

REPORT TO:	COUNCIL	AGENDA ITEM: 12
DATE OF MEETING:	11 APRIL 2024	CATEGORY: RECOMMENDED
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	OPEN:
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (SERVICE DELIVERY)	DOC:
SUBJECT:	HOUSING CONSUMER STANDARDS	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Regulator for Social Housing is advised of the outcome of the Council's self-assessment against the Housing Consumer Standards.
- 1.2 That the Council makes a self-referral for non-compliance with the Housing Consumer Standards, along with the request of a 12-month extension to meet the required standards.
- 1.3 That Council approve the formation, and appointment of Member representatives, to a Housing Services Working Group and approve the Terms of Reference of that Group (Appendix 1).
- 1.4 That the Performance Improvement Plan agreed by the Housing Services Working Group is reported to the Housing and Community Services Committee, with regular updates on progression of the Plan.

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 To inform Members of the outcome of the Housing Service Review of the new Housing Consumer Standards for social housing effective from the 1 April 2024 and the Council's self-referral to the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH).
- 2.2 To establish a working group to oversee the delivery of a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) to meet the consumer standards, and for Members to appoint representatives to the Housing Services Working Group (HSWG).

3.0 Executive Summary

- 3.1 This report outlines the outcome of the self-assessment used to demonstrate compliance with all the new Consumer Standards for Social Housing effective from 1 April 2024. The report recommends that a self-referral be made to the RSH along with a request for a 12-month extension for the Housing Service to meet the new standards.

3.2 The report also seeks agreement to establish a Housing Services Working Group to agree and oversee a Performance Improvement Plan for the Housing Service to meet all the new consumer standards.

4.0 Detail

4.1 The Social Housing White Paper, 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents' was published in November 2020, and after consultation was followed by the Social Housing (Regulations) Act 2023, being agreed. The new framework (the Act) established for social housing includes:

- New building safety regime,
- Strengthened role for the Regulator on safety,
- Increase powers for the Housing Ombudsman,
- New standards on professionalism, and
- The introduction of tenant satisfaction measures requiring the collection and provision of information to support the effective scrutiny by tenants of their landlord's performance in managing their homes and neighbourhoods.

4.2 A fundamental part of the new regulatory framework is a revised set of Consumer Standards setting out the requirements that registered providers such as the Housing Service must meet. The four areas of the standard cover the following:

- The Safety and Quality Homes Standard,
- The Transparency, Influence, and Accountability Standard,
- The Neighbourhood and Community Standard,
- The Tenancy Standard.

4.3 The areas covered by the new standards include:

- Quality of the Stock,
- Decency,
- Health & Safety,
- Tenant Engagement,
- Repairs, Maintenance and Planned Improvements,
- Damp, Mould and Condensation,
- Taking the Lead,
- Transparency, Influence and Accountability,
- Neighbourhood and Community, and
- Tenancy Standards, Allocations and Lettings.

Each of these areas has been used by the Housing Service to undertake a self-assessment against the new standards to identify any gaps and/or issues that need to be addressed.

4.4 The self-assessment demonstrates the Housing Service have not be able to meet all the requirements of the new Consumer Standards by their effective date of 1 April 2024. This predominantly arises from not having up to date stock condition surveys, making it difficult to determine the current condition and safety of the stock on a property-by-property basis. In addition, tenant engagement activities have decreased, and tenants are not as involved in the Council's landlord responsibilities, and associated management of its council housing.

- 4.5 The RSH require registered providers to communicate in a timely manner with them on all material issues that relate to non-compliance with the Housing Consumer Standards. Being open and transparent with the RSH is an essential part of a registered provider meeting their co-regulatory responsibilities. As a result, it is recommended that the Council approaches the RSH to confirm the position and make a self-referral for non-compliance with the required standards.
- 4.6 It is imperative the Housing Service can demonstrate the standards will be achieved within the timescales agreed with the Regulator for Social Housing and incorporated into the PIP. Once finalised, the PIP will be reported to the Housing and Community Services Committee on 23 April 2024.
- 4.7 It is recommended that a Housing Services Working Group be set up to agree and oversee the delivery of the Performance Improvement Plan. Member representation on the Group will be in line with the Council's political proportionality and nominations are sought from 3 Members of the Labour Group and 2 Members of the Conservative Group. The Group will be chaired by Chair of the Housing and Community Services Committee. Officers of the HSWG will include the Chief Executive, Strategic Director (Service Delivery), Head of Housing, the Council's Health and Safety Officer, other officers as required by expertise, as well as tenant representatives.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however actions required to meet compliance are likely to result in additional financial pressures for the Housing Revenue Account.
- 5.2 Financial assessment will be undertaken as part of the Performance Improvement Plan, which will be reported to the Housing and Community Services Committee. Should additional financial pressures not be manageable within the existing in-year budget as approved by Council on 28 February 2024, requests will be managed through the Finance and Management Committee and Council as necessary and in line with the Council's Constitution.

6.0 Corporate Implications

Employment Implications

There are no direct employment implications contained within this report.

Legal Implications

The Council has a duty to comply with the Consumer Standards for Social Housing. Non-compliance may result in the Council being found in breach of the Standards and served with a Regulatory Notice.

Corporate Plan Implications

The report has a direct impact on the Council's Corporate Plan in relation to providing access to affordable housing.

Risk Impact

This report directly impacts the risk SD3 in the Service Delivery Risk Register - safety standards failure to comply with basic safety standards in flats/blocks with communal areas.

7.0 Community Impact

Consultation

In order to meet the requirements of the Council as a landlord of social housing, the Housing Services Working Group will consult with tenants on the need, scope, content and time scales for the delivery of a Performance Improvement Plan.

Equality and Diversity Impact

The Housing Regulator has completed its own Equality Impact Assessment as part of the consultation process. That assessment concluded that “We have rigorously considered equality considerations and relevant evidence throughout the development of the proposed consumer standards. Where we have identified aspects of the current standards that might benefit from being strengthened or amended to address any potential negative equality impact, or where we have identified an opportunity to create a positive equality impact through our proposed standards, we have taken the opportunity to do so. Because of this approach, we have not identified any potential negative equality impact at this point.”

The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard sets expectations for the Council in providing choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of tenants.

Social Value Impact

The provision of accessible, safe housing offers a social value benefit to the community.

Environmental Sustainability

There are no direct environmental sustainability impacts within this report.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 Completion of the self-assessment has established that the Housing Service will not be able to meet all the requirements of the new Social Housing Consumer Standards effective from 1 April 2024.
- 8.2 The RSH requires registered providers to communicate in a timely manner with them on all material issues that relate to non-compliance, therefore the Council need to approach the RSH to make a self-referral for non-compliance seeking an extension of time to achieve compliance with the Housing Consumer Standards.
- 8.3 Compliance with the RSH Consumer Standards is a priority and a Performance Improvement Plan needs to be produced and delivery overseen by a Housing Service Working Group.

9.0 Background Papers

Report to Housing and Community Services Committee on 28th January 2021 –
Housing White Paper

Housing and Community Services Committee, 16th November 2023 – Regulator of
Social Housing – Proposed Consumer Standards