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# Landlord Report to Tenants 2020 / 21

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Midlothian



**Welcome to our Landlord Report to Tenants covering the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. 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.

As the country went into lockdown on the 23 March 2020, we responded immediately to protect and support our tenants and communities in such difficult times to ensure we could continue to deliver essential services.

We have worked really hard to ensure services run as smoothly as possible in line with restrictions, however we have at times only been able to carry out essential and emergency services in line with government guidelines. This has affected things like non-emergency repairs, our modernisation programme and upgrades to our housing stock.

It is likely that the impact of the pandemic will continue to be felt for some time and we will continue to face other challenges as we work to build back the services we provide and meet wider challenges around climate change and the development of affordable new homes.

We are pleased to report improvements in some 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.

To ensure a realistic comparison between councils, the 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 hope you enjoy reading about what we achieved in the year and taking a look at how we performed on the key indicators we submit to the Scottish Housing Regulator. 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](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk)**



## Key achievements

Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 we:

- Delivered 96 new build properties, representing an investment of £12.4 million
- 14 additional properties were purchased from the open market, representing an investment of £2.1 million
- Ended the use of bed and breakfast type emergency accommodation to ensure compliance with legislation
- Responded to customer feedback and complaints within our target timescales
- Reduced the time taken to complete emergency repairs from 5.6 hours to 2.5 hours
- Reduced the time taken to re-let properties by 13.8 days to 38 days
- Carried out 253 medical adaptations to assist tenants who have a disability
- Retained low Tenancy refusals compared to all other local authorities
- Sustained 99% of new tenancies for more than a year
- Continued to improve services through virtual tenant participation and scrutiny activities



## Key Highlights

- 7,111 properties owned by us compared to 7,001 for 2019/20
- 4136 applicants on the housing list compared to 3,950 for 2019/20
- 4.8% of properties became vacant - amongst the lowest of all Scottish councils compared to 4% for 2019/20
- 359 properties let with average re-let time of 38 days compared to 306 properties let with average re-let time of 51.8 days for 2019/20
- 0.7% of rent lost through properties being empty
- 372 offers were made to housing applicants compared to 351 offers for 2019/20. A total of 13 offers (3.5%) were refused compared to the Scottish average of 36.5% and 33.2% for our peer group. 45 offers were refused during 2019/20
- 4,965 emergency repairs completed compared to 4,684 for 2019/20
- 4,146 non-emergency repairs completed compared to 15,613 for 2019/20
- 98.1% of housing stock meeting the Scottish Housing Quality Standard compared to 94% for 2019/20
- £1.15 million invested in existing homes including installation of 72 new kitchens, 17 new windows, 16 new heating systems, 34 new bathrooms and energy efficiency measures in 88 properties.
- 9 resident-led neighbourhood inspections were undertaken. 11 resident-led neighbourhood inspections were undertaken during 2019/20



## 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? This was a recurring theme.*

#### What we did

We know tenants appreciate the quality of accommodation when they first move in. We are committed to reducing the overall time we take to re-let empty properties. 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.

As a result of this review, we reduced the average length of time taken to re-let properties by 13.8 days to 38 days, compared to the Scottish average of 57.3 days and 57.7 days for our peer group.

#### You told us

*Some emergency temporary accommodation is unsuitable and unsatisfactory.*

#### What we did

We set out plans to end the use of bed and breakfast type emergency accommodation to ensure compliance with the amended Unsuitable Accommodation Order (UAO). A local authority would be in breach of the UAO if any homeless person was placed in unsuitable accommodation for more than 7 days. In response to these changes we ended the use of bed and breakfast type of accommodation in November 2020 and have not placed any household in accommodation considered unsuitable since this time.

The cost of using this type of emergency accommodation was very costly. Some of the savings realised by ending the use of this accommodation were used to fund activities which have a focus on the prevention of homelessness, including increasing the number of households assisted to private rented accommodation and providing direct assistance to help people remain in their current accommodation.

#### You told us

*We needed to take further action to improve the support provided to the victims of domestic abuse.*

#### What we did

Our commitment to taking action to support victims of domestic abuse was affirmed by signing the 'Make a Stand' pledge developed by Women's Aid, Chartered Institute of Housing and the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance. We developed a new policy in partnership with Midlothian Women's Aid and Mid and East Lothian's Public Protection Team to provide better outcomes for those affected by domestic abuse, which includes taking action against the perpetrator should they be a Midlothian council tenant.



## 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.

We need to be aware of tenants' needs, keep them informed by quarterly newsletters via social media, treat them fairly and provide ways for them to have an influence over the services they use and the decisions we take. 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.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to find new ways of keeping in touch and engaging with tenants and service users. We made greater use of online communication and held most of our meetings and events online. We offered digital support training to tenants to enable them all the opportunity to participate. We also contacted tenants and service users by email and telephone offering advice and the chance to catch up on local matters and a course on mindfulness.

Many of our tenants and service users have given us positive feedback from these meetings and events.

## 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. The next tenant satisfaction survey is planned for 2022.

- Satisfaction with the overall service provided by the council as a Landlord was 84%. The Scottish average is 84% 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 79% and 83% for our peer group.
- 84% of tenants were satisfied with the overall quality of their home. The Scottish average is 83% and 84% for our peer group.



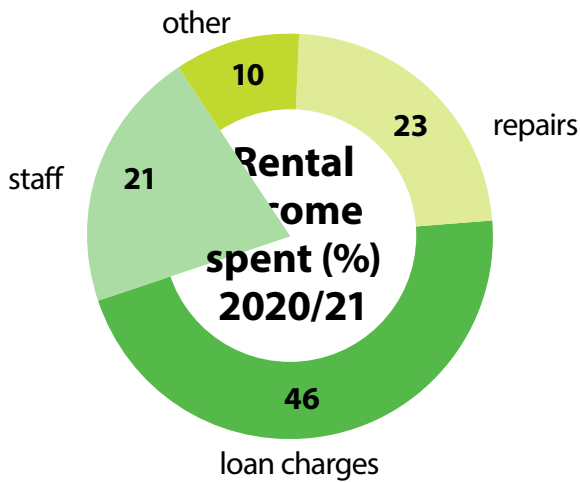
Tenants Day 2019



## Rent and Value for Money

During the financial year 2020/21 you paid **£30 million in rent payments.**

The information below shows how we spent every pound collected of our rental income in 2020/21.



- 46% 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.
- 23% covers the costs of all repairs reported by customers and planned repairs.
- 21% covers staffing costs associated with providing housing services.
- 10% 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

99.2% of the total rent due was collected in the year compared to the Scottish average of 98.7% and 100% for our peer group. The overall arrears outstanding reduced by 0.6% from 2019/20 to 6.4% of the total rent due compared to the Scottish average of 5.4% and 5.4% for our peer group. These figures were affected by the national COVID-19 lockdown. We were paid housing costs directly through housing benefit and Universal Credit for 3,459 households, the total value of payments received in the reporting year was £11,144,468.

## 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.

In February 2021, councillors decided to defer the 3% rent increase proposed for 2021/22 in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic impact and its effects upon households.

The weekly rent for each apartment size in 2020/21 is compared with Scottish average below.

Apartment size	Midlothian Council	Scottish Average	Difference
1	£76.64	£64.05	£12.14+
2	£70.59	£71.30	£0.71-
3	£76.33	£76.06	£0.27+
4	£84.48	£81.49	£2.99+
5+	£88.95	£88.09	£0.86+

## 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 83% and 86% 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. 9 neighbourhood inspections were held during 2020/21 resulting in improvements to the standard of gardens and common areas. For more information about organising a neighbourhood inspection email [tenantparticipation@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto: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's Community Action Teams which has a wide community safety remit in responding to antisocial behaviour complaints. We continue to address and resolve antisocial behaviour whilst considering the needs of those impacted by such behaviour.

There was a reduction in the number of cases of anti-social behaviour reported due to the restrictions introduced to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020/21, 182 cases of antisocial behaviour were reported of which proportionate tenancy actions were taken to resolve these in all cases.

## Abandonments

Over the year there have been a small number of properties that tenants abandoned. We recovered possession of 8 properties following investigations which confirmed they were abandoned. This represents 0.11% 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 email [housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk](mailto:housing.enquiries@midlothian.gov.uk)

## Evictions

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.

There were no evictions for non-payment of rent due to the legal provisions introduced to protect tenants from eviction during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Access to Housing and Support

There is a very high demand for our properties. On 31 March 2021 we had 4,136 applicants registered on our waiting list.

The turnover of our housing stock is extremely low at 4.8% of our housing stock which is less than the Scottish average of 6.7%.

99% of new tenancies were sustained for more than a year, compared to the Scottish average of 90% and 91% 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 Housing Allocation Policy offers incentives to encourage stock turnover such as local lettings initiatives and greater financial incentives to move to a smaller property.

Of the 359 homes we let in the year, 194 went to homeless applicants, 165 to general needs housing applicants. The total number of offers refused was 13 (3.5%) which is 28.4% less than the Scottish average and 29.7% less than our peer group.

## Increasing Housing Supply

We continued to invest in new homes for Midlothian and delivered 96 new council houses in Danderhall, Loanhead, Pathhead and Penicuik. 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 14 properties across Midlothian from the open market to increase our supply of affordable housing.



## 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 2020/21, housing options advice and support was provided to 662 households. 427 households were assessed as homeless which is 35 less than 2019/20.

54% of all permanent lets of council housing were made to homeless applicants.

99% of new tenancies let to homeless applicants were sustained for more than one year compared to the Scottish average of 90% and 88% 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.

89% 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 112 weeks to provide permanent accommodation to homeless households, compared to the Scottish average of 35 weeks. Homeless households also spend a longer time in temporary accommodation at 614 days, compared to the Scottish average 199 days.

There was a 26% reduction in the number of children (230) living in temporary accommodation. This compares to 9.5% increase for Scotland for 2020/21.

## Housing Quality and Maintenance

98.1% 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 91.3% and 89.6% 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. We must ensure that our properties meet this standard. The aim of the standard is to improve energy efficiency through a range of measures including insulation, new windows and heating replacement.



85% of the housing stock is ESSH compliant, which compares favourably to the Scottish average of 65% and 70% for our peer group.

There are many benefits for tenants who have more energy efficient, warm, high quality and low carbon homes. We 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 88 homes.

£1.15 million was also invested in existing homes during the year, including 72 new kitchens installed, 17 new windows installed, 16 new heating systems installed and 34 new bathrooms installed.





## Emergency Repairs

We completed **4,965** emergency repairs.



The average length of time taken to complete an emergency repair was 2.5 hours compared to the Scottish average of 4.7 hours and 4.1 hours for our peer group.

## Non-emergency Repairs

We completed 4,146 non-emergency repairs which is significantly less than we would normally undertake. As a result of the Covid-19 restrictions and compliance with Public Health guidance, we were limited to providing critical services, emergencies and void property works only being carried out during the lockdown periods.

As a result, the average length of time taken to complete non-emergency repairs increased by 7.5 days to 18 days, compared to the Scottish average of 7 days and 11 days for our peer group.

82% of tenants indicated they are satisfied with the quality of the repairs service, compared to the Scottish average of 89% and 90% 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 2021/22, 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 for all other council properties, with the exception of

119 properties. During the Covid-19 pandemic, access was not permitted to properties where a household member was shielding. These properties have now been serviced and have valid gas safety certificates.

## Making Best Use of Our Housing Stock and Maximising Rental Income

We are committed to reducing the overall time we take to re-let empty properties. In 2020/21 the average length of time to re-let properties was 38 days, compared to 51.8 days in 2019/20. In 2021/20 the Scottish average was 57 days and 58 days for our local authority peer group.

The amount of rent lost through properties being empty during 2020/21 was £194,482. This accounts for a 0.7% rent loss, compared to the Scottish Average of 1.3% and 1.5% 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](mailto: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](http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk)**

