

# Scottish Housing Network & LGBF Briefing 2018

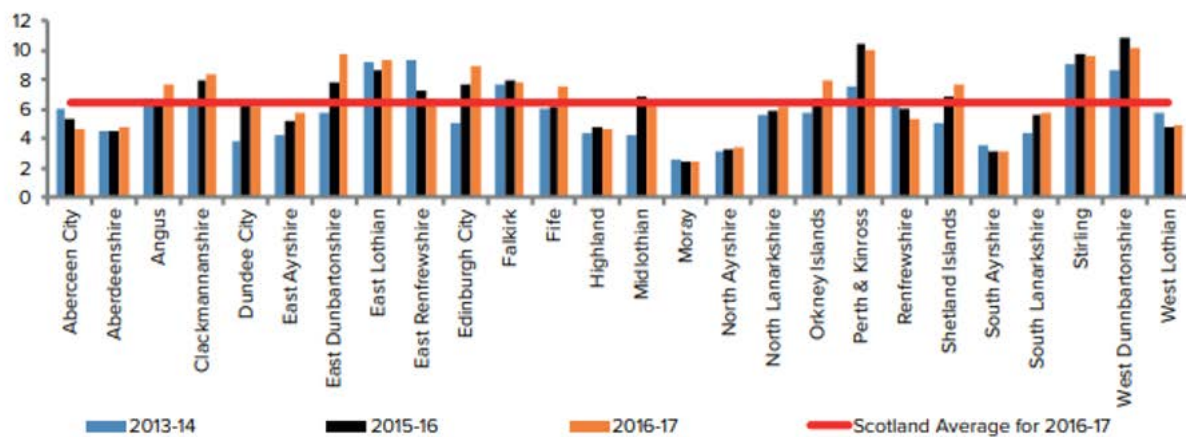
The housing information within the benchmarking framework covers housing management, housing conditions and energy efficiency. Only those councils who have responsibility for the provision of housing services are included here.

## Rent Arrears and Voids

The average Scottish tenants' arrears as a percentage of rent due has increased year-on-year from 5.6% in 2013/14 to 6.5% in 2016/17. In 2013/14, the definition and methodology for this measure changed, therefore it is not possible to provide a direct comparison with previous years.

In 2016/17, the percentage of arrears range from 2.5% to 10.1% across councils which indicates a widening variation since 2013/14. However, analysis indicates variation is not systematically related to levels of deprivation, rurality or size of authority area.

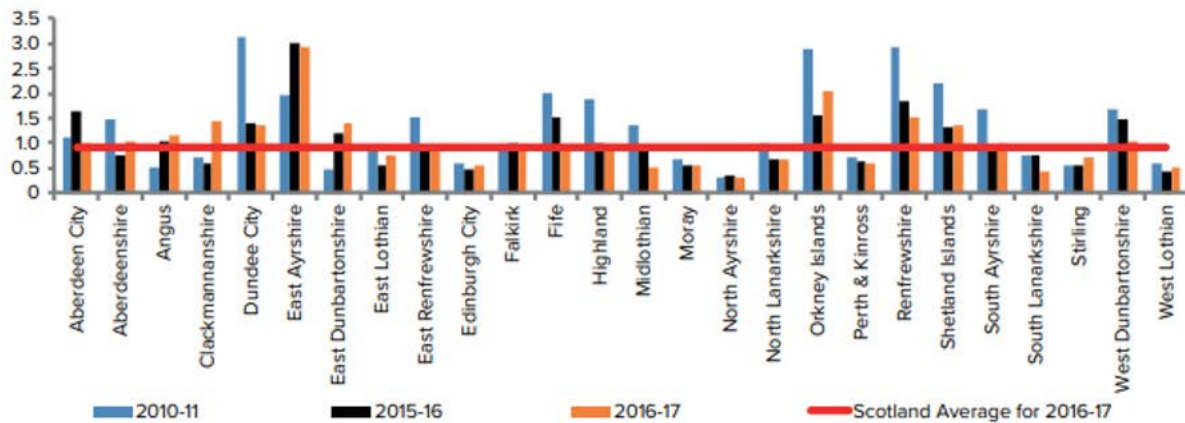
Gross Rent Arrears at a Proportion of Rent Due (%)



Source: Annual Return on the Charter (ARC), Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) Note: Missing values represent the six councils who do not provide housing services (RSL transfer)

Meanwhile, the rent lost due to voids has reduced from 1.3% in 2010/11 to 0.9% in 2016/17. Again, figures vary across authorities, from 0.3% to 2.9%, however the level of variation has reduced since the base year. Neither the urban/rural nature of the council nor the size have a systematic impact here.

### Percentage of Rent Due in the Year that was Lost Due to Voids



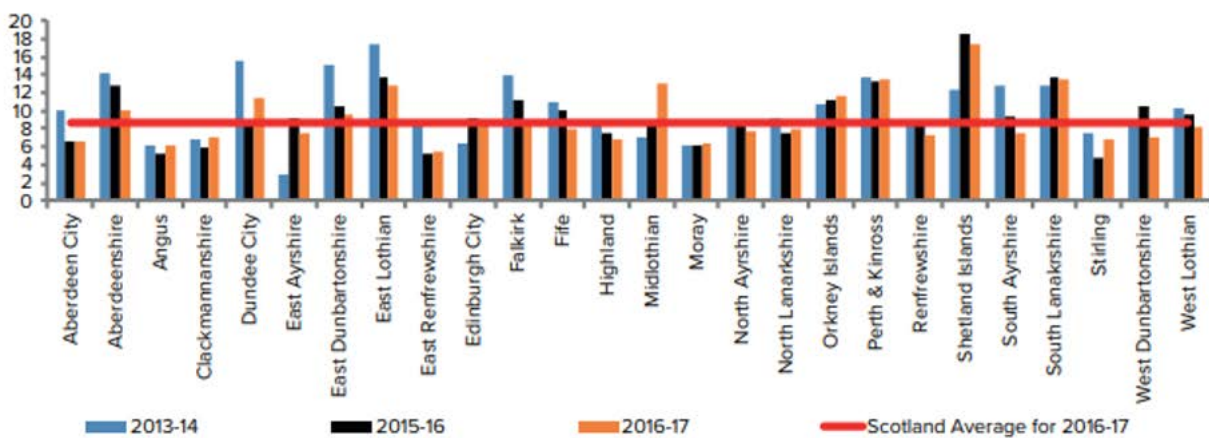
Source: Annual Return on the Charter (ARC), Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)

The average length of time taken to complete non-emergency repairs has reduced by 14.2% over the period, from 10.2 days in 2013/14 to 8.7 days in 2016/17. As with rent arrears, the definition and methodology for this measure changed in 2013/14, therefore it is not possible to provide a direct comparison with previous years.

There is significant variation across councils although this has narrowed slightly since the base year. In 2016/17, length of time ranged from 5.4 days to 17.5 days, with rural councils reporting longer times (11.7) compared to urban councils (8.3).

Overall, these figures suggest the councils continue to manage their stock well in the face of mounting pressures.

### Average Time Taken to Complete Non-Emergency Repairs (days)

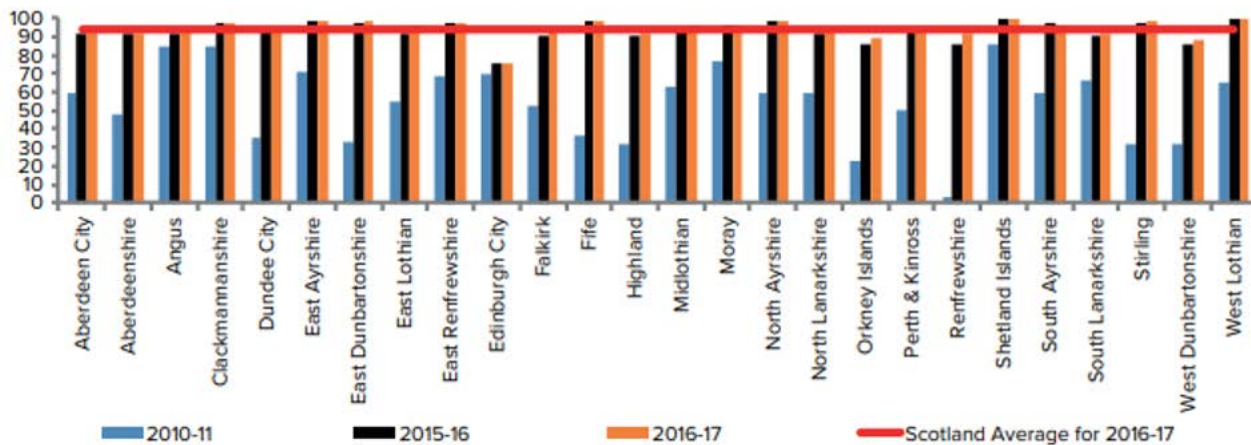


Source: Annual Return on the Charter (ARC), Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)

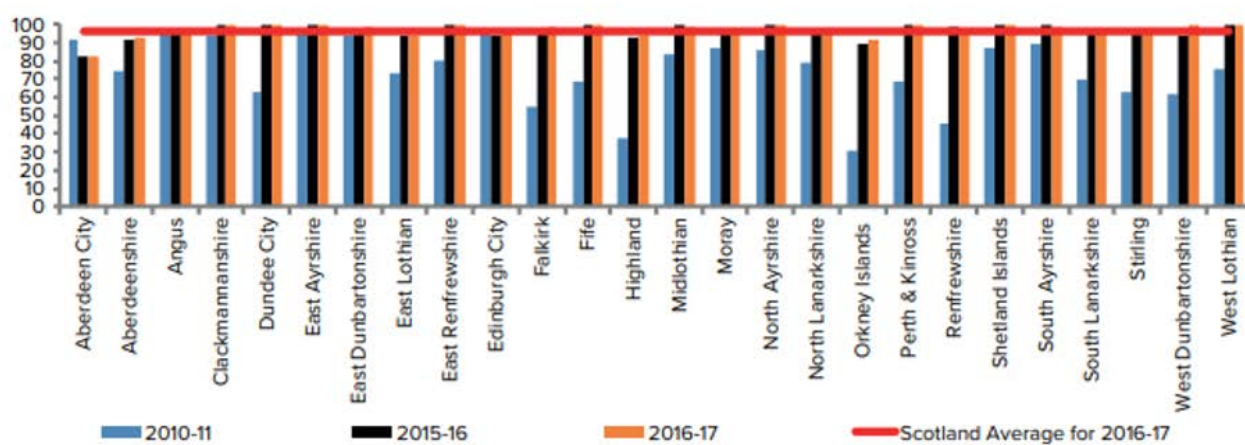
## Housing Quality

In terms of housing quality, there have been significant improvements over the past seven years in terms of dwellings meeting Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS) and energy efficiency standards. In 2016/17, 93.6% of council dwellings met the SHQS, an increase of 40 percentage points from 2010/11. The range across councils varies significantly from 75.7% to 99.9%, although this range has narrowed since 2010/11. In 2016/17, 96.6% of council dwellings were energy efficient, an increase from 74.9% in 2010/11. Councils range from 82.8% to 100% with rural councils on average reporting lower levels of energy efficiency

## Properties Meeting SHQS (%)



## Percentage of Council Dwellings that are Energy Efficient



Work within family groups has identified the following features of local policy and procedure as important in further understanding the variation between authorities in Housing services performance:

- Current standard of housing stock; newer houses are likely to require fewer repairs
- Service structure within Councils
- Rurality of Councils
- Composition of population; some areas have larger number of young families
- Alignment between provision of LA housing and population growth
- Current level of digital provision within Councils; shift to self-service, improved recording methods, digital communication within departments
- Partnership and inter-departmental working

## Learning from June 2018 Benchmarking Event

There was general acknowledgement that because local authority housing services are funded through the Housing Revenue Account (which is ringfenced) it has been easier to maintain services and to test new approaches than for some other areas. **Limiting the financial pressures** on the service has encouraged positivity and **facilitated service planning and development**. This is in sharp contrast to some general funded services in which the focus as a result of severe budget cuts has been on trying to maintain some form of reduced and inadequate service provision.

## Workforce

As part of their restructure **South Ayrshire** council introduced new ways of working for staff; they introduced PDRs, and linked individual's objectives to the team plan, service improvement plan and ultimately the council plan. Individual teams were given targets and did performance reporting at an individual officer level. A more structured approach to support for staff has been established, whereby staff meet with their supervisors on a regular basis (every 4- or 6-weeks). Direct observations and shadowing were also introduced, with a view to identifying training needs more easily.

**Renfrewshire** Council has introduced Service Improvement Groups across departments, which has resulted in positive feedback regarding opportunities for different services teams to work together. Integrated training sessions also help to highlight the impact had by teams on services outwith their own.

**Edinburgh** City Council recently co-located different housing services in the same offices to improve process across services/departments. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this change.

**East Lothian** have Property Services Officers based in Housing, with one of their roles being to monitor the standard of houses for let.

**West Dunbartonshire** have merged the Housing and Building Service functions, with building maintenance officers being transferred into the Housing team.

## Service structure

**South Ayrshire** previously had generic teams across the council area; these teams were stretched and frequently having to deal with urgent demands of tenants, which didn't allow enough time to work on areas that were strategically important to the council such as reducing or recovering rent arrears. In 2014 they moved to a new structure, consisting of a Housing operations team, two specialised teams (a revenue, arrears & support team, and a housing options & support team) and three area-based teams. This approach helped reduce rent arrears from 3.59% to 3.18%, and South Ayrshire are now the second best local authority for this measure. They also reduced voids from 58.4 re-let days in 2012/13 to 35 re-let days in 2017/18 (a 40% reduction), and reduced repair response times from 4.48 hours to 2.67 hours. Moving to dedicated teams enabled these areas to get the attention they needed.

**Fife** council have brought services together, for example co-locating Building Services and Housing staff, whilst giving responsibility for managing voids to building services supervisors. They have also moved towards a flat fee for building services for every void of £2,800, rather than differing fees depending on length of the job. This has helped saved Fife nearly £500,000 from voids, as they now have reduced voids from 47 re-let days in 2014/15 to 25 re-let days in 2017/18 – a reduction of 47%. This successful shift in service structure has allowed for closer inter-team working leading to clear accountability, and a focus on the single end goal of getting it right for tenants. In particular, bringing Building Services closer to tenants and providing training for building services supervisors was seen as critical.

**West Lothian** have moved to a joint visit approach in voids management. This involves a housing officer, building services team supervisor and asbestos contractor (who tends to manage the process) carrying out one joint visit rather than 3 separate visits. This delivers efficiencies around staff time and length of process. In one year, the void re-let time has reduced by 20% from 25 days to 20 days. While this approach has been successful, they noted challenges in relation to different culture/practices across local areas, and also challenges for building services in relation to recruiting staff, which is creating pressures on the existing service.

**East Renfrewshire** traditionally have high void costs, and are undertaking consultations with staff to identify potential areas where savings could be made quickly. This has led to Building Services taking a more structured approach when dealing with properties, moving away from a model where certain properties could be flagged for prioritisation by Housing staff.

**Falkirk** will soon be undertaking a restructure to implement a new housing structure. Originally, the Finance team handled arrears, but this has gone back to the housing team recently. It is envisaged that some tasks will move away from Housing in the restructure. Falkirk have also introduced a dedicated voids officer. This officer (based in Housing Needs) co-ordinates all liaison and the whole voids process. This approach has seen

satisfaction rates increase, and void re-let times reduce. As a result of this success, the restructure will see further investment in this approach with 3 dedicated voids officer posts being introduced.

In **East Dunbartonshire** a dedicated arrears team has been introduced due to welfare reform; the team aims to identify risk and enable earlier intervention. A pilot scheme in Kirkintilloch saw 4 arrears officers based in job centres to assist universal credit clients around housing issues. This has enabled more focused and targeted help to be provided at the right time. Previously, the generic approach was creating barriers in ensuring staff had the specialism/knowledge needed to support clients navigate universal credit, and the introduction of a specialist team has also freed up the generic housing teams to focus on tenancy management. As a result of the success of this approach, it will be rolled out across East Dunbartonshire in October with the existing 4 arrears officers providing support across the whole LA area. The model means there will always be an arrears officer based in the job centre, while others are chasing arrears. Where other housing officers receive enquiries/information about rent arrears, the new SmartSheet app will allow information to be shared between officers in real time.

**Renfrewshire** have introduced a more preventative approach to voids. The allocation team meet up quarterly to build up relationships and to tackle long-term voids. Three long-term voids were skewing the data – but also needed to be addressed by a more targeted approach and the quarterly meetings have helped to identify and target incidents like this. Renfrewshire has condensed office groups and reduced the number of senior level officers from 6-7 per team to 4.

**West Dunbartonshire** have generic workers who carry out a range of functions (repairs, rent etc.) and who work on an area basis.

## Technology/Digital

In order to deal with the increasing level of requests for statistics, **South Ayrshire** introduced a bespoke module which could be added to their existing Northgate recording system (which they used across Housing), leading to improvement in their data quality and scrutiny, and enabled regular auditing and exploration of customer journeys.

The introduction of Smartsheet app in **East Dunbartonshire** has significantly improved the sharing of real-time information about customers between housing officers and repairs teams, and will soon be extended to customer services. Communications between teams was identified as a critical success factor to improve the customer journey, particularly given the introduction of specialist arrears team. This new system has improved the quality of information shared and has enabled a greater reach than previous systems.

**Edinburgh** City Council is in the process of introducing a new project management software that will help to identify risks in processes and enable more efficient action planning.

**Fife** Council have introduced an online 'Housing Options Portal' which offers access to advice, information and support for tenants.

## Tenancy sustainment/Homelessness

**The Wheatley Group** supported homeless young people and care leavers by providing 6-month short term tenancies with support provided by **Glasgow City** Council before offering a permanent tenancy.

In **South Ayrshire** there is commitment that by 2019 no care leaver should have to apply for housing via a homelessness application.

**West Lothian** are looking at how they can adjust current processes and procedures around homelessness due to the current pressure on the service. Dedicated tenancy sustainment officers help keep people in their properties, however increasing demand and pressure on the service has meant that their role has become increasingly focused on dealing with presentations of homelessness. Their review will focus on the customer journey and identify where the council needs to refocus their provision to have the greatest impact, also considering how best to support the shift to prevention to stop people presenting as homeless initially.

**Falkirk** are carrying out a project on tenancy sustainment, involving Finance and Health colleagues. While they have achieved a fairly consistent 88% average for tenancy sustainment, this is below the internal target of 92% and is a strategic priority due to the impact on so much of the service and tenant outcomes. Improved tenancy sustainment should help to reduce voids and property arrears, create more settled communities, and help tackle the cycle of repeat homelessness. This is still at an early stage, but one focus of this will be around making better use of information/data on tenants to understand the reasons why tenancies haven't been sustained. For example, initial analysis has shown a peak in tenancy breakdown at 5 months, so work will look at interventions before this point.

**East Dunbartonshire** had 10 repeat homeless applications which were flagged up as an area where focused and targeted intervention was needed to improve outcomes for this group. They brought in Housing 1st (Turning Point Scotland) who worked with the dedicated arrears team and this has significantly improved homelessness applications and tenancy sustainment results.

Some councils are looking into the potential to convert temporary tenancies that have been given to homeless applicants into secure tenancies. This approach can make managing the availability of housing stock more challenging and lead to longer waiting times in homeless accommodation. More positively it does reduce both void periods and repair costs and increases tenant satisfaction.

## Service design/provision

**South Ayrshire** are committed to avoiding the use of bed and breakfasts to house people who are homeless, thus they have had to develop an alternative flexible approach, while avoiding contributing to voids. To achieve this, they have leased housing from the private sector, and have recently converted two self-contained units into three rooms and a kitchen. As a result, satisfaction with temporary accommodation has increased, and given that 40% of their lets are to homeless people this has improved the experience of many of their new tenants.

**Fife** and **South Ayrshire** both found that asking for feedback immediately gives more accurate satisfaction rates for example when doing a repair or modification to a property.

In **Falkirk**, the workflow team responsible for scheduling appointments, phone clients immediately once a repair job is recorded as complete. This has enabled a much more pro-active approach to responding to issues raised as part of the feedback process.

**South Ayrshire** have introduced service development working groups for key areas: Voids; Anti-Social Behaviour and Estates; Housing Options; Revenue and Arrears. These groups developed work-plans, with clear agendas; staff involvement across each of these areas at each stage was critical for their success, although workload pressures did create challenges in sustaining progress.

**Perth & Kinross** have introduced service scrutiny working group including team leaders and area managers. They meet monthly and discuss different themes such as rent arrears, voids etc. They use a dashboard to look at performance. The process is then split into 7 stages. This is used to identify any gaps or find out if any stages are taking longer than usual. From this step analysis an action plan is carried forward.

**Edinburgh** has set up a working group which includes tenants. They are using the 'Stepping up to scrutiny framework.' They have included tenants when they are looking at improvements by setting up a mock-exercise looking at performance data.