

KEY

HOUSING STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 – 2025

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Introduction

This document outlines the Strategic Plan for Key's housing function for the period 2020-25 and is a part of an overall Plan covering the range of activities for the Group.

This Plan provides a commentary on the context of Key's housing provision, identifies the main risks and mitigations which are in place for these activities and outlines the main objectives being taken forward by our landlord functions.

Specific appendices look at our approach to Affordability & Value for Money, Asset Management, Tenant Engagement and Key's Performance Management Framework

The extended five-year period of this Plan reflects the longer-term ambitions for our housing services and will allow us to adapt and amend our objectives as the plan is implemented. Specifically, interim reviews of progress against objectives and the risk environment will be undertaken throughout the lifespan of the Plan.

The Development of the Plan During the Covid Pandemic

It should be recognised that the introduction of this Plan was originally scheduled for earlier in the year but has been delayed to October 2020 as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Our normal approach as an organisation to the development of our Strategic Plan is characterised by a desire to maximise the meaningful involvement and participation of our tenants, staff and other stakeholders. Unfortunately it has not been possible to consult in detail with our tenants on the detail of this Plan over the period of the pandemic and it has not been feasible to conduct virtual or on-line participation in an inclusive way with our tenant group (the main vehicle for tenant engagement in Key's landlord services is our very active "My Home Group" which has been unable to meet since February 2020). It is recognised that these are exceptional circumstances and over the period of the Plan the commitment remains to engage with our tenants, as soon as it is feasible and safe to do so, on the subject areas of this Plan. It should be noted, however, that these comments relate to the fine detail of this Plan and that the active and frequent meeting of the My Home Group in recent years has shaped much of the overall direction and focus of this Plan. The Plan has also been developed with participative input from all staff in our landlord function, particularly in the development of the overall aims and of Key's housing services.

The development of this Plan has also been shaped by the supplementary advice for landlords on business planning in response to Covid-19 as issued by the Scottish Housing Regulator in August 2020. The purpose of this advice is to assist Registered Social Landlords during the period of the pandemic to consider the return to comprehensive service provision and to begin to evaluate the ways in which services may be best delivered in future.

A number of themes are identified with this supplementary guidance and those with greatest impact on our service provision as a landlord are considered below:

- The guidance notes that the pandemic is likely to bring additional challenges for landlords in relation to the health and safety of their tenants. In Key's case the impact to date has been relatively limited as we have by and large been able to maintain our core delivery of health and safety related work during the period of the pandemic in relation to gas safety

checks, electrical wiring and lifting equipment. This is due in part to our offices remaining open at all times (in our role as a provider of care, services) and our ability to continue to access contractors to carry out this work. Additionally, our pre-pandemic high degree of compliance with the provision of heat, smoke and carbon monoxide alarms has assisted in this respect, and this is also reflected in our compliance level with the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing required by the end of 2020. Further commentary and details are provided in Asset Management appendix of this Plan.

- As part of an assessment of the impact of the pandemic and our consideration of what the next 18 months and beyond are likely to bring, there is a clear need to accelerate our consideration of the opportunities offered by the adoption of digital approaches. This is likely to have an impact on the nature of our communication with tenants, the ways in which our staff operate (working environment and technologies adopted in our IT infrastructure) and the nature of the services we provide to our tenants (this is particularly relevant in the context of our existing provision of 'telecare' to the majority of our tenants). A detailed target of this Plan will be to evaluate these strands.
- In relation to rental income and affordability, a separate appendix to the Plan provides a detailed commentary on the particular context and risks faced by Key a specialist housing provider. Our housing revenue plan will require, even more than previously, to be tested (scenarios and assumptions) as part of our existing annual cycle of rent determination.
- Our risk identification and mitigation approaches are summarised within appendix 2 of the Plan. As a general commentary many of these risks and mitigations pre-date the current pandemic (and will continue to be present when the pandemic is no longer a major influence).

Context of Key's Housing Services

Key has been a housing provider since 1982, with its stock based on a new build programme and amounting to over 700 properties spread across 15 local authority areas.

The majority of this housing was developed as supported accommodation for people with learning disabilities (and the majority registered with care home status). This care home status was removed in 2002/2003 and from that time we have provided distinct housing and support services, characterised by the separation in the delivery of these functions. In the area of support provision this has been characterised by the continued movement towards individualised, personalised services and the associated adoption of self-directed support the Scottish Government in the delivery of social care services.

As part of this general developmental pathway, as a housing provider, Key commenced a programme of sub-dividing shared housing to meet the needs of existing tenants. With the changing aspirations of tenants to have their own homes, and the need for the Key to consider the longer term use of its housing, a programme of remodelling was developed, producing one and two bedroom flats from the original shared housing.

Over the period 2002 to 2017, we have created 164 new units of remodelled housing at 31 locations.

It is relevant to note that we let a significant proportion of our stock (around 200 properties) to tenants who are unsupported and to tenants where support is provided by another organisation (usually where the support service was passed to another organisation following a local authority social care procurement exercise, but also in reflection of individuals choosing an alternative support provider)

Overview of Current Themes, Risks and Objectives

Key's overall operating environment as a landlord is shaped by a number of established and developing factors, which are summarised below.

In turn these factors inform both the nature of risks faced by us as a landlord and our objectives as a provider of housing. These areas are considered in greater detail later in this Plan.

In overview, these themes include

1. The continued priority to ensure meaningful **engagement with our tenants** on all relevant aspects of the provision of services. This approach features a number of specific strands of activity as well as the embedding of an approach where responsive and positive customer engagement characterises our approach to service delivery. Our tenant engagement strategy is outlined in more detail later in this Plan.
2. We continue to promote and develop our **communication with tenants** which is inextricably linked to the above theme of engagement. A number of mechanisms have been embedded in our practices and these include the publication of regular newsletters (three per year), an annual satisfaction survey (every second year this focuses solely on maintenance/property services), formal rent consultations and the consolidation of our tenant engagement forum (the My Home Group). The landlord section of our web site has been recently revised to provide a comprehensive source of information to our tenants and has also been updated to reflect the Freedom of Information requirements placed on our landlord function.
3. An ongoing facet of our tenant engagement remains the consideration of ensuring **value for money** (doing the right things, in the right way, at the right cost) and continuing consideration of **rent affordability**. These aspects are considered in more detail later in this Plan.
4. Our approach is also characterised by a focus on **tenant safety**. At a general level a risk assessment-based approach to our provision of housing is central to our approach as an organisation, reflecting the nature of our combined housing and support services to vulnerable individuals and this informs the installation of specific facilities/equipment within individual properties. At a general level we have taken a position to review our response to the risk from fire and have agreed to enhance our smoke and heat detection beyond even that required by the recent statutory changes. Specifically, this has involved the provision of detectors in all compartments in all properties and to take forward a phased programme over the early period of this Plan (in supported housing initially) to install digital linkage between individual properties and a monitored call centre.

5. The requirement to work to the **regulatory framework** (as updated in 2019) and associated guidance as issued by the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR). The associated requirement to submit an Annual Assurance Statement has been considered by our Board and a series of business processes have been introduced to review our compliance with the regulatory framework.
6. The ongoing requirements associated with the **Social Housing Charter**, as recently reviewed, on the provision of our landlord services. Specifically, all Registered Social Landlords are required to evidence compliance in the form of an annual return to the SHR and are also required to promote and make available to tenants their performance in relation to these indicators.
7. The approaches taken to securing the condition of our physical housing stock is outlined within our **asset management strategy** which is expanded in greater detail later in this Plan. The requirement to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing are addressed within this document, alongside a commentary on our procurement activity in response to the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014.
8. Another theme is the impact of **welfare reform**, although our assessment is that in relative terms this present a relatively low risk for Key.

In retrospect the impact of size criteria ('bedroom tax') as applicable to housing benefit payments had limited impact due to the exemption of 'Supported Accommodation' from these restrictions. There is also UK government recognition that supported housing costs will not fall into the Universal Credit regime and in the interim these continue to be met from Housing Benefits with a clear understanding that such specialised housing does incur additional cost which require to be reflected in rents.

Of more impact will be the managed migration of existing tenants from housing benefit to the Universal Credit system, although as noted above this will predominantly only impact on unsupported tenants. Managed migration has been delayed because of the pandemic but will feature and at that time there will be a need for Key to be proactive and responsive to ensure our tenants are not negatively affected. Accordingly, our access to specific welfare benefits advice will require to be considered

9. An operational priority for the previous Plan had been the in-house development of a replacement **IT system** which was achieved for our core property/tenant data and, crucially, for our rent accounting processes. During the period of this Plan the intention is to expand this system to provide additional functionality for our property/asset management systems. This represents a significant objective and risk control mechanism over this period.
10. In a wider context the move towards **digital working** is likely to be an emerging trend over the period of the Plan. This will impact on the nature of the housing services we provide (use of technology in the home), the ways in which our workforce undertake their duties (possibly less presence in offices and the development of systems which can be accessed remotely), and the way we communicate with tenants.

11. A revised set of **performance indicators** and associated management framework was implemented during the lifespan of the previous Plan and these will continue to be refined under the period of this Plan as an internal management tool and in reporting performance to the Board and our tenants
12. A new **complaints handling procedure** which is compliant with the requirements of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is now embedded, and in 2019 we developed a series of measures to meet our obligations under the **Freedom of Information** requirements introduced to our landlord activities.
13. Finally, we will continue to seek creative ways to **expand the provision** of our housing. This is of particular importance to the organisation as our growth as a provider of support is often dependent on our ability to access new housing (and this has been made explicit by several local authorities). Currently it would be very difficult to pursue a conventional housing development routeway, given that a condition of Key's agreement over its historic pension deficit requires the consent of the pension provider for any lending and this is considered to risk the trigger of a request for security over our housing stock. On this basis our approach has been to work with our housing providers and extend our access to leased housing and as at October 2020 we have over 80 properties under lease arrangements.