



LINKHOUSING

**LINK HOUSING
BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21**



CONTENTS

1.0	INTRODUCTION.....	2
2.0	STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES.....	2
3.0	BACKGROUND AND OPERATING ENVIRONMENT.....	3
4.0	BUSINESS PLAN OUTCOMES 2019/2020.....	8
5.0	OLDER PERSONS' SERVICE.....	13
6.0	BUSINESS PLANNING 2020/2021.....	14
7.0	ASSET PLANNING.....	19
8.0	OUR PEOPLE.....	21
9.0	EQUALITY.....	21
10.0	GOVERNANCE.....	21
11.0	RISK REGISTER.....	22
12.0	DRAFT BUDGET.....	22

DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Business Plan sets the vision, strategic framework, the objectives for 2020/2021 and reports on the 2019/2020 outcomes and performance for Link Housing Association. This plan aligns with the Link Group wider Business Plan and supports the corporate objectives.

2.0 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Providing Homes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build at least 3,200 new homes over the next five years that meet people’s needs including expansion into the private rented sector
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek opportunities to build low cost, good quality homes for sale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Link homes are well maintained, efficient to heat and are adaptable as people’s needs change
Building Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with people to improve their communities and contribute towards inclusive growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support community development and social enterprises
Valuing People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out from customers what they want from us and use these insights to drive service improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and encourage more people to reach their potential
Working Together
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the best use of our resources and use them to benefit our customers by benchmarking, reviewing value for money and conducting social impact analyses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use our networks to learn from and influence others, and use our knowledge and experience to help others to maximise our impact

3.0 BACKGROUND AND OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Several pieces of legislation, regulation and national consultation requests have been made or have been introduced during 2019/2020. These will have a direct impact upon the way in which housing management services are planned and delivered in 2020/2021 and beyond. These are:

Scottish Government Consultation - Housing 2040

Since making a commitment for a new approach to homes and communities in its 2018-19 Programme for Government,¹ the Scottish Government has been engaging extensively with a variety of stakeholders, including local government, businesses, the third sector, homeowners, and tenants.

Issues raised in an initial round of stakeholder engagement in autumn 2018 included the need for improvements to existing housing stock, a recognition of the distinct needs of Scotland's rural communities, and the putting of people and communities at the heart of planning.

The Housing to 2040 draft vision has the following 15 principles:

Principle	
1.	The housing system should supply high-quality affordable homes for living in, to shift the balance away from the use of homes as a means to store wealth.
2.	Government policy (including taxes and subsidies, for example) should promote house price stability, to help underpin Scotland's standard of living and productivity and promote a Fairer Scotland
3.	Everybody should be able to save for the future (as well as be secure in their home and make significant changes to it) whether they rent or own.
4.	Housing provision should be informed by whole life economic costs and benefits in the round and help to address inequalities in health, wealth, and education
5.	Tenure-neutral space and quality standards for new homes (and existing homes where possible) should be set specifically to improve and protect quality of living and of place.
6.	Government policy should promote a greater diversity of home builders and broader availability of land for development to reduce prices and improve building quality.
7.	All tenures should apply the same high quality and safety standards and levels of consumer protection

¹ 2018-19 Programme for Government

8.	New homes for sale should be built to high standards, defects should be identified and remedied quickly, and all owners should be required to maintain the condition of their home.
9.	Decisions around the quality, location and utilisation of existing stock and new build should be ambitious in enhancing biodiversity, promoting Scotland’s energy security, and be consistent with the target for Scotland’s emissions to be net zero carbon by 2045.
10.	New housing, and the required community resources, should only be provided where they help to create safer, stronger, attractive, sustainable, and integrated communities.
11.	Local communities should be empowered to respond to housing need in their area, as part of a coherent regional economic approach (creating and maintaining jobs) and supported by provision of the right infrastructure
12.	Government intervention should help existing and new communities to be physically, digitally, culturally, and economically connected within a coherent geographic region; this includes retaining and attracting vibrant communities in areas facing depopulation.
13.	Government should ensure that there are affordable housing options across Scotland for households at all income levels
14.	Housing and the housing market should be highly flexible to enable people to meet their changing needs
15.	Everyone has a right to an adequate home

The aims of these principles are to have a well-functioning housing system, high quality sustainable homes, sustainable communities and homes that meet people’s needs.

Link Group is contributing to the consultation exercise and will continue to participate in Scottish Government’s plans for housing in the future.

Scottish Government - Prevention of Homelessness

Scottish Government has introduced groundbreaking legislation over the past 30 years governing the help and assistance offered to people experiencing or threatened with homelessness. This has resulted in a progressive legal framework of protection and duties for people experiencing or threatened with homelessness, compared to other countries.

A key feature of Scottish legislation over the past decade has been the abolition of priority need in 2012, which widened entitlement to and use of temporary accommodation. Whilst a positive development, it has not been without implications, particularly pressure on temporary and permanent accommodation. This pressure is not evenly spread, with some local authority areas, such as Edinburgh and Glasgow experiencing more issues than others.



The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) was established by Scottish Government in 2017. Addressing homelessness became a political priority following the campaign of several homeless rights groups including Shelter Scotland.

HARSAG made a host of recommendations, the cornerstone of which was the transition to a Rapid Rehousing approach, i.e. *“transition to a model of ‘rapid rehousing’ by default across Scotland, which will positively impact on all groups of homeless people, not just people sleeping rough or at risk of doing so”*.

RSLs are one of many partners to this approach; Health and Social Care Partners are also crucial to the success of tackling homelessness.

Rapid Rehousing principles:

- A settled, mainstream housing outcome as quickly as possible.
- Time spent in any form of temporary accommodation reduced to a minimum, with the fewer transitions the better.
- When temporary accommodation is needed, the optimum type is mainstream furnished and within a community.

For those with multiple needs beyond housing, Housing First, an intensive, independent, wrap around support service will be adopted.

Local Authority - Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTP)

Rapid rehousing means taking a housing led approach for rehousing people that have experienced homelessness, making sure they reach settled housing as quickly as possible rather than staying in temporary accommodation for too long.

Transition to a rapid rehousing approach means that some local authorities and partners will have to redress the balance of housing and support options that are available and how quickly they are accessed.

Local authorities led on the production of RRTPs which produced a planning framework for local authorities and partners to transition to a rapid rehousing approach. The main purpose is to redress the current balance of housing options for homeless households and realign these to the preferred housing-led approach rather than “tenancy ready”, the current preferred route.

The plans were produced, in conjunction with RSLs, and will be phased over 5 years with the Scottish Government providing resources to help with this transition.



Link and R RTP

Local authorities have approached this in different ways, depending on the size and challenges faced by each in managing homelessness. Some have invited partners at the very early stages of planning, some during the planning stage, and some are intending to ask for comments and commitments once the R RTP are completed.

Currently, Link's lets to homeless households varies by local authority, in some areas this is 100% of properties let and in others this is zero. Link has always been committed to the prevention of homelessness and will work closely with all local authorities to achieve the target outcomes. The current target for Link Housing is to achieve at least 50% of lets to homeless applicants.

The Scotland Act 2016 (Part 3) and Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018

The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 makes provision for social security in Scotland to deliver devolved powers introduced in the Scotland Act 2016 (Part 3) and received Royal Assent on 1 June 2018.

Scottish Government is committed to delivering a social security system based on dignity, fairness and respect, delivered by the Social Security Agency, which is based across two sites in Glasgow and Dundee and when fully operational is expected to employ approximately 1900 staff.

To date the Agency has introduced the following benefits:

- Carers Allowance Supplement from September 2018
- Best Start Grant, Pregnancy and Baby Payment from December 2018
- Best Start Grant nursery age and school payments June 2019
- Young Carer Grant from October 2019
- Funeral Support Payment from September 2019

The following new benefits will be available:

- Disability Assistance for Children and Young People from summer 2020
- Disability Assistance for Working-age People from early 2021
- Disability Assistance for Older People from 2021
- Scottish Child Payment from early 2021

Scottish Housing Regulator - Annual Assurance Statements

In 2019 the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) introduced the submission of an Annual Assurance Statement from all housing providers. Boards were asked to assure the SHR that evidence was available, and compliance was achieved in all the following areas:

<p>Standards of Governance Board self-assessment Board and policy templates Internal Audit Strategic Services Review VFM benchmarking Risk Register Quarterly KPI reporting</p>	<p>Regulatory Requirements Regulatory checklists Board and policy templates Internal audit Investors in Diversity Equality Impact Assessment</p>
<p>Charter Outcomes ARC Validation and approval Charter Outcomes Review Housing Services Review Benchmarking Performance reporting</p>	<p>Legislative Duties Board and policy templates Charter outcomes review Rent consultation Internal audit Legal checklists Risk register Quarterly KPI reporting</p>

The submission of the 2020 Annual Assurance Statement will follow the same process as 2019 at which time Link Housing Board will be invited to review the evidence of performance against the Charter Outcomes.

Care Inspectorate

Link Housing’s older persons’ service is registered with the Care Inspectorate in accordance with the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010, Part 5. The service is monitored and inspected by the Care Inspectorate.

The Registered Manager of the service has a responsibility to:

- Complete Annual Returns
- Notify Care Inspectorate of all applicable events that occur within a registered service. These notifications now include a responsibility to report if an event triggers the Duty of Candour
- Complete Self-Assessment and Grading submissions prior to an inspection. This model of inspection is moving to a framework that is based on the Health and Social Care Standards. The quality framework for Housing Support Services has still to be published.

Duty of Candour

The purpose of the Duty of Candour legislation is to support the implementation of consistent responses across health and social care providers when there has been an incident that has resulted in unintended or unexpected harm which is not related to the course of the condition for which the person is receiving care. Duty of Candour regulations apply to Link Housing’s sheltered housing service as a service registered with Care Inspectorate for the purposes of the provision of housing support services.

The duty of candour legislation requires responsible organisations to respond to people when unintended or unexpected harm has been caused. The procedure applies to all organisations providing health and social care services in Scotland.

This includes notifying the person affected, apologising, and offering a meeting to give an account of what happened. A review of each incident and consider the support available to those affected (both those who deliver and receive care and support services). Organisations are required to publish an annual report on and when the duty has been applied. This includes the number of incidents, how the organisation has implemented the duty and what learning and improvements have been put in place.

Link Housing published their first annual report in April 2019

4.0 BUSINESS PLAN OUTCOMES 2019/2020

The objectives and outcomes achieved within the 2019/20 Business Plan are listed below:

2019/20 Objectives	2019/20 Outcomes
Welfare reform and the effects of Universal Credit upon rent collection and arrears and debt management	UC and rent arrears data are analyzed on a monthly basis, reports prepared for SMG, LHA and LG Boards on a regular basis. Arrears levels have continued below performance target set. Advice service continue to provide intensive support to tenants who claim UC entitlements. Debt and Money Advice Officers have produced monetary gains for tenants with high levels of debt. Improvements to processes have influenced the positive arrears outcomes.
Achieve a redesigned sheltered housing service for older people	A successful reshaping of the sheltered housing took place resulting in 6 out of 12 developments transferring to a Retirement Plus model. Intense planning and consultation ensured there were no complaints formal or otherwise regarding the way in which this change was managed. This is significant given other providers have not managed this successfully in the past.



<p>Improve customer satisfaction (including value for money (VFM) perceptions) and service delivery</p>	<p>CAPCO were engaged as an independent consultant to help diversify who we engage with. Face to face surveys were also introduced to measure Vfm perceptions and tenant views on their estate. The results of the VFM survey has shown an increase in tenant satisfaction. The rent consultation results also provided comments from tenants and have been reviewed. The launch of MyLink/MyLarkfield/My Horizon Customer App has resulted in 600 tenants downloading the app and contacting Link using this method (as at January 2020). A further staff app was launched in January 2020 to enable staff to effectively provide services in real time whilst in the field.</p>
<p>Work collaboratively with other subsidiaries</p>	<p>The Housing Services Strategy commenced development and several consultation events have taken place with all housing staff during 2019/2020. Successful working together and collaboration has resulted in two major Policy reviews implemented across all subsidiaries.</p>
<p>Contribute to homelessness and tenancy sustainment</p>	<p>The review of the Lettings policy increased the number of priority passes for applicants and lowered room criteria which resulted in increased lets to homeless applicants and those in priority need. Annual tenancy visits to all tenants have identified customers who require help to sustain their tenancy. As part of this initiative, the HoMe project was introduced to help vulnerable tenants sustain their tenancy and is delivered through LinkLiving. A commitment to “Making a Stand” against Domestic Abuse was achieved and a group wide policy implemented to support victims of domestic abuse.</p>

Performance Outcomes 2019/2020

Overall Link Housing performance was good or excellent in a number of areas. Some highlights include:

The rent arrears position has remained well below the predicted target of 5% at 4.53% and this has been as a result of improving the arrears process, early intervention measures and closer working with tenants.

The percentage of Link tenancies sustained for more than a year (87.34%) was marginally below the SHN average for RSL's (88.82% in 2018/19.) Our vision, by introducing our personalised service, would allow housing officers to carry out annual tenancy visits to all tenants and increasing the time spent on pre- allocation work and ongoing tenancy sustainment.

In addition, the smaller patch sizes are providing a supportive approach to tenants which is expected to stabilise the number of evictions and reduce the number of abandoned tenancies. In 2018/19 there were 36 evictions and 47 abandonments, in the first six months of 2019/20 these figures are improving.

Link Living and Link Housing have collaborated to respond to the needs of tenants with very challenging behaviours that were not being met by other existing services, nor Housing First support. The Help with Managing Anything (HoMe) project was established, as a pilot, with the provision of funding for a 28 per hour a week post for intensive/specific support to those tenants suffering from social isolation, hoarding, very poor standard of property or chaotic lifestyles.

This has proved very successful, with abandonments in the Falkirk area reducing by circa 5%. Approval has been given to extend this service for a further year and in addition this has been rolled out the Edinburgh area, from April 2020, where serious sustainment issues have been identified through annual tenancy visits.

Rent Increase Consultation 2019/2020

In November 2019 Link consulted its tenants on two options for the 2020/21 rent increase; Option 1 to increase rents by 2.5% (average rents would go up £2.17 per week); or Option 2 to increase rents by 3% (average rents would go up £2.60 per week).

All tenants received an information booklet, which gave information, in a simple and engaging way on what rent pays for, service levels and what the different increase option provided. The pie chart style diagram used in previous years was replaced with simplified total amounts for investment and maintenance, staff and office costs and loan repayments/debt.

The % of how every £1 is spent was still provided. The average unit costs for kitchen and bathroom was removed as they vary significantly.

Research Resource (RR) (a social research consultancy) were appointed to do the consultation using a combination of email, online and telephone. A total of 635 interviews (405 email, 30 online and 200 telephone) were completed (up from 313 in 2017 and 481 in 2018).

Sampling by property type, location and household composition took place to ensure good representation across Link stock. Telephone calls were made to tenants with no email address recorded. A 10% response rate was achieved from the whole tenant base and provides data accuracy to plus or minus 3.7%. This response from total tenant population is a good level for a rent increase consultation and has improved year on year.

All tenants had the opportunity to respond to the rent increase consultation survey. The booklet invited tenants to complete an online survey or to contact RR by phone if they want to participate. Our experience has been few tenants have opted into this type of research, therefore, to maximise responses, RR emailed a sample of tenants with email address, inviting them to complete an online survey. This year a sample was drawn for the research company to telephone tenants to balance the methods with solely online.

A summary of the results are as follows:

- 83% stated they felt the booklet helped them understand what Link spends rent on and why it is making a proposal to increase rent (up from 73% in 2018).
- The preferred option was option 1, an increase in rent by 2.5% which was cited by 59% of respondents overall. 34% stated a preference for option 2, an increase in rent by 3%.
- 85% (compared to 78.6% last year) said they find rent very or fairly easy to afford or just about affordable 15% found it difficult to afford (compared to 21.4% last year).
- Working households much more likely to select the lower option than those who were unemployed, long term sick or retired.
- There was no significant variance of views on options between local authority areas in 2019.
- Those who preferred option 2 were asked to prioritise a list of investments. Windows and front doors (74%), heating and energy efficiency (63%), kitchens (60%), bathrooms (55%) and roof render/external work (52%).
- 236 tenants made commentary, the majority were related to rents being too expensive or increasing every year (23%).
- The same number of people said they would support a higher increase to improve housing quality as those who thought rent should not be increased at all (both 11%). Other themes in the commentary include properties must be improved; and only if they personally see the benefit (9%); and wages not increasing at the same level as rent (5%)

Link Group rent increases have been below the Scottish average for four of the previous five years. In 2018/19 average Link rents (including service charges) were less than the RSL average. The Scottish average includes local authority as well as RSL rents.

Welfare Reform

Work has continued to mitigate and monitor the effects of welfare reforms, particularly UC and the benefits freeze which continue to impact on tenants and the business. Tenants in receipt of UC continue to experience higher levels of rent arrears than those on HB or not in receipt of benefits. There is also evidence that the benefits freeze is impacting on rent arrears levels for all benefit recipients. That said, current rent arrears remain well below the projected targets as mentioned above.

The issues with rent collection through the UC, Managed Payment to Landlord (MPTL) process are well known and are further compounded by administrative errors and incorrect payments received from DWP. These additional issues have been raised through appropriate escalation channels.

The Managed Migration to UC pilot is underway in Harrogate, the learning from which will inform the final procedures to be adopted by DWP. There are currently 1830 Link working age households in receipt of HB who will require to claim UC before December 2023. Whilst all households are likely to require some guidance and support, it is anticipated that approximately 1400 will require more intensive support, this ascertained from completion of the Vulnerability Questionnaire. It will also be important to ensure that household income is maximised prior to migration. The Migration timetable is expected during 2020.

In May 2019, welfare reforms affected mixed age pensioner couples, forcing them to claim UC for the first time. For those affected the impact on their income is substantial losing approximately £500 per month.

It comes as no surprise that debt levels and food bank use continue to increase as does applications to SWF.

The following positives are worth noting:

- The benefits freeze is due to end in April 2020 with working age benefits to increase by 1.7%
- Scottish Social Security Agency has commenced payment of a range of benefits detailed in 1.3 and propose to implement further new benefits over the coming months. Link staff are involved in shaping these new benefits through participation in consultations and workshops
- Scottish Government continues to fully mitigate the bedroom tax through DHP spending £65m in 2018-2019
- Easements to the two-child limit and increases in UC work allowances will result in extra benefit entitlements

- The SDP Gateway will prevent households in receipt of Severe Disability Premium from moving on to UC until Managed Migration thus protecting that entitlement and the top up payment those already in receipt of UC will result in extra benefit income.
- The Landlord Portal has simplified the administration of rent verification and further enhancements to functionality are anticipated in the coming year

Coordinated through the Welfare Reform Group, Link continues to mitigate the impacts of welfare reforms keeping staff and tenants constantly updated on external developments.

Rent Affordability

In the current economic climate and taking account of welfare reforms rent affordability must be carefully considered. An affordability assessment has been completed using the SFHA (Scottish Federation of Housing Associations) Affordability Tool. This shows that the percentage of property types with below 25% of moderate income or between 25% and 30% of moderate income, ratings are the same as last year (98%).

Tenant perceptions of affordability have improved since from the previous rent consultation. In 2019, 86% stated their rent was affordable or just about affordable compared to 78% in 2018.

Tenants also responded that rents are too expensive or increasing every year.

Our in-house VFM survey shows a significant improvement from the 2017 tenant satisfaction survey. In 2019, 89% of tenants stated they felt their rent was very good or fairly good value for money compared to 65% in 2017.

During 2020 Link Housing Association will appoint consultants to complete a review of Link Group's Rent Setting Policy. This will include an affordability assessment of Link Group rents.

5.0 OLDER PERSONS' SERVICE

A move away from the traditional Sheltered Housing model to the Retirement Plus model has had a positive impact for tenants whilst maintaining a reduced on site staff presence at an affordable level for tenants and the organisation.

Of the 12 previously existing sheltered housing developments, 6 have been converted to Retirement Housing and 6 developments remain in 3 local authority areas. These 3 local authorities have yet to confirm their budget commitment for 2020/21. Once this is known tenants will be notified and changes introduced should this be appropriate.

Link Housing has committed to the new Housing and Dementia Framework launched on 30 October 2019. The framework was commissioned by Healthcare Improvement Scotland's hub in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland and Alzheimer Scotland.

The number of people living in Scotland with dementia is estimated at 90,000 with around 3000 of these people aged under 65. It is estimated that a further 19473 people will be diagnosed in 2020 and numbers are expected to increase to 164,000 by 2036.

As a landlord, it is inevitable that a proportion of Link tenants and staff will be affected by dementia. Raising staff awareness across Link is important if we are to recognise and understand the impact of a dementia diagnosis on our tenants and be able to offer appropriate support and signposting to services who can help.

The framework includes:

- Five person-centered outcomes that people living with dementia and their carers have said are important to them, and
- 11 commitments that housing organisations should already be achieving or working towards in order to meet the outcomes

In the year ahead, Link Housing will identify good practice, and where more work needs to be done in addition to co-ordinating a response to the launch of the framework and engage in activities across services that will promote and champion dementia awareness.

6.0 BUSINESS PLANNING 2020/2021

The main business themes for Link Housing will align with the newly developed Housing Service Strategy – “Housing with Heart”. The development of this partnership housing strategy has been underway during 2019/20 business year and will be the focus in 2020/21. Asset Management is now incorporated operationally as part of Link Housing and therefore planning for 2020/2021 includes this area of housing management services.

The main themes of the Housing Service Strategy will focus on:



The above themes will be underpinned by a set of 4 principles which will determine the direction of travel for housing within the Group over the period 2021/2026. As such, the year ahead will form more as an optimization and planning phase although actions will take place which are aligned to the broad principles.

Tenant Engagement and Scrutiny

Link Housing's Tenant Participation Strategy has been under review. The reviewed strategy will be presented to Link Housing Board for approval in April 2020.

The new strategy will outline how Link will deliver statutory duties outlined in the housing acts. It will also reflect recognised good practice. The reviewed strategy has been shaped by tenants, who have been involved through an online survey (sent to over 700 tenants and promoted in the winter newsletter) and discussions at tenant events.

The tenant events were held in February 2020 in Glasgow and Falkirk. Tenants identified and scored preferences for strategic outcomes of the new Tenant Participation Strategy. They also discussed how Link will achieve each outcome. Events were interactive, to encourage maximum tenant involvement.

The strategic outcomes identified during tenant events form the basis of the action plan that the Tenant Engagement Team will work towards achieving. It is believed, however, that there are several areas that Link can improve the way it engages with tenants. These are outlined below:

Participatory budgeting – Link invests in estate management improvements throughout the year in each of the areas that it has stock. Investment is identified by the asset management team, in consultation with housing management. There is no tenant involvement in the process. Several social landlords, such as the Wheatley Group, West Dunbartonshire Council and Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership involve their tenants in identifying and approving projects for local investment.

Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs) – RTOs currently do not effectively input into Link's decisions on housing policy and investment. An aim of the new strategy will be to look at introducing networking opportunities. It is also hoped to bring RTO representatives from each area together formally. This will form the basis of delivering participatory budgeting and will boost RTO moral and involvement.

Local engagement – The Link Tour is one of the main ways that Link engages with local tenants. There are opportunities to make the Tour more effective. These will be reflected in the reviewed strategy.

Capco Customer Engagement Project – Link has employed the services of an external consultant, Capco, who is currently assessing how Link engages with tenants. The project uses an iterative methodology, focusing on business needs, customer expectations and collaborative problem solving. The aim of the project is to identify a minimum viable project (MVP) that will improve tenant engagement. The project is currently ongoing, although Capco has committed to matching Link's timescales as part of the review of the Tenant Participation Strategy.



Improved customer insight – Information gathered by housing officers on their iPads will be used to develop approaches for targeted engagement. We will identify customer profiles and ways of engaging most effectively with each.

Tenant Scrutiny – The Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) has drafted a 3-year business plan. This will be incorporated into the Tenant Participation strategy document to provide additional transparency. The terms of reference of the TSP will be updated. Terms of reference and the strategy will outline the role of the TSP in 'Scrutiny Plus'.

The reviewed strategy will establish ways of measuring how effective each of our engagement structures are.

Sustainability

As part of the Housing Service Strategy sustainability for customers and the organisation will form several of the business planning objectives for 2020/21. These will include:

- Large scale tenant consultation exercise
- Providing support and assistance to those most people most in need
- Review of the older persons' service
- Scope tenancy sustainment requirements to meet homelessness targets
- Allocating and managing 850 new build properties
- Maintaining and protecting assets whilst improving customer consultation
- Review of Estate Management including Neighbourhood Commitments
- Review of policies and procedures

Value for Money

Developing an approach to demonstrating value for money will be a focus during 2020/21. As part of the Housing Service Strategy work, we will embed value for money concepts into decision making processes. Whilst, the Group's approach to value for money encapsulates a wide range of activities including social impact measurement, it is considered that a stand-alone Housing Value for Money Strategy with a bespoke definition will be more meaningful to tenants. Outcomes of initiatives will be shared with tenants to highlight how value for money has been achieved.

Initiatives will include:

- Review of choice based letting system
- Service First Project Phase 2 including tenant self-service portal
- Rent setting review
- Input and collection of data through Community Insight tools to influence performance and business decisions



Accountability

To ensure we are accountable for all our service delivery, it is planned to:

- Provide a clear and coherent plan through the launch of the Housing Service Strategy 2021-2026
- Better understand our customers' needs, expectations and aspirations
- Upskill and refresh staff training plans
- Review working methods to provide consistency across all housing services
- Lead success through a culture of mutual support
- Deliver personalised solutions for customers and tenants with a “can do” attitude

Performance Targets 2020/2021

Setting targets for 2020/2021 will determine the level of performance we aspire to. The following targets are proposed:



Indicator	Reason	LHA Performance 2019/2020	Proposed Target 2020/2021	Scottish Average 2017/2018
Gross Rent arrears as a % of rent due	ARC indicator Service Impact	4.53%	5.5%	3.4%
% of new tenancies sustained for more than a year by source of let	ARC indicator Service Impact Prevention of homelessness	84.62%	90%	88.7%
Of properties available (and there was a demand for homeless) how many were let to homeless applicants	ARC indicator Service Impact Prevention of homelessness	70.86%	>70%	N/A
% of tenants who feel that rent for their property represents good value for money	ARC indicator Service Impact	76.43%	85%	83.4%
Average re-let times (calendar days)	ARC indicator Service Impact	25.85	25 days	30.7 days
% of rent due lost through homes being empty	ARC indicator Service Impact	0.58%	0.5%	0.7%
Reduce number of evictions and abandonments	ARC indicator Service Impact	33 evictions 35 abandonments	Evictions < 32 Abandonments < 34	N/A
Increase number of properties meeting SHQS target	ARC indicator Legislative requirement	99.46%	99.7%	94.2%
Achieve 100% smoke and heat compliance by February 2021	ARC indicator Legislative requirement	N/A	5952 properties	100%
Deliver component renewal programme within budget of £4.6M	Service delivery	N/A	100% spend	N/A
Increase stock condition surveys	ARC indicator	N/A	>20% of total stock	N/A



7.0 ASSET MANAGEMENT

Asset Management transferred to Link Housing in February 2020. The current Asset Management Strategy provides a robust framework within which informed decisions can be made to ensure the long-term future of Link's stock whilst contributing to sustaining the communities in which they are located. The strategy was approved in 2018 and identified a range of properties requiring specific interventions; from improving lettable/energy efficiency to disinvestment and disposal for properties that were uneconomical to maintain with Link's portfolio.

The strategy comprises:

- A detailed asset performance review dovetailed with environmental and socio-economic factors to establish a baseline score for each scheme
- A methodology of weighting and scoring the assets reflecting these indicators
- A defined ranking of Link stock
- An activity plan to ensure an appropriate solution is developed for lower ranked schemes
- An outline of the assets energy performance and action plan to meet the Energy Efficiency standard for Social Housing (ESSH)
- Protocols for disposing of assets and leases

Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS)

Link delivered on its commitment to achieve the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by March 2015. There were however a list of exemptions and abeyances which required notification to the Scottish Housing Regulator. In our 2016/17 ARC, we identified 31 properties for exemption and 29 properties for abeyance which leaves a total of 60 which do not meet the standard (less than 1% of Link's stock). This figure continues to reduce as we gain access to those properties in abeyance.

Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH)

The Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (ESSH) was published in 2014 which a target date of 2020. The minimum energy efficiency ratings that all social housing in Scotland is required to meet by 2020 vary according to heating source and type of dwelling. But overall, these ratings straddle Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Bands D and C.

In simple terms, this means that all social housing in Scotland must, as a minimum, meet EPC Band D – although, depending on individual dwelling type and heating source, some categories of housing will have to meet EPC Band C in order to achieve the standard.

Link's 2019 ARC submission detailed 336 properties which currently do not meet the standard. Business as Usual measures such as boiler renewals, window and door replacements along with targeted Energy Efficiency projects have resulted in an anticipated position of 283 properties failing to meet EESSH by December 2020 (95.9% compliance).

The Scottish Government consulted on the proposed post 2020 Energy Efficiency Standard in 2018 but the standard remains to be published. The proposal included some significant challenges to bring stock to a yet higher standard when the more straightforward and affordable measures had already been completed to meet SHQS and EESSH (2020). The proposed standard is being considered when projects are being specified to maximise the improvement to the energy efficiency rating of the properties involved where possible.

Smoke and Heat Detection Compliance

The Scottish Government issued changes to the legislation regarding Smoke and Heat detection in November 2019 with a target date for compliance of February 2021. A total of 5952 properties were identified as requiring upgrade at a cost of approximately £1.7M. Work commenced in summer 2019 and upgrades are being carried out by the gas contractor when they are identified as being due for replacement (10 years old), during planned works, at void and in a targeted approach by Link Property to ensure compliance by February 2021.

Future Asset and Investment Planning

As part of the asset and investment planning review, the five-year and 30-year investment programmes were assessed during 2019. The review established that investment and maintenance requirements can be achieved with current incomes however, some reprofiling of spend is required to reflect changes as a result of improved stock information.

Minimising contractor profit on materials and eliminating VAT from labour costs will be advanced as Link Property (Link's in-house maintenance contractor) expands, including the delivery of the Gas servicing and maintenance contracts from April 2020.

The significant development programme and increase in stock is also providing the opportunity to review how best to deliver compliance contracts in the future.

For the year 2020/2021 the programme of works and associated budget costs are split into three headings and attached as an appendix.



8.0 OUR PEOPLE

Resource planning for the year ahead has taken place and whilst there are no new permanent posts planned, there are changes to some temporary posts to ensure we are able to manage the 850 new build properties due to be handed over to Link Housing.

The learning and development of our staff will be reviewed as part of the Housing Service Strategy in the coming year. Succession planning will also form part of this review.

9.0 EQUALITY

Working with our partners and external agencies we will continue to ensure the services we provide reflect the diverse needs of our tenants and customers. Equality by design is at the forefront of all our policies and procedures, with full impact assessments carried out whenever there is a revision or introduction of new business process. We will continue to work to remove barriers and promote inclusion across the business both internally and externally.

We aim to meet the Regulatory requirements in relation to strategic decision making and accountability for those with protected characteristics by making best use of new and existing business data and Community Insight™ software which utilises nationally recognised data sets.

10.0 GOVERNANCE

A wider Strategic Review of Governance has taken place during 2019/2020 which has involved member organisations from the whole Group. The outcomes from this review are currently being considered and developed. It is likely that these will not be fully realised for the business year ahead.

The Link Housing Board currently has 8 members. One member resigned for personal reasons during 2019 which has created a vacancy. Two new members joined the Board during 2019 and bring with them asset management and strategic planning skills. Interviews with potential tenant Board members were conducted in February 2020 and it is anticipated that the Board membership will welcome one new tenant Board members in April 2020. This will maintain the board compliment to 8 members with further tenant interviews to take place during 2020.

Performance reviews of members of Link Housing Board took place during 2018/2019 and will re-commence during 2020.

Profiles of Board members are attached as an appendix.



11.0 RISK REGISTER

The risk registers have been reviewed to produce an overarching Strategic Risk Register which is considered at Link Group Board level and a Housing Operational Risk Register for all subsidiary companies. Both registers are appended to this Business Plan.

12.0 DRAFT BUDGET

The overall draft budget is similar in financial terms to last year in terms and draft income and expenditure proposals are attached as an appendix.