

The Highland Council

HOUSING MATTERS CÙISEAN TAIGHEADAIS ANNUAL CUSTOMER

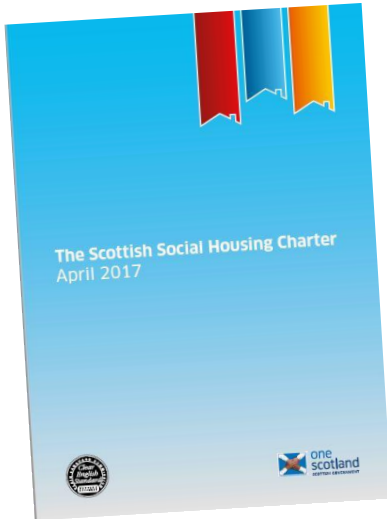
REPORT 2023/2024



About this Annual Customer Report

Mun Aithisg Luchd-ceannaich Bhliadhna seo

In April 2012, the Scottish Government introduced the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC). The Charter sets out 16 outcomes and standards that the Scottish Government expects landlords to achieve when delivering services to their tenants and service users.



From 2012 onwards, landlords have been expected to annually self-assess their performance against each of the Charter outcomes and report this to the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) in May of each year. This is called the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC). A copy of our Annual Return on the Charter can be found online at: **www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/find-and-compare-landlords/highland-council**

In addition to reporting to the SHR, the Council must also report its performance to its tenants and other service users by 31 October each year. This is our full Annual Customer Report: it tells you how the Housing Service performed from 01 April 2023 until 31 March 2024.

The report does not cover all 16 outcomes and standards, but it focuses on those areas tenants have told us they are most interested in. The purpose of this report is to provide you with clear, accurate information about areas of our performance.

We hope that you find this year's Annual Customer Report to be meaningful and informative. Our tenant-led Communication Group have played an important role in setting out what information they feel would be of most interest and benefit to you, and we would like to offer a special thank you to them for their help in preparing this report.

In order to provide some context to the figures, we have provided comparison information with the Scottish average where available. The Scottish average includes the results for other social landlords such as housing associations.

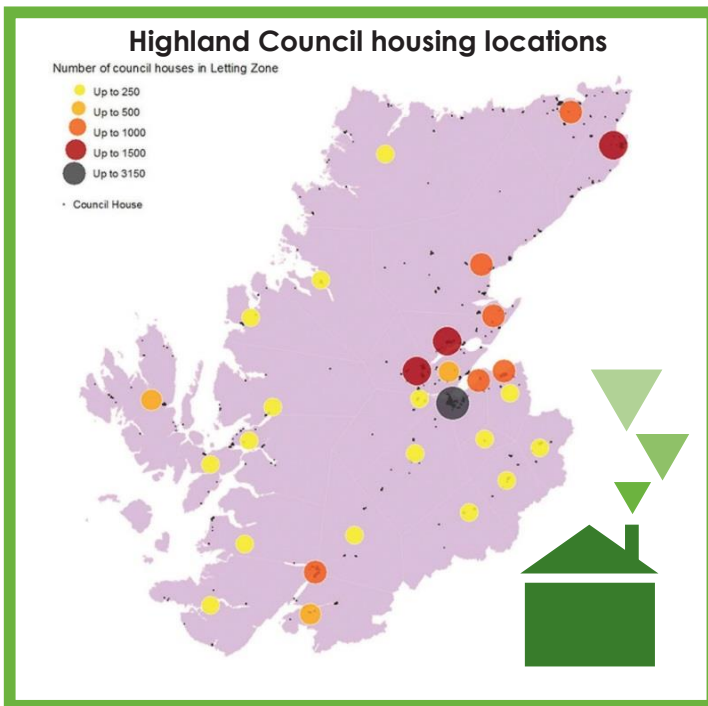
We would really appreciate your feedback and would like to know what you think about the report. Your views and comments will help us to improve future reports and provide the information you want to know about.



The Highland Council as Landlord

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd mar Uachdaran

- We provide housing and deliver housing services across a third of the land area of Scotland - including the most remote and sparsely populated parts of the United Kingdom.
- On 31 March 2024, we owned and managed **15,004** council houses in 223 communities in city, town, rural, remote rural and island locations.
- We provide information about our services on our web site, on-line publications, or printed copies for anyone requesting this.



During 2023/24 we let **1180** properties. **607** lets (51%) were made to those who were assessed as homeless, **335** lets (28%) went to those on the waiting list and **238** lets (20%) were allocated to the transfer list. A total of 436 offers were refused. The Housing Options teams have been working with applicants to ensure the suitability of the property and location when accepting offers.

The demand for housing in the Highlands remains high. To help meet demand, the Council is on track to deliver **371** affordable homes of which 134 were new Council homes.

Overall average weekly rent for all apartment sizes in Highland

Apartment size	Number of properties	Weekly rental charge 2021/22 £	Weekly rental charge 2022/23 £	Weekly rental charge 2023/24 £	Scottish average 2023/24 £	How we compare with the Scottish average
bedsit	216	68.53	70.10	74.15	82.24	●
1 bed	3,922	72.85	73.44	76.27	87.87	●
2 bed	6,165	80.58	81.52	84.86	90.29	●
3 bed	4,274	89.75	90.65	94.43	98.30	●
4 bed +	427	100.06	101.33	105.65	108.29	●
	15,004					

* Rent figure includes service charges & elements for new supply and includes HRA properties used as temporary accommodation (288 units)



Rents and Value for Money

Màil agus Luach an Airgid

This annual report covers services provided by the Council as a landlord, paid for from tenant rents received into the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). To date the Council has actively sought to minimise the impact of budget reductions on housing service delivery by seeking efficiencies through improving processes, developing new ways of working through exploiting technology and reviewing structures. The 'value for money' of services funded by the HRA is a key part of the Scottish Social Housing Charter. Scrutiny of the HRA is a key priority for tenants to help ensure that tenants receive the maximum benefit from their rents and ultimately the best standards of service. Highland Council tenants have formed a Value for Money Group. The Group's remit is to agree how tenants should be consulted on the HRA and have an active voice in decisions affecting the HRA.

What is the Housing Revenue Account?

The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 sets out the requirement for local authorities to maintain a dedicated account in relation to their housing stock. This separate account is called the Housing Revenue Account (the HRA). The Act specifies what a local authority can charge to its HRA and what income can be credited to it. HRA money and assets such as council houses must be used to benefit current tenants or people who may become council tenants in the future.

- Reducing the amount of money tenants owe us in rent arrears is important, as it affects the amount we spend on key services such as repairs. This year has been challenging due to the pressures of the cost of living on our tenants, however we have been very proactive in responding to these pressures and have worked hard to minimize the impact by offering advice and support to tenants.
- The amount of rent due to the Highland Council in 2023/24 was £62,989 million which includes
- current tenant's rent, former rent arrears and current rent arrears.

What this report does not cover: The General Fund

The Housing Revenue Account is separate from the Council's General Fund. The General Fund is the account your Council Tax goes into, as well as the grants given to local authorities by the government. The General Fund pays for things like repairing potholes, gritting roads in winter, streetlights, bin collection, social-care services and education.

Housing Revenue Account – rent collected

	Highland 2021/22	Highland 2022/23	Highland 2023/24	Scottish average 2023/24	How we compare with the Scottish average
Rent collected as a % of total rent due	99.56% £53,810,300	98.02% £53,969,848	99.0% £57,425,100	99.4%	

Housing Revenue Account – Reported to Housing and Property Committee 14th August 2024

Budget heading and description	2021/22 Annual Spend		2022/23 Annual Spend		2023/24 Annual Spend		Increase/ Decrease from previous year
	% of overall Spend		% of overall Spend		% of overall Spend		(£)
Supervision and Management This covers the day to day costs of running the housing service ie staff wages, heating & lighting in offices, printing, postage etc. and includes our contribution to the funding of advice services such as CABs in Highland.	13%	£7,754,000	13%	£8,517,000	14%	£9,011,000	+£494,000
Tenant Participation Covers venue and catering costs for events, transport costs, supplies, reimbursement of tenant volunteer expenses and provision of ICT equipment and tenant training opportunities etc.	0.5%	£229,000	1%	£248,000	1%	£286,000	+£38,000
Sheltered Housing This covers staffing costs, property utilities, transport, supplies and services such as helpcall alarms etc.	1%	£597,000	1%	£582,000	1%	£657,000	+£75,000
Homelessness This covers staffing costs, repairs to properties as well as utilities, rates and council tax and supplies such as furniture and storage.	2%	£1,261,000	2%	£1,631,000	3%	£1,787,000	+£156,000
Repairs and Maintenance These are the costs of the day to day maintenance of council houses including grounds maintenance and work carried out on empty houses (voids).	37.5%	£23,234,000	39%	£24,908,000	33%	£20,767,000	-£4,141,000
Central Support This covers our service contribution to corporate service such as legal & IT services & business support.	6%	£4,159,000	6%	£3,946,000	6%	£4,118,000	+£172,000


Loan charges These are related to money borrowed to improve or build housing.	38%	£23,330,000	36%	£22,651,000	39%	£24,307,000	+£1,656,000
Voids This heading covers the rental loss from houses and other rent voids.	2%	£1,345,000	2%	£1,087,000	2%	£1,215,000	+£128,000
Total	100%	£61,909,000	100%	£63,570,000	100%	£62,148,000	-£1,422,000

Source: HRA Revenue Expenditure 2021/22, 2022/23 & 2023/24

Rent increases

Over the last few years, by keeping as efficient as we can, we have managed to keep our rent affordable while still delivering services to our tenants. This year has been particularly difficult as exceptionally high inflation continues. Balancing the increasing costs of delivering essential services with statutory requirements to meet Net Zero targets.

The weekly rent was increased by **7.95%** from April 2024.

	Highland 2021/22	Highland 2022/23	Highland 2023/24	Scottish average 2023/24	How we compare with the Scottish average
Rent Increase	3%	4%	7.95%	6.05%	


During 2023/24, our overall average weekly rent was **£87.07**

Our rents continue to compare well to other social housing providers in Highland

The Highland Council	Lochalsh & Skye Housing Assoc	Albyn Housing Society	Lochaber Housing Association	Cairn Housing Association
£87.07	£98.22	£96.39	£107.50	£108.74

It is important that our rents are affordable, but they also have to provide enough income to make sure we can pay for the things we need such as repairs and maintenance to houses, loan charges and other costs. Setting rents too low can mean that we cannot afford to provide services to you – setting them too high means it is difficult for people to pay their rent – we need to get the balance right.



Rent arrears management

	Highland 2021/22	Highland 2022/23	Highland 2023/24	Scottish average 2023/24	How we compare with the Scottish average
Gross rent arrears (all tenants) as at 31 March each year as a % of rent due	5.46% £3,077,862	7.05% £4,152,067	7.16% £4,486,763	6.88%	

- The money owed to The Highland Council in rent during 2023/24 was 7.16% of the rent due.
- This means **£4,486,763** of current rent had not been paid to the HRA, reducing the money we have to provide services. This figure also includes £616,070 owed by former tenants. The Scottish Government temporary ban on the enforcement of eviction orders for rent arrears ended on 31 March 2024. Evictions are only used as a last resort where tenants will not work with us to address their arrears. During this reporting year a total of **8** evictions were carried out
- Accounting good practice means that in some cases we have to “write off” rent owed by former tenants - when the person has died or moved away and we cannot trace them. The value of former tenant arrears written off in 2023/24 was **£341,147**.

If you are struggling to pay your rent please contact your Housing Officer. If you are worried about money, you can get free, independent help and assistance from the Council’s Welfare Support Team on 0800 090 1004 or from your local Citizen’s Advice Bureau.

Empty Homes - average time taken to re-let properties

	Highland 2021/22	Highland 2022/23	Highland 2023/24	Scottish average 2023/24	How we compare with the Scottish average
% rent loss through properties becoming void	1.02% £576,581	0.96% £562,946	0.9% £544,655	1.4%	
Average length of time taken to re-let properties in the last year	35.49 days	32.07 days	38.7 days	56.7 days	

During 2023/24, **1180** (8.11%) of our properties became vacant. On average, it took us **38.7** days to re-let our empty properties.

There has been an upward trend in number of days taken to re-let as some properties when returned to us need a significant amount of work to bring them up to a lettable standard.



Quality of Homes

Càileachd Dhachaighean

The Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) was introduced by the Scottish Government in February 2004 to improve the quality of social housing in Scotland. To meet the standard properties must be:

- Compliant with the tolerable standard
- Equipped with modern facilities and services
- Free from serious disrepair
- Healthy, safe and secure
- Energy efficient

	Highland 2021/22	Highland 2022/23	Highland 2023/24	Scottish average 2023/24	How we compare with the Scottish average
% of stock meeting the SHQS*	76.09% 10,519 properties	40.27% 5,984 properties	44.6% 6,692 properties	84.4%	

*SHQS = Scottish Housing Quality Standard

At 31 March 2024, **44.6%** (6,692 properties) of the Council’s housing stock met the SHQS with 6.2% (944 properties) exemptions and abeyances. The reason for the difference between the reporting years is in 2022 the Government introduced requirements for all landlords across the sectors to carry out electrical inspections on their properties every 5 years. This requirement now forms part of the SHQS standard and until these inspections have been completed the property does not meet SHQS. Highland Council have a programme in place for carrying out these inspections and reporting progress to the Regulator.

Energy Efficiency for Scottish Social Housing (ESSH)


The energy requirements of Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) has been updated to form part the “Energy Efficiency for Scottish Social Housing”(ESSH). The ESSH sets out the minimum energy efficiency standard for social housing. It has been developed by the Scottish Government following consultation with social landlords and tenants and will contribute towards reaching Net Zero targets. The Scottish Government have introduced ESSH 2 which aims to have all social rented properties meet a high level of energy performance by 2032.

This will place significant pressure on landlords to meet this standard with repairs and capital budgets already being stretched. The Scottish Government are reviewing the future funding of these measures which may influence the approach taken by Highland Council to deliver these measures.

In 23-24, £18.354m was invested in upgrading the housing stock through the housing revenue account capital programme. We continue to prioritise energy efficiency improvements within our housing stock, with 67% of the overall programme being committed to works such as heating upgrades, windows and doors replacements and insulation works. The housing revenue account capital programme has been

impacted over the past few years by increasing costs and labour shortages. However, the capital improvement programme has been reprofiled in order to maximise new external funding as it becomes available.

Satisfaction with homes

	Highland 2021/22	Highland 2022/23	Highland 2023/24	Scottish average 2023/24	How we compare with the Scottish average
% of existing tenants satisfied with the quality of their home	77.22% based on 1,001 survey responses	77.22% based on 1,001 survey responses	70% based on 1,008 survey responses	84.01%	



Medical Adaptations

It is our aim is to provide the help you need so that you can continue to live in a home of your own as independently and safely as possible. During the year 2023/24 Highland Council completed a total of **514** medical adaptations, taking an average of **38.12 days** to complete. This compares well to the national average of **44.77** days to complete medical adaptations.

If you would like to know more about how to arrange an assessment, details can be found on our website

[Home adaptations, aids and other options | Home adaptations, aids and other options | The Highland Council](#)



Maintenance of Homes

Cumail Suas Dhachaighean

	Highland 2021/22	Highland 2022/23	Highland 2023/24	Scottish average 2023/24	How we compare with the Scottish average
Average length of time taken to complete emergency repairs	5.82 hours	5.47 hours	4.1 hours	4 hours	
Average length of time taken to complete non-emergency repairs (working days)	7.53 days	7.59 days	9.2 days	9.0 days	
% of repairs carried out in the last year completed right first time	89.40%	86.04%	83.5%	88.4%	

The Housing Service has worked hard to improve the housing repairs service to allow us to complete repairs more quickly and efficiently as possible. The performance compares well with the national benchmarks especially when factoring in the Highland geographical challenges.

	Highland 2021/22	Highland 2022/23	Highland 2023/24	Scottish average 2023/24	How we compare with the Scottish average
% of tenants who have had repairs or maintenance carried out in the last 12 months satisfied with the repairs service	79.58% based on 377 responses	No data collected this reporting year	92.2%	87.3%	

Highland Council have introduced a repairs text messaging service keeping tenants informed on when the repairs appointment is made, reminders before the appointment, notification when the repairs person is on their way and a post repair satisfaction survey.



Managing our estates, antisocial behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes

A'stiùireadh ar n-oighreachdan, giùlan mì-shòisealta, nàbaidhean croiseil agus connspaidean gabhaltais

We want to make sure that our tenants live in neighbourhoods where they feel safe and that are well maintained. Responding to, investigating and managing antisocial behaviour can be complex and resource intensive. A range of partner organisations participate in managing antisocial behaviour on a case by case basis. This includes: Housing Associations, Victim Support Scotland, Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, NHS Highland, Highland Council's Environmental Health, Care and Learning Services, Highlife Highland, Alcohol and Drug Partnership and other related third party organisations.

Antisocial behaviour cases resolved within target timescales in 2023/24

	Highland 2021/22	Highland 2022/23	Highland 2023/24	Scottish average 2023/24	How we compare with the Scottish average
% Antisocial behaviour cases resolved within target timescales	78.02%	49.04%	86.4%	94.3%	

The number of reported cases remains low with 1.92 per 100 homes, where the Scottish National Average sits at 7.51 per 100 homes.

If you are experiencing any problems please contact us immediately on **01349 886602**.

If you wish to report any criminal activity, telephone Police Scotland on 101 or if you want to pass on information about crime anonymously telephone Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.



Complaints & Comments

Gearanan & Beachdan

All tenants have the right to complain if they are not satisfied with the level of service that we provide. We take complaints very seriously and have a comprehensive complaints handling policy that is in line with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) model complaint handling procedure.

Complaints give us valuable information that we use to improve customer satisfaction and make changes to our service. Our complaints handling policy allows us to address the problem and may help prevent the issue from happening again. You can find out more about complaints including how to complain from the Council's Complaints leaflet - contact us for a copy or go to the Council's website at :

[How to make a complaint](#) | [How to make a complaint](#) | [The Highland Council](#)

All complaints are recorded through our corporate complaints system. To monitor complaints we divide them into:

- 1st stage complaints which are straight forward and need little or no investigation
- 2nd stage complaints which are more complex or more serious and need further investigation



The percentage of 1st and 2nd stage complaints responded to in the last three years within the SPSO guidelines was as follows:

	2021/22		2022/23		2023/24		Scottish average 2023/24	How we compare with the Scottish average
	No. complaints received	% Percentage complaints responded to in full	No. complaints received	% Percentage complaints responded to in full	No. complaints received	% Percentage complaints responded to in full		
Stage 1	240	98.75%	118	98.31%	156	100%	96.70%	●
Stage 2	124	96.77%	82	85.37%	118	90.37%	90.69%	●



Tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk



Tenant Participation Team

The Highland Council Glenurquhart Road
Inverness
IV3 5NX



Getting Involved A' Gabhail Com-pàirt

We believe that tenant involvement should be positive and active. Consulting and involving tenants in the services we provide is at the centre of what we do. To be successful, tenant involvement relies on effective communication between tenants and the Council and their involvement in the decision making process. Tenants have played a key role in shaping and monitoring housing services for a number of years and we acknowledge the importance of tenant engagement and consultation to ensure continuous improvement and tenant satisfaction.

Our 2024 tenant satisfaction survey revealed that 81.9% of tenants who responded were satisfied with the opportunities given to them to participate in our decision-making processes. This is lower than the Scottish average of 87.7% and we must continue working to improve this. We want to look beyond government expectations and provide greater choice, more incentives, training and development opportunities and increased flexibility in our approach to involving tenants.

Formal opportunities for involvement

- **Communications working group:** The Tenant Communications working group meet on a regular basis with the Tenant Participation Team to plan, design and contribute to the tenant newsletter 'Housing Matters'. The group also has a direct input into the review and introduction of all Housing Services literature and publications.
- **Scrutiny Panel:** The Highland Tenant Scrutiny Panel is involved in scrutinising the delivery of housing services. The Panel monitors the quality of service delivery against defined standards and can undertake on-site inspections. They are empowered to call managers to account if services do not meet the required standard and their feedback forms part of overall performance monitoring.

- **Value for Money Group:** The VfM Group is another tenant-led group, its remit is to focus primarily on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The group acts as a 'critical friend' by analysing HRA expenditure, questioning and challenging the Council as part of a constructive and structured approach to continuous improvement.
- **Highland Tenants' Forum:** The Highland Tenants' Forum meets quarterly and brings together tenants from across the whole of the Highlands to hear from and engage with Council representatives in order to learn about the works going on in their area and ask any questions they might have.
- **Registered Tenants and Residents Group:** At this time there are 20 registered groups across Highland. Most groups meet at least six times a year, some monthly. If you would be interested in setting up a group in your area, please contact us – we can help. We can also provide funding towards running costs.

Informal opportunities for involvement

- by taking part in surveys either by email, online, text, phone or post
- community events/open days
- estate walkabouts
- focus groups
- training and development opportunities
- by becoming a Tenant Rep



For tenants who do not have time or are unable to attend meetings, there are still ways of working with us to **make your voice heard**.



Our List of Interested Tenants is a database of Council tenants who are happy to give their views but are unable to get involved in meetings or activities. If you would like to find out more about Tenant Participation or our List of Interested.

Contact your Tenant Participation Officer for more information on how to get involved:

If you live in:	Contact	Contact details
Caithness & Sutherland	Leona Geddes	leona.geddes@highland.gov.uk
Mid and West Ross-shire & Nairn	Justyna Leslie	07387 234 107 justyna.leslie@highland.gov.uk
Skye & Lochalsh	Catriona Sutherland	07767 162 258 catriona.sutherland@highland.gov.uk
Inverness, Badenoch & Strathspey	Kerri Macdonald	07774 337 689 Kerri.macdonald@highland.gov.uk
Lochaber	Karin McKay	07785 477 696 karin.mckay@highland.gov.uk
Easter Ross	Suzy Boardman	07557 744413 Suzy.boardman@highland.gov.uk
General Enquiries		Tenant.participation@highland.gov.uk