

Appendix 2

Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) - Annual Assurance Statement (AAS) Assessment of Compliance

SHR Requirement

Prepare an AAS in accordance with published guidance, submit it to the SHR between April and 31st October 2021 and make it available to tenants and other service users.

Notify the SHR during the year of any material changes to the assurance on our AAS.

Have assurance and evidence that we are meeting all our legal obligations associated with housing and homelessness services, equality and human rights, and tenant and resident safety.

Notify the SHR of any tenant and resident safety matters which have been reported to or are being investigated by the Health and Safety Executive, or reports from regulatory or statutory authorities, or insurance providers, relating to safety concerns.

Make our Engagement Plan easily available and accessible to our tenants and service users, including online.

Submit an Annual Return on the Charter to the SHR each year in accordance with the SHR published guidance.

Involve tenants, and where relevant, other service users, in the preparation and scrutiny of performance information. We must: agree our approach with tenants; ensure that it is meaningful - that the chosen approach gives tenants a real and demonstrable say in the assessment of performance; publicise the approach to tenants; ensure that it can be verified and be able to show that the agreed approach to involving tenants has happened; involve other service users in an appropriate way, having asked and had regard to their needs and wishes.

Report our performance in achieving and progressing towards the Charter outcomes and standards to our tenants and other service users. We must agree the format of performance reporting with tenants, ensuring that it is accessible for tenants and other service users, with plain and jargon free language.

When reporting our performance to tenants and other service users we must: provide them with an assessment of performance in delivering each of the Charter outcomes and standards which are relevant to the Council; include relevant comparisons - these should include comparisons with previous years, with other landlords and with national performance; set out how and when we intend to address areas for improvement; give tenants and other service users a way to feed back their views on the style and form of the reporting.

Make the SHR report on our performance easily available to our tenants, including online.

Have effective arrangements and a policy for whistleblowing by staff and elected members, which it makes easily available and which we promote.

Make information on reporting significant performance failures, including the SHR leaflet, available to tenants.

Provide tenants and other service users with the information they need to exercise their right to complain and seek redress and respond to tenants within the timescales outlined in our service standards, in accordance with guidance from the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

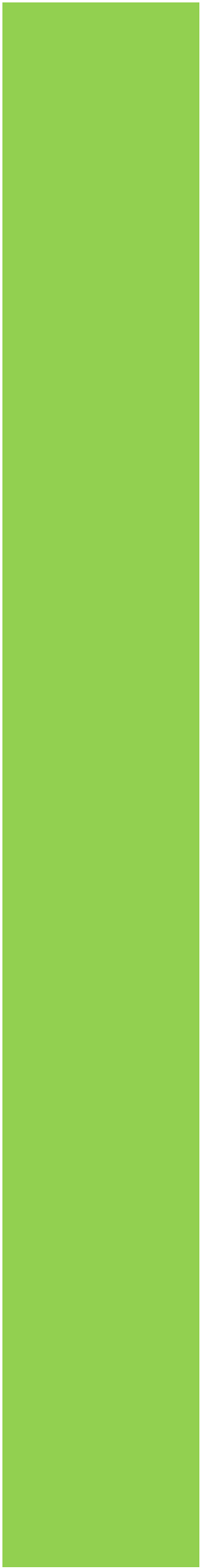
Ensure we have effective arrangements to learn from complaints and from other tenant and service user feedback, in accordance with SPSO guidance.

Have assurance and evidence that we consider equality and human rights issues properly when making all of our decisions, in the design and review of internal and external policies, and in day to day service delivery.

To comply with these duties, we must collect data relating to each of the protected characteristics of our existing tenants, new tenants, people on waiting lists, governing body members and staff. We must also collect data on protected characteristics for people who apply to us as homeless and those who live on our Gypsy / Traveller site.

Assured

Status



Evidence

Committee Report and Appendices, 5 October 2021. The ASS is published on the Council website at http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/917/housing/323/housing_strategy_and_performance and can be provided in other formats as requested.

There are no material changes to report at present.

Housing services are delivered in accordance with legislation, regulatory standards and taking account of best practice guidance.

As we progress through and out of the Covid-19 pandemic, the focus of the Housing Service has been ensuring the health and safety of tenants, other service users and Council employees, whilst maintaining core services and providing reassurance and contact for tenants and service users. This has been done in accordance with guidance issued by the Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland and the SHR. The SHR introduced a requirement for social landlords to submit monthly (now quarterly) monitoring information which has been shared with senior officers and councillors, in addition to general service updates provided to Council outlining all Covid-19 service related initiatives implemented by the Housing Service.

Policies and procedures provide clear direction to the Housing Services staff. The Making Performance Matter Appraisal process supports staff to achieve work related objectives linked to service / corporate plans and provide good levels of service to customers.

Internal audit reviews are carried out, most recently on the homelessness service (26 August 2021). Audits are reported to Audit Committee and development plans implemented.

Housing Services data is reported quarterly to the Council's Cabinet and the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Committee.

The Council is a member of the Scottish Housing Network and benchmarks performance against peer local authorities and regularly engages with best practice networks in a culture of scrutiny connected to No health and safety matters have been reported to the Health and Safety Executive in the last 12 months. There are no reports from regulatory or statutory authorities relating to safety concerns.

The Council's current Engagement Plan is published on the Council website at http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/917/housing/323/housing_strategy_and_performance

The Annual Return was completed and submitted by 31st May 2021, in accordance with the SHR response timescale.

The Tenant Participation and Customer Engagement Strategy 2020-23 sets out the framework for tenant scrutiny opportunities and is available on the Council's website at

https://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/200277/tenancy/224/tenant_participation.

Funding is provided to support tenant participation and engagement.

Feedback from homeless service users has shaped the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan in respect of further transforming services.

The annual performance report is provided to tenants and is available on the Council's website at

http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/917/housing/323/housing_strategy_and_performance There are a range of ways tenants can engage with the Housing Service to discuss performance and influence the format and design of the annual performance report.

In addition to published quarterly performance data reported to the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Committee, the annual performance report provides a comparison with other councils based on the Scottish Housing Network's peer group system. The report compares the Council's performance with the Scottish average and if performance has improved or deteriorated over the previous year. A narrative is provided highlighting key points and identifies areas for improvement.

The current SHR report is available on the Council's website at
http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/917/housing/323/housing_strategy_and_performance

The Council's Whistleblowing Policy was last reviewed 17th August 2018. Details are available for staff on the Council's intranet site.

Policies in respect of fraud, corruption and bribery are available to members of the public on the Council's website and staff undertake mandatory eLearning training. Concerns can be reported by telephone and email.

A link to the SHR website is available on the Council's website at
http://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/917/housing/323/housing_strategy_and_performance

The complaints handling process is available on the Council's website (and link provided on the front page of the website) at https://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/670/have_your_say/132/complaints_procedure.

Leaflets are available in Council buildings used by members of the public and referred to in written and verbal communications as appropriate with customers. The complaints process is highlighted at the new tenant settling-in visit undertaken within the first 4-6 weeks of tenancy start date.

Complaints performance data is considered at the Housing Services monthly performance review meeting attended by senior officers. This includes details of complaints received, outcomes and lessons learned where service failures are identified and remedial action is taken to improve service.

Housing Services complaints data is reported to the Council's Cabinet and the Performance, Review and Scrutiny Committee. Mandatory eLearning training on Customer First and Complaints handling is undertaken by all staff to ensure they have the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence.

The Council's Equality Plan 2017-21 commits all services to meeting the requirements of equalities legislation and promoting an equal opportunities culture. The Equality Mainstreaming Outcome Progress report (2017-19) sets out how the Council integrates equality across activities and functions when delivering services. This report and other reports is published on the Council's website at
https://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/200286/equality_and_diversity/136/equality_and_diversity_-_our_commitment.

The Council's Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) tool is used to ensure the consideration of equality and human rights issues and the impact of decisions on those with protected characteristics.

The Council considers that the decision making process needs to consider the wider scope and therefore the IIA also considers socio-economic inequality, health inequality, human rights, environmental and sustainability matters. All new and existing housing policies and procedures are considered as part of an IIA. The Council's Equality/Diversity Officer is consulted with when new policies, plans, strategies are being reviewed, renewed or developed through the IIA process. This helps to ensure that the needs of all our customers are met.

The Council meets its legal requirements in respect of the corporate reporting. Equalities considerations are a standing item for consideration in all Council Reports being considered by Elected Members and the Corporate Management Team.

The Council's Equality / Diversity Officer delivers appropriate training to the staff teams regarding equality
Midlothian Council collects data relating to protected characteristics for the specified groups.

Action

The winter tenant newsletter posted on social media platforms will provide information on and how to access the 2021 AAS.

The Council provides the SHR with regular performance information and updates on areas for improvement identified in the Council's Engagement Plan. Officers met with SHR on 26 August 2021 to discuss Engagement Plan 2021/22.

The Engagement Plan features in the tenant newsletter.

Meeting scheduled with Midlothian Tenants Panel on 16th November 2021 to review 2020/21 performance, facilitated by the Scottish Housing Network (this is an annual event). This will include considering feedback received regarding the format and design of the performance report for 2020/21.

The winter tenant newsletter will include the performance report for 2020/21.

The summer tenant newsletter provided information on how to access the SHR report for 2020/21 and this will be published on the Council's website.

The winter tenant newsletter will provide annual reminder information on reporting significant performance failures.

The winter tenant newsletter will provide annual reminder information on the complaints handling procedure.

Undertake discussions with the Council's Engagement Officer and Midlothian Peoples Equality Group, which is a group of that represent all the protected characteristics, to establish arrangements to encourage feedback on future policies, plans, strategies.

Undertake a Council-tenant-wide profile survey to collect up to date information across all protected characteristics and socio-economic situation as part of the next tenant satisfaction survey in 2022.