 2023-28
- Report No 259/23 – Housing Services Performance Update – Annual Assurance Statement

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List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Housing Service Improvement Plan 2024 - 2025
Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment