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| Report to: | Housing and Technical Resources Committee |
| Date of Meeting: | 8 December 2021 |
| Report by: | Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources) |

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| Subject: | Annual Report - Mainstreaming Equality and Diversity within Housing and Technical Resources |
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ♦ provide an overview of progress made in relation to mainstreaming equalities within Housing and Technical Resources during 2020/2021
- ♦ highlight the key actions being progressed during 2021/2022

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the progress made during 2020/2021 and key actions for 2021/2022 in relation to mainstreaming equalities, be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. The last mainstreaming equalities annual report was presented to Housing and Technical Resources Committee on 17 February 2021. The report highlighted progress made in 2019/2020 and set out a number of key priority areas being progressed in 2020/2021.
- 3.2. The Housing and Technical Resources Equality and Diversity Co-ordination Group continues to progress actions and support a consistent approach to mainstreaming equality and diversity across the Resource.
- 3.3. This report outlines the progress made during 2020/2021 and sets out the key priorities being progressed during 2021/2022.
- 3.4. It is widely recognised that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact upon the most vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals within our communities. The Resource quickly revised service delivery arrangements to support all customer groups, with work to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on potentially vulnerable individuals and groups a particular focus of attention during 2020/2021. This report provides further details of this work alongside other activities progressed during the year.

4. Service Provision during the Pandemic

- 4.1. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic saw a shift to virtual and remote service provision by the Council. However, the continuation of critical services was key to ensuring that the most disadvantaged and vulnerable customers, including people experiencing homelessness, sheltered housing tenants, members of the Gypsy/Traveller community and people experiencing financial hardship, remained supported during the most unprecedented and challenging of times.

- 4.2. As restrictions eased during 2020/2021, non-essential services resumed with the introduction of revised approaches and safe systems of work.

5. National and Local Policy Developments

5.1. Housing to 2040

- 5.1.1. In March 2021, the Scottish Government published 'Housing to 2040', a long-term national housing strategy for Scotland. The strategy and its associated route map aim to deliver an ambition for everyone to have a safe, high quality, affordable home that meets their needs, in the place they want to be.
- 5.1.2. Housing to 2040 highlights equality and human rights issues and will shape future housing policy to deliver on the vision and principles set out within the strategy.

5.2. Equality Outcomes

- 5.2.1. The Resource contributed to the Council's final report to the Scottish Government on the Equality Outcomes for the four-year period 2017-21. The report recorded progress across a number of key equality areas and highlights for Housing and Technical Resources including:-

- ◆ continued delivery of the Council's Home+ new build housing programme, providing accessible and adaptable new homes suitable for a variety of needs
- ◆ setting a target of 8% for new build homes to be fully wheelchair accessible and meet the 'Housing for Varying Need' standard
- ◆ continued delivery of the adaptations programme and Scheme of Assistance, allowing people to continue to live independently within their own homes without the need for rehousing or moving to a care setting
- ◆ Continued involvement in the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme

- 5.2.2. During 2020/2021, all councils were required by the Scottish Government to review their Equality Outcomes and re-prioritise them for the four-year period from 2021 to 2025. These were to be high-level and measurable, with progress reported to the Scottish Government at two-yearly intervals. Housing and Technical Resources identified the following headline Equality Outcome: *"Prevent homelessness occurring and significantly reduce homelessness."*

- 5.2.3. Within this context, the Resource has given a commitment to the following actions:-

- ◆ increase the number of affordable homes for rent
- ◆ develop and implement a housing options framework for young people
- ◆ work with the Scottish Prison Service to implement Sustainable Housing on Release for Everyone (SHORE) standards, specifically ensuring suitable and sustainable accommodation options for people leaving prison
- ◆ expand the Rent Deposit Scheme to assist in meeting housing needs in the private rented sector and support prevention of homelessness from the private sector.

Progress against Housing and Technical Resources Equality Outcomes for the period 2021-25 will be closely monitored and reviewed by the Resource Equality and Diversity Co-ordination Group.

5.3. Scottish Housing Regulator Annual Assurance Statement –Equalities and Human Rights

- 5.3.1. It is a requirement of the Scottish Housing Regulator's regulatory framework that landlords prepare and submit an Annual Assurance Statement which confirms that the landlord is complying with regulatory requirements and standards.
- 5.3.2. During 2020/2021, the Regulator advised of its intention to begin assessment of Equalities and Human Rights legislation in 2021 and draft guidance on collecting equalities information, to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements, was issued for consultation in October 2020. As part of the development of the Annual Assurance Statement, the Resource will be required to confirm that it has plans in place to ensure the effective collection of equalities information and that considerations are being given to a human rights approach.

6. **Key Areas of Progress 2020/21**

6.1. Home+ New Build Housing Programme

During 2020/2021, a total of 339 additional affordable homes for social rent were delivered across South Lanarkshire. This included 142 homes built by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and 197 additional homes delivered by the Council. The Resource continued to meet the target for the delivery of fully wheelchair accessible homes within the new build housing programme.

6.2. Adaptations Programme

During 2020/2021, a total of 721 homes were adapted to support people with health conditions or disabilities to continue to live independently within their own homes, without the need for rehousing or moving to a care setting. The Resource completed 476 adaptations to Council properties throughout 2020/2021 and a further 245 adaptations were completed in private homes through grant funding provided by the Scheme of Assistance.

6.3. Housing and Homelessness

The Resource continues to work with its housing and homelessness partners to implement the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) 2019-24. The RRTP contains five high level priority objectives which centre around a partnership approach to preventing and reducing homelessness and limiting the time people experiencing homelessness spend in temporary accommodation.

The second annual review of the RRTP was undertaken during 2020/2021 and reported to Housing and Technical Resources Committee on 30 June 2021. The review noted that excellent progress had been made in the second year of the plan. Key highlights included continued support and development of housing pathways for people experiencing domestic abuse and care experienced young people.

6.4. South Lanarkshire Strategic Commissioning Plan 2019-22

The Resource continues to work with partners from across the South Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnership (H&SCP) to contribute to the delivery of South Lanarkshire's second Strategic Commissioning Plan 2019-2022. This includes the provision of suitable and sustainable housing to support independent living.

6.5. Supporting Digital Inclusion through Connecting Scotland

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted a greater need for people to be digitally connected to keep in touch with friends and family, access critical services, reduce loneliness and isolation and improve mental health.

During 2020/2021, working in partnership with the South Lanarkshire Tenants Development Support Project, Housing and Technical Resources applied to the Connecting Scotland fund to secure 68 digital devices and connectivity for some of its most vulnerable and isolated customers, including sheltered housing tenants, Housing First (homelessness) customers and the Tenant Participation Co-ordination Group.

Positive feedback has been received with customers highlighting that the ability to get online and digitally connected has enhanced their lives by allowing them to continue to stay in touch with friends and family, join in virtual faith services, take part in online social events and attend virtual medical appointments.

Building on the success of Connecting Scotland, a priority for the Resource will be to explore other options to continue to expand digital capacity for housing customers.

6.6. Gypsy/Travellers

During 2020/2021, the Resource continued to work closely with residents of its two Gypsy/Traveller sites to improve both accommodation and site provision. A range of improvement projects were progressed in line with investment masterplans previously developed in conjunction with site residents. These support the 'Improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers National Action Plan', published jointly by the Scottish Government and COSLA.

Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, new heating systems funded through the Scottish Government's Additional Capital and Decarbonisation funds were installed at both sites. At the larger of the two sites in Shawlands Crescent, Larkhall, an upgraded waste management system was also installed.

6.7. Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme

At the end of March 2021, there were 51 Syrian families (187 individuals) settled across South Lanarkshire. The families continued to be supported throughout the COVID-19 pandemic by specialist officers from Housing and Technical Resources' Refugee Resettlement Team. In addition, online English language classes (ESOL) were provided and families continue to attend classes with colleagues from Youth, Family and Community Learning services, within Education Resources. Face to face ESOL classes will commence during 2022.

The Syrian Refugee Resettlement Programme ended in March 2021 with no further arrivals to South Lanarkshire through the scheme. Planning arrangements for the new UK Resettlement Programme focuses on new arrivals from May 2021 onwards.

6.8. Housing and Dementia

During 2020/2021, Housing and Technical Resources signed up to the Chartered Institute of Housing, Housing and Dementia Framework. The framework supports the Scottish Government's Age, Home and Community Strategy and is designed to help housing organisations to support people to live well with dementia.

The framework is being used to test and develop the current service approach across sheltered housing within South Lanarkshire. A self-assessment process has commenced which looks at how the service is supporting people living with dementia to access the right advice, the right home and the right support.

Implementation of the framework is at an early stage and it is anticipated that it will be used more widely to support people living with dementia in mainstream and amenity housing, as well as sheltered.

6.9. Translation and Interpretation Services

The Resource continues to provide a range of translation (written) and interpretation (verbal) services to customers with specific communication requirements, including sign language provision.

6.10. Consultation, Engagement and Customer Feedback

The approach to customer engagement moved to a virtual platform at the outset of the pandemic in March 2020 and has continued this way. Tenant groups have been supported to get online by the Resource, working in partnership with the South Lanarkshire Tenant Development Support Project, to ensure that business continues as usual. This has facilitated continuation of the Resource's annual consultation programme and in addition to the broader programme of engagement, officers have continued to work virtually with a range of equalities groups and stakeholders including:-

- ◆ Disability Partnership Housing Subgroup
- ◆ South Lanarkshire Access Panel
- ◆ Residents of the Council's two Gypsy/Travellers Sites
- ◆ Seniors Together
- ◆ Sheltered housing tenants
- ◆ People with lived experience of homelessness
- ◆ South Lanarkshire Gender Based Violence Partnership
- ◆ South Lanarkshire Autism Strategy Group
- ◆ See Hear Strategic Working Group

6.11. Complaints

There were no complaints recorded within the Equalities category for Housing and Technical Resources during 2020/2021.

6.12. Employee Training and Development

Resource employees participated in a wide range of equality and diversity related virtual training and e-learning activities during 2020/2021, including:-

- ◆ Equality and Diversity Awareness
- ◆ Communicating with People who are D/deaf
- ◆ Sight Loss Awareness
- ◆ Disability Module
- ◆ Gaelic and Scotland
- ◆ LGB&T People and Public Services
- ◆ Dementia Awareness
- ◆ Unconscious Bias
- ◆ Mental Health and Wellbeing

6.13. Equality and Diversity Reporting Framework

The Resource continues to report the range of work and activities being progressed to support mainstreaming equality, to a number of groups/stakeholders including:-

- ◆ Resource Equality & Diversity Co-ordinating Group
- ◆ Resource Management Team
- ◆ Parent Joint Consultative Council
- ◆ Housing and Technical Resources Committee
- ◆ Equal Opportunities Forum

7. **Key Priorities for 2021/2022**

- 7.1. The Resource Equality and Diversity Co-ordination Group (EDCG) continues to oversee the work and activity of the Resource in relation to mainstreaming equality during 2021/2022.
- 7.2. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a key focus for the equality and diversity workplan, to ensure that the delivery of housing services helps mitigate negative equality impacts experienced due to the pandemic.
- 7.3. Key priorities for 2021/2022 include:-
 - ◆ ensure continuity of critical services to potentially vulnerable individuals and groups including people experiencing homelessness, sheltered housing tenants, members of the Gypsy/Traveller community and people experiencing financial hardship
 - ◆ engage with people with lived experience of homelessness to deliver the commitments set out in the Resource's Equality Outcomes 2021-25
 - ◆ continue to implement the Home+ new build housing programme to support the delivery of additional accessible and affordable homes
 - ◆ continue to work with the South Lanarkshire Disability Partnership Housing Subgroup and Access Panel to ensure that properties are accessible to meet a range of needs
 - ◆ continue to deliver the adaptations programme within both Council and private housing to support independent living
 - ◆ engage with those with lived experience of homelessness to support the implementation of year 3 of the Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan
 - ◆ continue to work with the Health and Social Care Partnership to support the objectives of the Strategic Commissioning Plan's Housing Contribution Statement
 - ◆ continue to explore all available options to expand digital capacity for housing customers
 - ◆ continue to engage with Gypsy/Traveller site residents to inform and shape the service and programme of investment which continues to be delivered at both sites
 - ◆ contribute to the UK Resettlement Programme and Afghan Refugee programmes
 - ◆ take forward a range of initiatives through the Housing and Dementia framework to better support people who are living with dementia
 - ◆ implement the revised mandatory equalities training programme for new and existing employees
 - ◆ review and implement a revised approach to Equality Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland Duty based on new Scottish Government guidance

- ◆ provide an update to the Scottish Housing Regulator, through the Annual Assurance Statement, on how the Resource will implement an effective approach to the collection of equalities information and adopt a human rights-based approach in our work

8. Next Steps

- 8.1. During 2021/2022, in line with the agreed reporting schedule, an annual update will be reported to the groups/stakeholders detailed at 6.13.

9. Employee Implications

- 9.1. There are no employee implications associated with this report.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. There are no financial implications associated with this report.

11. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 11.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy which impacts on the natural environment, climate change or sustainability.

12. Other Implications

- 12.1. There is a risk to South Lanarkshire Council should the Resource not comply with the relevant equalities' duty and legislation.
- 12.2. The content of this report will contribute to the evidence to support the requirements of the Annual Assurance Statement provided to the Scottish Housing Regulator.

13. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 13.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore no impact assessment or formal consultation is required.

Daniel Lowe

Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

25 October 2021

Link(s) to Council Values/Objectives

- ◆ Focused on people and their needs
- ◆ Accountable, effective, efficient and transparent
- ◆ Fair, open and sustainable
- ◆ Get it right for children and young people
- ◆ Improve health, care and wellbeing
- ◆ Make communities safer, stronger and sustainable
- ◆ Improve later life
- ◆ Improving the availability, quality and access of housing
- ◆ Protect vulnerable children, young people and adults
- ◆ Deliver better health and social care outcomes for all
- ◆ Support our communities by tackling disadvantage and deprivation and supporting aspiration

Previous References

- ◆ Annual Report on Mainstreaming Equality and Diversity within Housing and Technical Resources (17 February 2021)

List of Background Papers

- ◆ Housing to 2040 (Scottish Government, March 2021)
- ◆ “South Lanarkshire Working For You” Mainstreaming Equalities Progress Report 2019-21 and Mainstreaming Equalities Report 2021-25
- ◆ SHORE Standards (SFHA, ALACHO, CIH, Shelter Scotland, SPS – December 2017)
- ◆ South Lanarkshire Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2019-2024
- ◆ South Lanarkshire Health and Social Care Partnership Strategic Commissioning Plan 2019-22
- ◆ Improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers 2019-21 (Scottish Government / COSLA - October 2019)
- ◆ Housing and Dementia Framework (Chartered Institute of Housing, 2017)

Contact for further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:

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