

2023 Annual Report to Tenants

More detail available on the [Scottish Housing Regulators Website](#).

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What is the annual report on the charter?

Each local authority landlord and registered social landlord is required to submit performance data to the Scottish Housing Regulator on a yearly basis.

This allows the Scottish Housing Regulator to monitor ongoing performance.

Alongside this, the Scottish Housing Network collates performance data and uses this for “benchmarking”, or detailing how a landlords performance compares to its peer-group.

The information contained in this report has been selected in discussion with Aberdeenshire Council’s Tenants’ Communications Group, as well as through themes which tenants taking part in business plan consultation groups have highlighted as “high importance”.

Stay up to date with opportunities to have your say by [joining our Facebook Group](#).

How we plan your rents

Aberdeenshire Council sets rents yearly. The Housing service consults with tenants on what rent options are preferred - this is usually done on a 3 year basis, but can be reviewed more frequently. A working group consisting of elected member (councillors), housing staff, and tenants then consider this information alongside detailed financial modelling.

The working group then makes a recommendation based on all information which was given.

The Housing service then create a report with relevant detail and recommendations which goes to full council.

Full Council then make a decision, and set the level of rent for the year.

The past 4 years have seen tenants and the housing service facing unprecedented challenges - through the Covid-19 pandemic, straight into a cost of living crisis.

Through extensive consultation with tenants, we have been told that while the majority feel rent levels are affordable, the rise in energy and every day living costs have caused many to struggle.

The housing service is also facing pressures and challenges - for example, with the rise in costs for materials - but is committed to keeping rent levels affordable.

2023 has seen extensive consultation with tenants taking place between August and October - asking what services are most important to them, and what they feel good value for money looks like within these services.

Your Rents

Your rents fund the Housing Revenue Account, or HRA. This fund is separate from the Council's other monies (such as council tax) which are held in the General Fund.

The money paid into the HRA funds all aspects of the housing service including repairs, maintenance, housing improvement, sheltered housing, and staffing costs.

Table showing the average rents in Aberdeenshire compared to Scottish Average.

1 Apartment is 57.84 (Aberdeenshire) and 78.26 (Scottish Average).

2 apartment is 85.40 (Aberdeenshire) and 83.46 (Scottish Average).

3 Apartment is 88.67 (Aberdeenshire) and 86.28 (Scottish Average).

4 apartment is 103.10 (Aberdeenshire) and 93.96 (Scottish Average).

5 apartment is 117.82 (Aberdeenshire) and 103.72 (Scottish Average).

Value For Money

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Expenditure

% of HRA funds to budget lines:

repairs and maintenance 31%

sheltered housing 8%

void rent loss 3%

capital works 23%

cost of borrowing 13%

central support charges 4%

supervision and management 17%

bad debt 1%

Repairs and Maintenance includes the day to day repairs and cyclical maintenance.

Supervision and Management are staffing costs. **Capital Works** and the **Cost of Borrowing** go towards funding our housing improvement programme and new build properties

Voids

A "void" is the period of time where a property is empty - between a tenancy ending and a new one beginning. It's important to keep the time a property is empty as short as possible as we don't receive any rent for this period. We keep track of this lost rent to show how much money we lose in a year and how well we are managing our voids.

Lettings

It is impossible to avoid losing some rent each year to voids because there are things we have to do before a property can be let again (like safety checks, repairs and advertising the home). Aberdeenshire Council has not performed as well as we would like on voids, but we are getting better.

We reduced the rent we lose because of empty homes last year - falling from 2.75% of our rent to 2%. This is a reduction of about £250,000. Although this is a big improvement compared to last year, we still lose more of our rent to empty properties (voids) than most local authorities. So, we need to keep improving how we deal with voids to bring this number down further before we meet our targets.

Empty Homes

This will take time, but it's something we're committed to getting better at. The chart on the next page shows how Aberdeenshire Council compares to the average for the North-East of Scotland (Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Moray and Angus), the average for all local authorities in Scotland, and to the median for Scottish local authorities (which is the halfway point).

How do we Compare

Average days to relet void properties 2022-23

North East Scotland Average: 116.8

Aberdeenshire: 76.2

Scottish Local Authority Average: 66.9

Scottish Median: 59

Void Properties

The average time we take to let void properties improved in 2022/23, falling from 95 days in 2021/22 to 76 days last year. While this is a big improvement, Aberdeenshire Council still takes longer than average to let empty properties. Our target for this year is to reduce the average relet time to around the Scottish median (the halfway point).

We reduced the rent we lose because of empty homes last year, falling from 2.75% of our rent in 2021/22 to 2% in 2022/23 - this is about £250,000 less.

Although this is a big improvement compared to last year, we still lose more of our rent to empty properties (voids) than most local authorities. So, we need to keep improving how we deal with voids to bring this number down further before we meet our targets. This will take time, but it's something we're committed to getting better at.

The chart above shows how Aberdeenshire Council compares to the average for the North-East of Scotland (Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Moray and Angus), the average for all local authorities in Scotland, and to the median for Scottish local authorities (which is the halfway point).

Percentage of rent lost due to empty properties 2022-23

North East Scotland Average: 3.93%

Aberdeenshire: 2.03%

Scottish Local Authority Average: 1.71%

Scottish Median: 1.28%

You can compare your landlords performance to other landlords by using the Scottish Housing Regulator comparison tool: <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/comparison-tool>

Repairs

ENERGY EFFICIENCY STANDARD FOR SOCIAL HOUSING (EESH) AND SCOTTISH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS (SHQS)

Aberdeenshire Council's homes which meet the SHQS have increased from 67.7% to 78.2% over the past year – higher than projected. The main reason properties do not meet SHQS is due to not meeting energy efficiency standards. Only 18 properties (0.01%) fail to meet the SHQS for reasons not related to energy efficiency.

Aberdeenshire Council have a variety of types and builds of homes. Approximately 15% of these will not be able to meet energy efficiency standards; therefore, full compliance for Aberdeenshire Council is around 85%. The average Energy Performance for Aberdeenshire Council's come is "band C".

Housing Stock EPC Ratings

A – 2%

B – 27%

C - 39%

D – 26%

E – 5%

F – 1%

G – 0%

Percentage of appointments kept

Aberdeenshire Council offers a range of appointment slots to our tenants when arranging non-emergency repairs. This helps to minimise the disruption for our tenants when they need to wait in for operatives to arrive.

While it is not always possible for operatives to arrive within the agreed timeslot (for example, if they are called away for an emergency), we aim to arrive in time for the majority of appointments.

Percentage of appointments kept

Scottish Average: 96.6%

Aberdeenshire Council 2021/22: 95.3%

Aberdeenshire Council 2022/23: 96%

Your voice, our progress

Quote: The meetings about the business plan are created to allow tenants to voice their concerns directly to the representatives from the council. I personally listened to various proposals for the council to consider, it was interesting to hear the different solutions to many problems. It is extremely important that tenants have a say in how the council operates. There is no one solution to any of the issues that were raised. Some tenants are aware of this, but they are only a few, there is a place for tenants to have their say, and it should be in the various working groups that the council hold every month. As a tenant who attends all the meetings that are available, I can see a good working relationship between the tenants and the landlord. For too long, we have had housing officers, who often own their own homes, make decisions that affect tenants' lives, they make the decisions, but we must live with them. To increase efficiency in every way, the council needs to have input from all tenants, and that's why tenants need to experience tenant participation every month. I fully endorse every tenant to get involved and influence how they live.

Martin McCathie, Tenant

Quote: I found the business plans plan consultations to be very valuable as a tenant. It felt like my concerns were being listened to directly and having a direct conversation was something I was pleased to be able to have.

Connon Mackenzie, Tenant

Tenant Impact Statement

The year 2022/23 has seen tenant participation move out of Covid and back into communities. Tenants have been involved in new-build inspections, where they were able to offer a practical insight into features of the home, and given their thoughts on

local environmental improvements (such as path-building and rewilding of land) through consultation. The tenant participation team was also able to support the creation of a further registered tenant organisation (RTO) called Aberdeenshire Council Tenants' Group (ACTG).

Tenant-Officer working groups, which consider strategic issues across housing, have been reformed and are progressing. These working groups allow tenants and the housing service to work together to improve services. The team continue to offer a hybrid approach to participation in these activities.

The team and tenants have also spent time together to ensure inclusion in governance (decision making) processes at service level and at council level. We are pleased to report tenants are fully included in working groups (which include tenants, elected members, and housing staff) that consider areas such as business planning and rent strategy and we are progressing options for tenant input into committees which consider housing related matters.

The current tenant participation strategy was set for a period of 2019 – 2029 due to the significant amount of work required to progress new initiatives. However, the local landscape has changed as we went through the Covid-19 pandemic and into the cost-of-living crisis. There are also wider policies which impact the work of the team – such as Place Strategy, and Participatory Budgeting. Therefore, we will be asking Communities Committee to allow us to bring forward a strategy review in 2024, which is mid-way through the current approved strategy lifecycle, to make improvements which are fit for purpose to the current preferences of tenants.

Would you like to have your say in the services provided to you as a tenant?

Contact tenant.participation@aberdeenshire.gov.uk to hear more!

Service Success

CIH Scotland – Finalists

Awards announced 27 October 2023

Working in Partnership - Housing First

Housing First (Aberdeenshire Council) in partnership with the Scottish Prison Service, Police Scotland and Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Justice & Substance Misuse Services celebrating partnership and collaboration across the housing spectrum through developing, delivering and driving progress through working in partnership with organisations in or outside of housing.

Excellence in Leadership - Neil Watts

This award is for an individual and recognises excellent leadership in the sector. It aims to demonstrate the quality of leaders in housing.

Local Authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS) annual conference

Congratulations to the Building Standards Team, with special thanks to Jeremy Mitchell! At the Local Authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS) annual conference were awarded “Building Standards Excellence”. This award differs to others in the ceremony as it is not awarded through nominations but based on performance figures.

Tenants’ Information Service National Excellence Awards 2023

Aberdeenshire Council has been shortlisted in the Tenants Information Service National Excellence Awards 2023 in the categories “Excellence in Digital Engagement” and “Outstanding Contribution to Tenant Participation”. These award shortlisting’s are based on the work undertaken between 2020 and 2022 to increase digital engagement through providing equipment and internet connections through the Connecting Scotland scheme and additional grant funding, and Neil has done with tenants to make complex business and financial information available in an easy to understand format. Awards will be announced in November.

Thank you!