

Agenda Item	9
Report No	HP/07/21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Housing & Property Committee

Date: 11th March 2021

Report Title: Housing Performance Report – 1st April 2020 – 31st December 2020

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Housing & Property

1 Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 Resource: There are no resource implications arising from this report.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:-

- (i) **Note** the update on the delivery of housing services during the COVID-19 emergency.
- (ii) **Note** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1st April 2020 – 31st December 2020.

3 Implications

3.1 **Resource** – No implications.

3.2 **Legal** - There are no legal implications arising from this report.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** - There are no equality implications arising from this report.

3.4 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever** - There are no climate change/Carbon Clever implications arising from this report.

3.5 **Risk** - Risk is managed through regular review and reporting to allow corrective action to be taken if necessary.

3.6 **Gaelic** – No implications.

4 Background

- 4.1 The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) has set out the performance indicators that it will use in its scrutiny of landlords.
- 4.2 This report provides performance information based on the reporting framework recommended by the SHR. Further performance information by Council Ward can be found on the Highland Council Intranet ward reporting pages.
http://www.highland.gov.uk/staffsite/info/13/members_intranet/37/ward_reporting/2
- 4.3 In accordance with the Scottish Social Housing Charter guidance, the Repairs, Tenancy Management and Rent Arrears figures are cumulative, while the Homeless Presentations figures are given for each separate quarter.
- 4.4 Scottish Housing Network (SHN) benchmark information, derived from the performance of all Scottish Landlords, has also been provided where available.
- 4.5 The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to impact on how services are delivered. As well as providing information on the immediate impact on key performance indicators this report provides a summary of the way services are being delivered during the current lockdown period and some of the emerging issues for the recovery phase.

5 Housing Services During the Current Lockdown Period

- 5.1 Comments on service areas covered by key performance indicators are provided in section 6 of this report, along with specific performance information. This section of the report provides information on how we have approached a wide range of other housing services during the ongoing emergency.

5.2 Tenant Engagement and Welfare

The priority for housing staff in the second phase of lockdown has been to identify and offer advice and assistance to the most vulnerable tenants and other housing clients. We have prioritised communication of advice and information to all tenants.

- 5.3 Throughout the first few weeks of January 2021 the Tenant Participation Team focussed on contacting as many tenants as possible to carry out welfare checks as follows:-

- Direct contact by phone – 2,672 tenants aged over 70;
- Email contact – 688 tenants; and
- Text message contact – 8,158 tenants.

Other tenants are being contacted by area housing teams as part of their ongoing casework, for example Housing Options Officers are contacting their clients in temporary accommodation and Housing Management Officers are contacting tenants in rent arrears. Officers are referring clients to local Community Hubs for assistance if required.

- 5.4 The emails and texts contained a link to an online Tenant Briefing giving information about Housing Services and useful contacts for any tenant requiring support or assistance. This briefing was also promoted on social media and through media outlets. A Tenant Newsletter was also issued to all tenants in December providing useful contact numbers for help and advice.

5.5 Digital interaction with tenants has continued to increase throughout the pandemic with interested tenants taking part in regular “Teams” meetings with staff and other tenants. Registered Tenant Groups and Sheltered Housing groups are being supported to meet online. The Tenant Scrutiny panel, Strategic Tenant Finance Group and Area Tenant Forums meet regularly online via Teams.

5.6 The Tenant Participation Team have also held informative online sessions on Energy Saving (in partnership with CAB) and on Scams (in partnership with Police Scotland and Trading Standards). Future sessions are planned on Mental Health Wellbeing (with NHS Highland) and Fuel Poverty (with Changeworks). There have also been a number of online social events for tenants, to address loneliness and social isolation, such as an online Christmas party, quiz sessions and a regular drop-in coffee morning. Regular “check-in” calls are also being carried out with individuals identified as vulnerable during the first lockdown and information is being shared as appropriate with other Council services to assist these clients.

5.7 **Tenancy and Estate Management**

We have continued to deal with complaints and other tenancy matters. Routine home visits and tenancy inspections are not possible during lockdown. Staff continue to follow up on tenancy management issues through telephone / e-mail / video calls. Arrangements for liaison with Police Scotland on antisocial behaviour continue as normal. Currently we are only able to undertake home visits where that is thought to be necessary to safeguard clients and taking into account relevant national guidance.

5.8 **Gypsy / Travellers**

The Scottish Government issued specific guidance on services to Gypsy / Travellers during the emergency. We have maintained a full service in relation to Council sites and visits and advice on unauthorised encampments although court action seeking removal of unauthorised encampment remains suspended.

5.9 **Sheltered Housing**

Daily contacts have continued at all schemes. This has been via the Help Call system rather than personal visits. Use of common rooms / guest rooms was suspended as part of the first lockdown and these remain closed. We introduced an increased cleaning regime for common area in sheltered housing complexes and this is being maintained. A sheltered tenant newsletter was also distributed before Christmas which provided useful information to sheltered tenants.

5.10 **Garden Aid**

This service is scheduled to resume in April in line with the annual cutting season. There may be a delayed start to the 2021 cutting season as a result of the ongoing restrictions.

5.11 **Aids and Adaptations**

We continue to provide adaptations where it is possible. This has been limited to emergency adaptations and a case-by-case professional assessment is required on whether works can proceed.

5.12 Safe at Home Referrals

This service refers to additional security related work for victims of domestic abuse. We have continued to provide this service throughout the emergency and have been working closely with our public protection partners to support victims of domestic abuse during the pandemic.

5.13 Gas Servicing

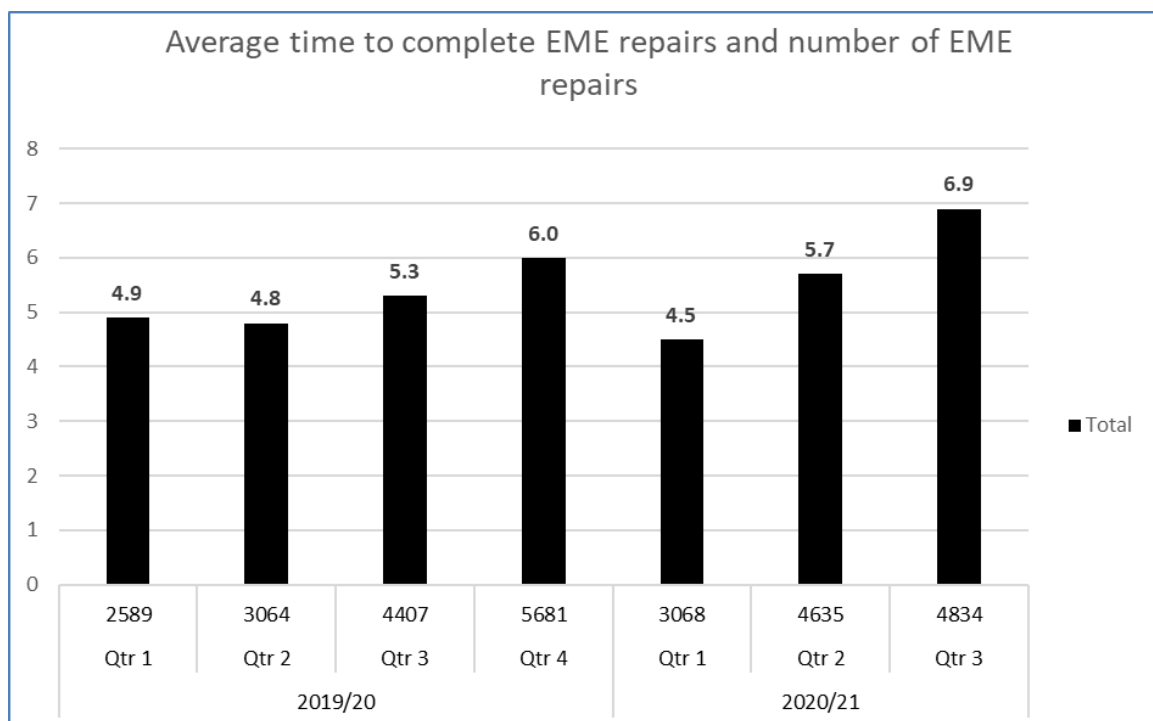
The annual servicing of our gas appliances has remained a priority to ensure the health and safety of our tenants. In line with national guidelines, we have been carrying out gas servicing where it has been possible to achieve access. We are continuing to prioritise safety checks and we are currently fully compliant with our annual gas servicing regime.

6 Housing Repairs

6.1 The key indicators for measuring repairs performance are the average time taken to complete Emergency repairs and Non-emergency repairs.

6.2 Table 1 details performance on the average time taken to complete emergency repairs and Table 2 details the average time taken to complete non-emergency repairs. Both graphs contain national benchmark figures for these indicators based on published 2019/20 figures.

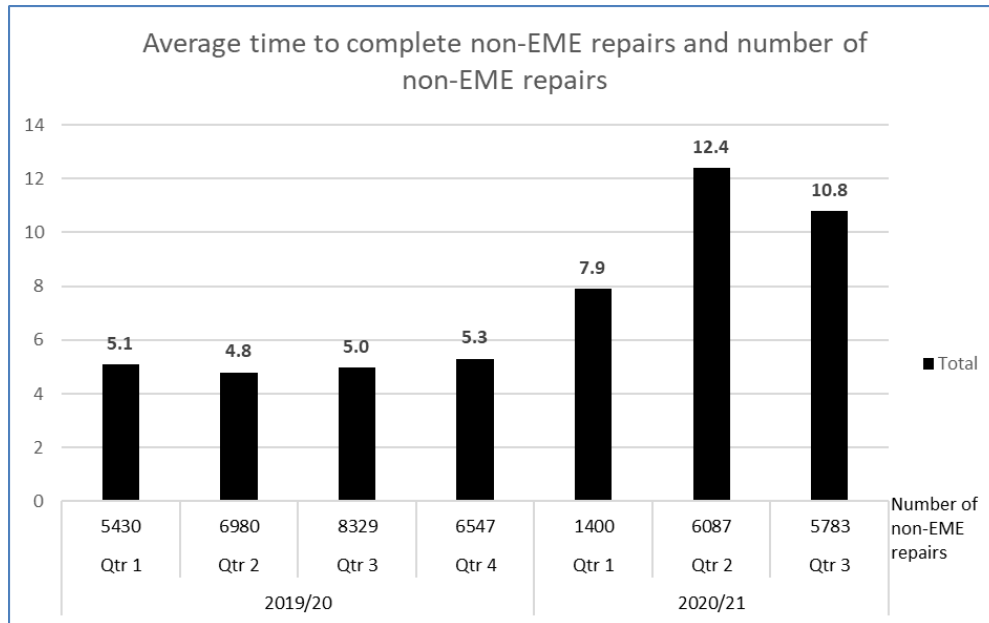
6.3 **Table 1: Average Length of Time Taken to Complete Emergency Repairs (hours)**
Target 14 hours
2020 SHN Benchmark (Group) – 4.8 hours



6.4 Performance on emergency repairs remains within the Highland target but emergency repairs have taken longer in the last two quarters. This reflects the impact of carrying out a higher proportion of non-emergency repairs to reduce the backlog of over 1,000 repairs from the first lockdown period. Highland geography needs to be considered when comparing the Highland figure for the national benchmark on completing emergency repairs.

6.5

Table 2: Average Length of Time Taken to Complete Non-Emergency Repairs (days)
Target 8 days
2020 SHN Benchmark (Group) – 6.6 days



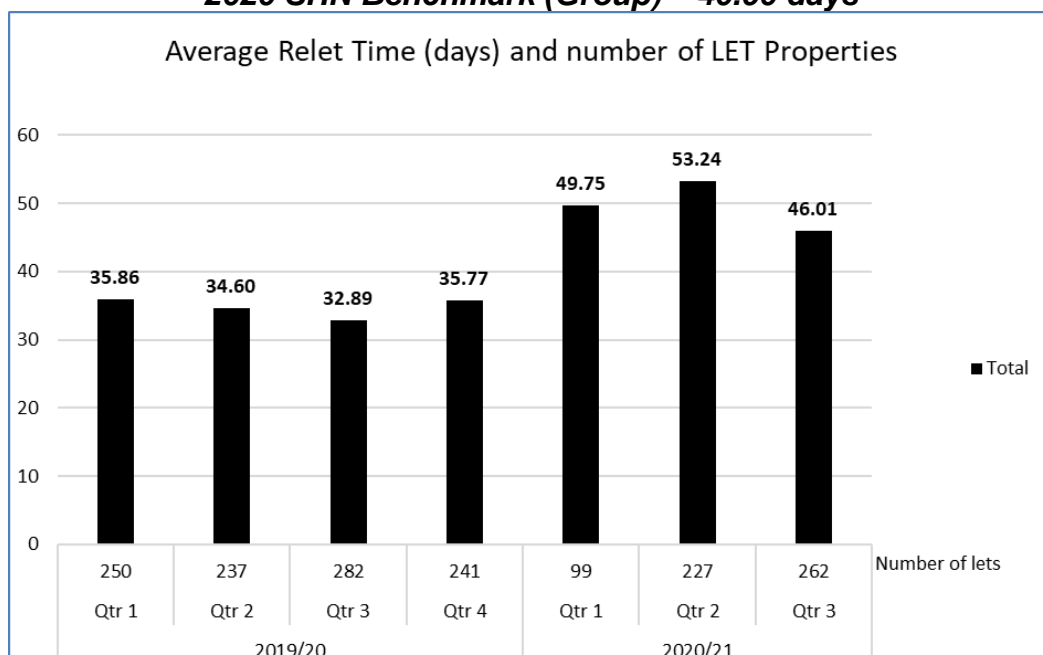
6.6 Average performance on non-emergency repairs is outside the target timescales which reflects the backlog of non-emergency repairs that were only completed in the last quarter following the initial lockdown period. Performance will continue to be impacted in future quarters as non-essential repairs are suspended during this lockdown period and they will only be completed once the national restrictions are eased.

7 Tenancy Management

7.1 Table 3 below provides information on the average re-let time showing the trend back 3 years and highlighting the same quarter in previous years for comparison.

7.2

Table 3 : Average re-let Time (days) Target 35 days
2020 SHN Benchmark (Group) – 40.90 days



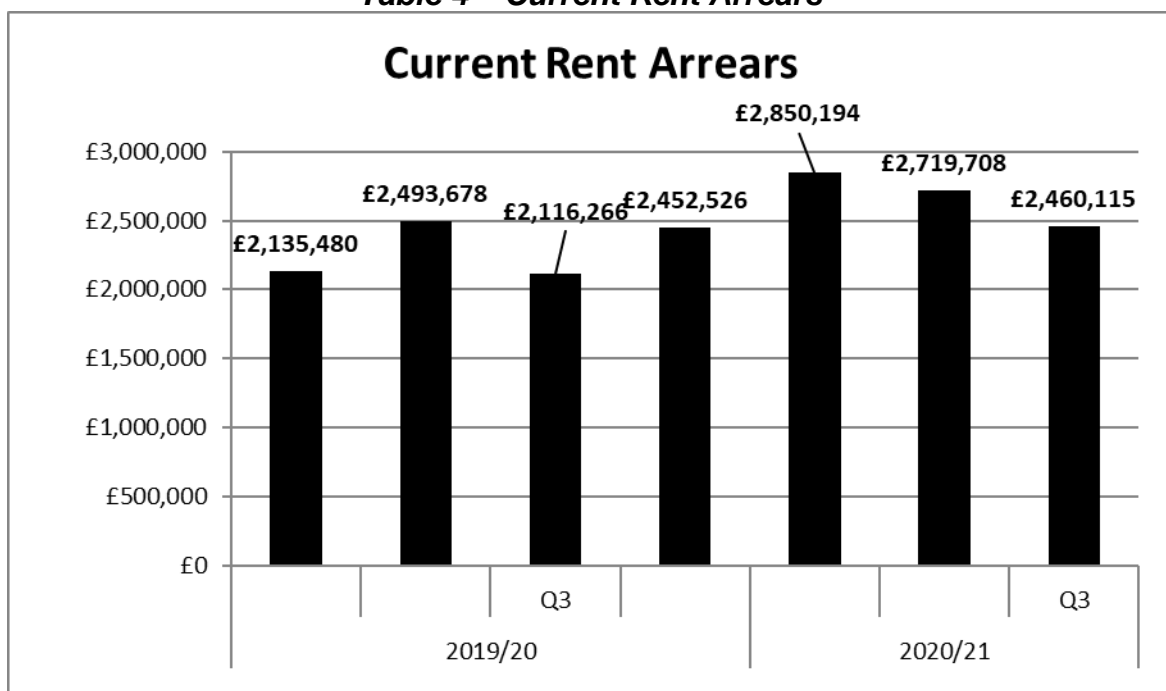
- 7.3 Performance on reletting times remains above our Highland target of 35 days although performance improved in quarter 3.
- 7.4 The graph shows the clear impact of the emergency on reletting activity and average reletting times. In line with national guidance, housing allocations are happening at a greatly reduced level and are focusing on homeless clients and other high needs cases.
- 7.5 Repairs teams continue to undertake reletting repairs on a targeted basis during the emergency, however changes to working practices have inevitably extended the time taken for repairs.
- 7.6 A large number of households still face complex housing issues and staff have continued to undertake housing options work and provide information and advice to people with housing problems through telephone or video calls rather than face to face.

8 Rent Arrears

8.1 The key performance indicator for rent arrears is the value of current arrears. Table 4 below provides information on current rent arrears going back 3 years and shows the comparative figure for the same quarter in previous years.

8.2

Table 4 – Current Rent Arrears



- 8.3 Previous reports to Committee have detailed the efforts of officers during the pandemic to provide a full service in relation to rent arrears and to adapt communication and engagement with tenants to help them maintain rent payments and to seek support required. Processes and correspondence have been adapted to increase tenant awareness of the support available to them during the pandemic.
- 8.4 Despite the efforts being made to contact people in arrears, rent arrears for quarter 3 are significantly higher than for the corresponding quarter in 2018/19 and 2019/20. However, arrears have reduced from quarters 1 and 2, reflecting the impact of officer efforts and the improvement to direct payments to tenants on Universal Credit.

8.5 Engagement with tenants and partners has confirmed that tenants are experiencing the same issues of unemployment and/or reduced income like the rest of the population during the pandemic. There have been 1,217 new Universal Credit claimants between 23 March 2020 and 31 January 2021. Of these 227 tenants have claimed since the start of December 2020. Many people are claiming Universal Credit for the first time

8.6 Under the emergency coronavirus legislation, there has been an extension to the notice period required to be given to tenants before landlords can start legal action to obtain an order for eviction. In line with this, Highland has not progressed any rent arrears cases to court during the emergency and the extended notice period will continue until 31 March 2021.

9 Homelessness

9.1 Performance information on homelessness is noted in tables 5 and 6.

9.2 **Table 5 - Homeless Presentations per Quarter (not cumulative)**

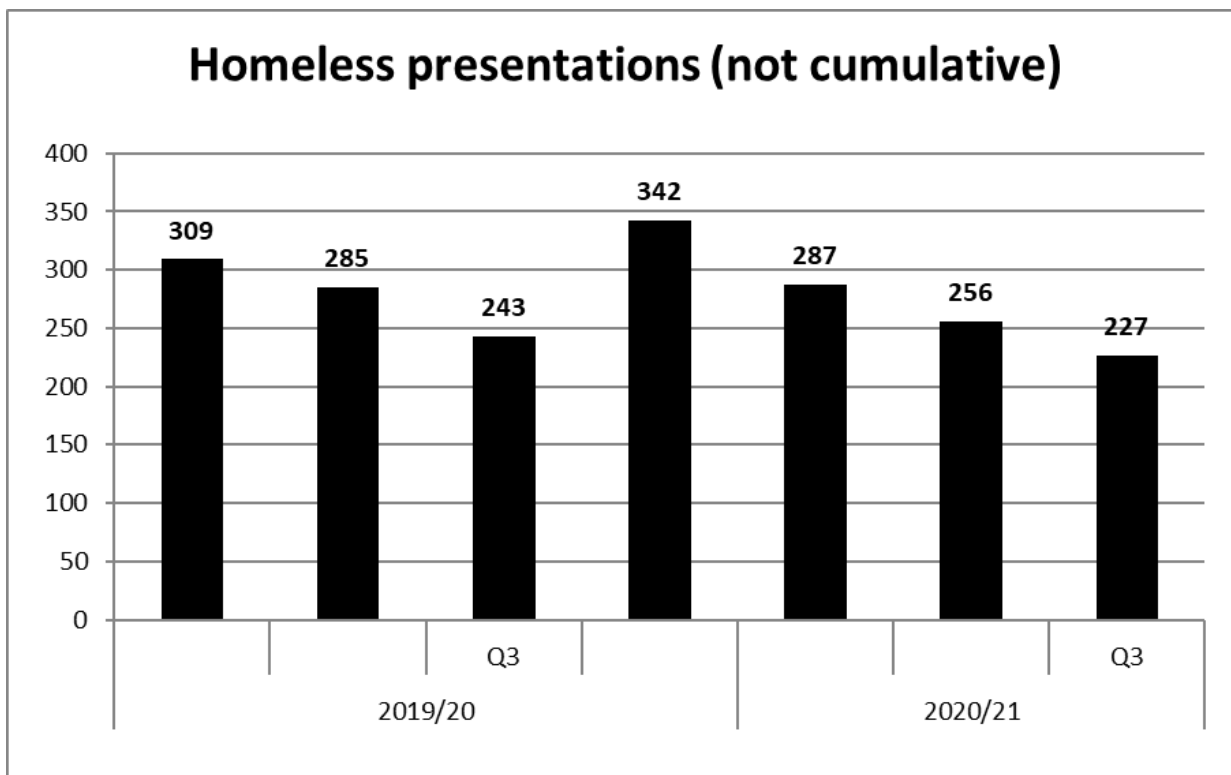
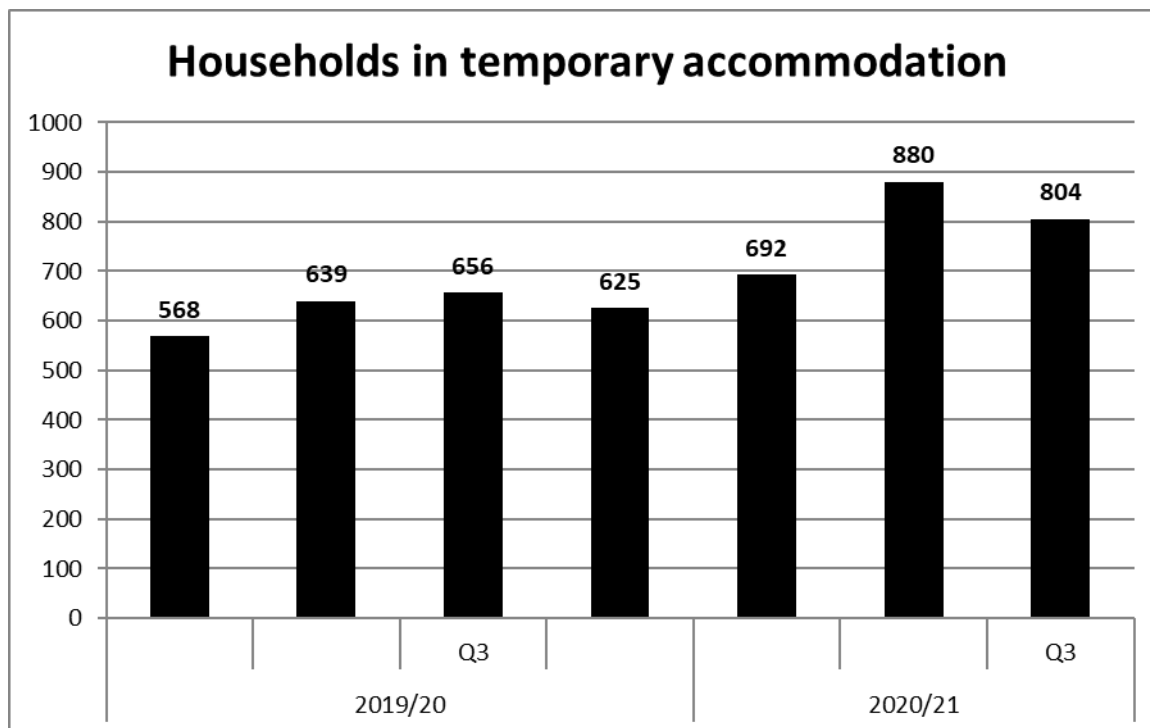


Table 6 – Households in Temporary Accommodation (not cumulative)

9.4 Table 5 (above) shows that numbers of homeless presentations have been slightly lower than normal compared to previous years which may reflect the legislation concerning court action, particularly in regard to private sector housing. Table 6 (above) shows a decrease from quarter 2 in the numbers of homeless people in temporary accommodation. However, this figure is still significantly higher than in previous years and reflects the difficulty of moving clients into secure tenancies during the pandemic.

9.5 As reported at December Committee, the Unsuitable Accommodation Order has been extended to include all homeless clients and not just pregnant women and families with children. Although there are exemptions to the extended Order as part of the emergency coronavirus legislation, these are scheduled to end on 30 June 2021, and it is anticipated that this will increase further the pressure on officers to provide self-contained temporary accommodation within 7 days of a homelessness application.

9.6 An update on homelessness services and Scottish Government funding allocations will be reported to June Committee when reporting on progress against the Council's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.

10 Complaints and Enquiry Performance

10.1 Table 7 below provides information on performance against complaints, freedom of information requests and MSP enquiries. This demonstrates the volume of formal complaints and enquiries that the service is dealing with. Staff are dealing with much larger numbers of service requests and enquiries on a day to day basis which do not form part of formal reporting. Given the nature and volume of business involved in housing services the proportion of formal complaints received is relatively low. As well as complaints some tenants and housing customers also take the time to contact us to compliment staff or thank us for the services they have received. Information on compliments received is also provided below.

- 10.2 Following completion of stage 2 complaints customers are advised that they can contact the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman if they are not satisfied with the way the Council has dealt with their case. There have been no complaints upheld by the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman to date in 2020-21.

Table 7 – Complaint and Enquiry Performance

**Housing Complaints:
Average Response time (days):**

	Stage 1 Complaints		Stage 2 Complaints	
	Number	Av response time (days)	Number	Av response time (days)
Apr – Jun 2020	29	12	12	25
Jun – Sep 2020	75	11	23	26
Oct – Dec 2020	61	9	30	26

Housing Freedom of Information Requests:

	Number logged	Number now closed
Quarter 1 (Apr - Jun)	13	13
Quarter 2 (Jul - Sep)	37	36
Quarter 3 (Oct – Dec)	24	21

Housing MSP Enquiries:

	Number logged	Number now closed
Quarter 1 (Apr - Jun)	55	55
Quarter 2 (Jul - Sep)	94	93
Quarter 3 (Oct – Dec)	89	88

Number of compliments received:

	Compliments
Apr – Jun 2020	6
Jun – Sep 2020	12
Oct – Dec 2020	13

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property

Date: 11th February 2021

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Background Papers: Scottish Housing Regulator: The Scottish Social Housing Charter: Indicators and Context Information