



Landlord Report to Tenants 2019 / 20



Midlothian



Welcome to our Landlord Report to Tenants covering the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. The information contained in the report shows our tenants and service users how we are performing as a landlord. We explain in the report what we have achieved, where we are making improvements and how we will continue to improve things further.

We work in partnership with Midlothian's Tenant Panel and they have helped shape this report and influence the content and design. If there is anything you would like us to include in next year's report, please let us know.

To ensure a realistic comparison between councils, Scotland's Housing Network has developed a peer group system which groups councils of similar size together for ease of comparison. This is because comparing larger and smaller councils may be less useful, although we do report the average results for all Scottish councils too. Our peer group councils are: Angus, Clackmannanshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire, Moray, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, Perth and Kinross, South Ayrshire and Stirling.

We are pleased to see improvement in a number of areas. However, improvement is still required in a number of areas and the report shows our plans to address these as we work to deliver excellence in all of the Social Housing Charter Outcomes.

We hope you enjoy reading about what we achieved in the year and taking a look at how we performed on the key indicators we give the Scottish Housing Regulator each year. You can find out further information contained in the Regulator's Report and their role by visiting the Regulator's website at **www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk**



Key achievements

Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020
Midlothian Council:

- Delivered 41 new build properties in Dalkeith, Danderhall and Loanhead.
- 49 properties purchased from the open market
- Responded to customer feedback and complaints within our target timescales
- Reduced the average length of time taken to complete non-emergency repairs by 6.3 days
- 100% gas safety check and record completed by the anniversary date
- Carried out 318 medical adaptations to assist tenants who have a disability
- Average time to complete medical adaptations was 19 days, compared to the Scottish average of 36 days and 35 days for our peer group
- Tenancy refusals very low compared to all other local authorities
- 97% of new tenancies sustained for more than a year, compared to the Scottish average of 89% and 89% for our peer group
- Tenant scrutiny events continue to improve services



Key Highlights

- 7001 properties owned by us compared to 6919 for 2018/19
- 3,950 applicants on the housing list compared to 3395 for 2018/19
- 4% of properties became vacant amongst the lowest of all Scottish councils compared to 4.75% for 2018/19
- 306 properties let with average re-let time of 51.8 days compared to 299 properties let with average re-let time of 48.32 days for 2018/19
- 351 offers were made to housing applicants compared to 362 offers for 2018/19. A total of 45 (12.8%) were refused within the year compared to the Scottish average of 37.6% and 38.8% for our peer group. 42 offers were refused during 2018/19.
- 4,684 emergency repairs completed compared to 7,612 for 2018/19
- 15,613 non-emergency repairs completed compared to 17,104 for 2018/19
- 94% of housing stock meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard compared to 96% for 2018/19
- £5.7 million invested in existing homes – compare to £5 million for 2018/19
- 130 new kitchens installed compared to 5 for 2018/19
- 750 new windows installed compared to 730 for 2018/19
- 260 new heating systems installed compared to 255 for 2018/19
- 86 new bathrooms installed
- Energy efficiency measures installed in 276 properties compared to 196 for 2018/19
- 301 households placed in temp accommodation in 2019/20 compared to 281 for 2018/19
- 11 monthly resident-led neighbourhood inspections undertaken. 12 monthly resident-led neighbourhood inspections were undertaken during 2018/19



Customer feedback

The Social Housing Charter sets out the standards and outcomes that the council should be achieving when delivering housing services.

The Charter has helped us focus on how we are performing and has provided good information to our tenants. We regularly gather feedback from tenants and service users through satisfaction surveys, our complaints and feedback policy, and through our work with the Midlothian Tenant Panel and tenant groups. Here are some of the outcomes as a result of what you told us.

You told us

Why does it take so long to re-let a property?

What we did

We know tenants appreciate the quality of accommodation when they first move in. To ensure a good letting standard this can mean empty houses taking longer to relet due to the repair and maintenance work going on in the property. We are committed to reducing the overall time we take to re-let empty properties. In 2019/20 the average length of time to re-let properties was 51.8 days, compared to 48.3 days in 2018/19. In 2019/20 the Scottish average was 37.9 days and 41 days for our peer group.

We carried out a review of our Void Policy and Procedure to reduce the time that properties are empty to help tenants move in as soon as possible, including earlier property inspections at the point tenants move out and undertaking some repairs after new tenants move in and including major improvement works such as new kitchens, bathrooms and windows.

You told us

Why does it take so long to provide permanent accommodation for homeless households?

What we did

In 2019/20 it took us on average 115 weeks to provide permanent accommodation to homeless households, compared to 34 weeks for all local authorities. Homeless households also spend a longer time in temporary accommodation at 561 days, compared to all local authorities at 184 days. This is due to the shortage and low turnover of affordable council housing in Midlothian.

We carried out a review of our Housing Allocation Policy, consulting with tenants and housing applicants, which places a renewed focus on addressing homelessness, providing choice, increasing the proportion of lets to homeless applicants and increased flexibility in the properties being allocated, including flipping tenancies which will reduce waiting times and time spent in temporary accommodation. The impact of these changes have helped us end the use of emergency bed and breakfast accommodation during 2020.

You told us

We need to update the Tenants' Handbook to reflect changes to how some services are delivered and take account of changes to housing law.

What we did

We are producing a new Tenants' handbook in consultation with tenant groups and this will be available in 2021.



Tenant Participation

Tenant participation is central to the way we work and our aim is to maximise our tenants' involvement in influencing and scrutinising our housing services. We want tenants to get involved in ways that suit them best. How tenant participation works is set out in our Tenant Participation Strategy. The aim of tenant participation is to improve housing services.

The Midlothian Tenant Panel continued to work in partnership with us to deliver and improve services for tenants. We continue to encourage people to get involved in scrutiny and consultation events knowing the importance of tenants working together to improve housing services provided by us.

There are a lot of different opportunities for tenants to become involved including at the Annual Tenants' Day which was held on August 2019. Over the last year we have worked with our tenants groups and Midlothian Tenants Panel to review our Housing Allocation Policy, the annual Assurance Statement submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator and to scrutinise the annual performance information submitted to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Tenant Satisfaction

The council carries out a comprehensive tenant satisfaction survey every three years. The last survey was carried out in 2019 which saw an overall improvement in the satisfaction that our tenants have with the housing services provided to them. These surveys give us good information about what parts of the service our tenants are most satisfied with and identify areas where we need to make improvements.

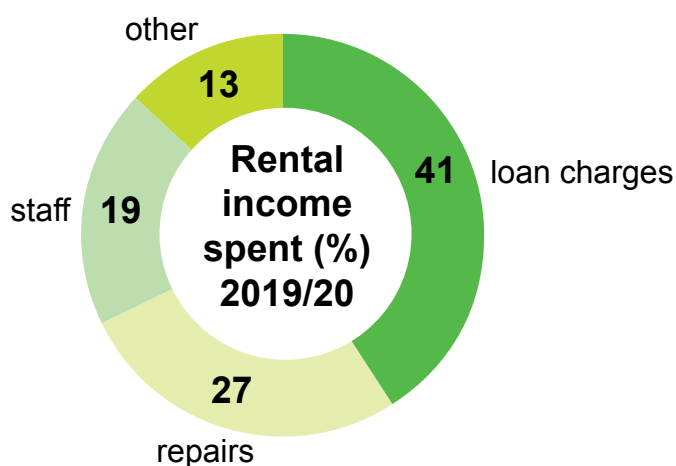
- Satisfaction with the overall service provided by the council as a Landlord was 84%. The Scottish average is 82% and 86% for our peer group.
- Satisfaction with how good tenants felt we were as a Landlord at keeping them informed about our services and decisions was 85%. The Scottish average is 86% and 88% for our peer group.
- Satisfaction with the opportunities we gave tenants to participate in our decision making processes was 82%. The Scottish average is 80% and 82% for our peer group.
- 84% of tenants were satisfied with the overall quality of their home. The Scottish average is 81% and 85% for our peer group.



Rent and Value for Money

During the financial year 2019/20 you paid **£26.03 million in rent payments.**

The information below shows how we spent every pound collected of our rental income in 2019/20.



- 41p covers the payment of loan charges made to cover investment in the development of new house building and investment in existing stock such as replacement windows, heating, kitchens and doors.
- 27p covers the costs of all repairs reported by customers and planned repairs like roof work and external painting.
- 19p covers staffing costs associated with providing housing services.
- 13p for other expenses including the provision we make each year to cover the costs of debts such as rent arrears and rechargeable repairs.

Rent collection performance

97.9% of the total rent due was collected in the year compared to the Scottish average of 99% and 99% for our peer group. The overall arrears outstanding were 7.9% of the total rent due compared to the Scottish average of 5.8% and 7% for our peer group. These figures were affected by the national COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. The council was paid housing costs directly through housing benefit and Universal Credit for 3739 households, the total value of payments received in the reporting year was £9,739,442.

Housing stock and rent

In 2018 tenants and housing applicants voted on our rent plans for 2019, 2020 and 2021. The most popular option was a 3% increase which has enabled development of 1,000 further new council houses, maintaining existing housing services and continuing with the maintenance and improvement of existing council houses.

The feedback we received from tenants from the 2019 customer satisfaction survey showed that 84% felt that rent represented good value for money.

The weekly rent for each apartment size in 2019/20 is compared with Scottish average below.

Apartment size	Midlothian Council	Scottish Average	Difference
1	£74.41	£63.30	£11.11+
2	£68.54	£70.46	£1.92-
3	£74.11	£75.16	£1.05-
4	£82.02	£80.53	£1.49+
5+	£86.36	£87.05	£0.69-

Homes and Communities

81% of tenants told us they were satisfied with the management of the neighbourhood they live in, compared to the Scottish average of 85% and 86.6% for our peer group.

Neighbourhood Inspections

These provide an important opportunity for tenants and residents to get involved in identifying issues and actions to improve neighbourhoods working with a range of community safety services. 11 neighbourhood inspections were held during 2019/20 resulting in improvements to the standard of gardens and common areas. For more information about organising a neighbourhood inspection email tenantparticipation@midlothian.gov.uk or call our Tenant Participation Officer on **07785 382170**.



Antisocial Behaviour

We promote tolerance and the right of every resident to enjoy peace and quiet in their home with respect for and from their neighbour. Antisocial behaviour can include loud music, shouting, swearing, verbal abuse, vandalism and physical violence.

Our Housing Services Team work with Police Scotland and other community safety partners, including independent mediation, in responding to antisocial behaviour complaints. We continue to address and resolve antisocial behaviour whilst considering the needs of those impacted by such behaviour. In 2019/20, 255 cases of antisocial behaviour were reported of which 251 cases were resolved.

Abandonments

Over the year there have been a small number of properties that tenants abandoned. We recovered possession of 3 properties following investigations which confirmed they were abandoned. This represents 0.04% of our housing stock.

We actively investigate and follow up any reports of unoccupied properties therefore if you have concerns regarding an abandoned property please contact us on **0131 271 3397** or email **housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk**

Evictions

There has been a reduction in the number of evictions where we evicted 18 tenants compared to 32 for 2018/19.

Eviction is seen as a last resort. We aim to work with our tenants and have developed a preventative approach to deal with antisocial behaviour, using a range of interventions to deal with those who perpetrate such behaviour. To maximise our income and reduce rent arrears we offer tenants confidential support and make sure they get the help that they need.

Access to Housing and Support

There is a very high demand for our properties. On 31 March 2020 we had 3950 applicants registered on our waiting list. The turnover of our housing stock is extremely low with only 248 properties becoming vacant. This means 3.85% of our housing stock became vacant which is 50% less than the Scottish average. 97% of new tenancies were sustained for more than a year, compared to the Scottish average of 89% and 89% for our peer group.

This means that we cannot meet all the demand for council housing.

It is important there is turnover of our housing stock to allow applicants to move to suit their needs. The new Housing Allocation Policy will offer incentives to encourage stock turnover such as local lettings initiatives and greater financial incentives to move to a smaller property.

Of the 306 homes we let in the year, 176 went to homeless applicants, 130 to general needs and choice housing applicants. The total number of offers refused was 45 which is 21% less than the Scottish average and 26% less than our peer group.

Increasing Housing Supply

We continued to invest in new homes for Midlothian and delivered 41 new council houses in Danderhall, Dalkeith and Loanhead. We can look forward to the delivery of many more new council homes in the coming years through our Affordable Housing Delivery Programme which will help address the housing needs of those on our housing list.

We also purchased 49 properties across Midlothian from the open market to increase our supply of affordable housing. This is an increase on the previous year when 18 properties were purchased.



Homelessness

The council has an ambitious Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan which aims to improve outcomes for households affected by or at risk of homelessness. Our vision is to increase the number of homeless households obtaining permanent accommodation that no homeless household will be accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation and the average time taken for the council to complete its homeless duty will have halved.

During 2019/20, housing options advice and support was provided to 836 households. 462 households were assessed as homeless which is 4 less than 2018/19.

57.5% of all permanent lets of council housing were made to homeless applicants.

97.3% of new tenancies let to homeless applicants were sustained for more than one year compared to the Scottish average of 87.6% and 86.5% for our peer group.

Temporary Accommodation

We have a legal duty to provide temporary accommodation to homeless applicants who require it. We use properties from our own housing stock, lease a small number of properties from the private rented sector and operate 8 shared supported housing services across Midlothian managed by a specialist support organisation.

87% of the households were satisfied with the quality of the temporary or emergency accommodation provided.

Due to the shortage and low turnover of affordable council housing in Midlothian it took us on average 115 weeks to provide permanent accommodation to homeless households, compared to the Scottish average of 34 weeks. Homeless households also spend a longer time in temporary accommodation at 561 days, compared to the Scottish average 184 days.

Housing Quality and Maintenance

94% of our housing stock complies with the Scottish Housing Quality Standard which is a key measure of housing quality. This compares to the Scottish average of 95% and 95.6% for our peer group.

The Energy Efficiency Standards for Social Housing (ESSH) aim to improve the energy efficiency of social housing. The standards are set by the Scottish Government. The council must ensure that our properties meet the ESSH standard by December 2020. The aim of the standard is to improve energy efficiency through a range of measures including insulation, heating replacement.



85% of the council's housing stock is ESSH compliant, which compares favourably to the Scottish average of 64% and 68% for our peer group.

There are many benefits for tenants who have more energy efficient, warm, high quality and low carbon homes. The council carry out regular stock condition surveys to find out what is required and helps to plan our improvement work to ensure that our homes meet these standards by the timescales required including installing energy efficiency measures in 276 homes.

£5.7 million was also invested in existing homes during the year, including 130 new kitchens installed, 750 new windows installed, 260 new heating systems installed and 86 new bathrooms installed.



Emergency Repairs

We completed 4,684 emergency repairs.



The average length of time taken to complete an emergency repair was 8 hours compared to the Scottish average of 4 hours and 4 hours for our peer group.

Non-emergency Repairs

We completed 15,613 non-emergency repairs.

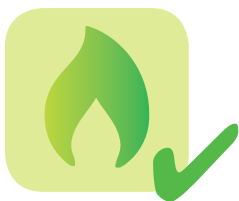
The average length of time taken to complete non-emergency repairs reduced by 6.3 days to 10 days, compared to the Scottish average of 7.1 days and 7.3 days for our peer group.

88% of reactive repairs were completed right first time compared to the Scottish average of 92.4% and 89.5% for our peer group.

82% of tenants indicated they are satisfied with the quality of the repairs service, compared to the Scottish average of 91% and 91% for our peer group.

We want to improve levels of tenant satisfaction and the time it takes to complete emergency and non-emergency repairs and will review how we achieve this during 2020/21, including reviewing satisfaction feedback arrangements with the quality of services provided.

Gas Safety



We achieved 100% compliance with our legal responsibility to service gas heating systems within 12 months of the previous inspection.

Making Best Use of Our Housing Stock and Maximising Rental Income

As previously explained, we are committed to reducing the overall time we take to re-let empty properties. In 2019/20 the average length of time to re-let properties was 51.8 days, compared to 48.3 days in 2018/19. In 2019/20 the Scottish average was 37.9 days and 41 days for our local authority peer group.

The amount of rent lost through properties being empty during 2019/20 was £224,055. This accounts for a 0.83% rent loss, compared to the Scottish Average of 1.07% and 1.1% for our peer group.

Feedback

We really value your feedback on our report – in particular what you like about it and what information you would like to see included in the future.

We would also be happy to talk to you if there are specific things you want to know about our performance. We are able to discuss performance information in more detail at tenants groups or you could join the Tenant Panel if you want to help identify ways we can improve. You could also just contact us to discuss this report.

Please let us know by emailing **tenantparticipation@midlothian.gov.uk** or calling our Tenant Participation Officer on **07785 382170**.

If you want to find out more about our performance, you can get detailed information from the Scottish Housing Regulator's website: **www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk**

