



EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW SCRUTINY: 23 February 2023

LANDLORD SERVICES: 1 March 2023

CABINET: 7 March 2023

Report of: Corporate Director of Transformation, Housing and Resources

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor N Pryce-Roberts

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SUBJECT : Housing Regulator Consumer standards - Key themes and approach

Wards Affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide a progress report on the action taken so far to review WLBC services to ensure that the Council continues to operate within the Housing Regulators Consumer standards.

1.2 For Cabinet to endorse key themes and approach

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND LANDLORD SERVICES CABINET WORKING GROUP COMMITTEE

2.1 That the Committee consider the report and note the updates and that the agreed comments of Executive Overview and Scrutiny Committee be passed to Cabinet for their consideration

2.2 That the Committee consider the report and note the updates and that the agreed comments of Landlord Services Cabinet Working Group Committee be passed to Cabinet for their consideration

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

3.1 That Cabinet endorse the current position as it relates to Housing Regulation and the Consumer standards.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 On 17th November 2020 the Government announced the social housing white paper. The paper proposed changes to the Consumer Regulation of Social Housing to strengthen the accountability of Landlords for the provision of safe homes, quality services and treating residents with respect.
- 4.2 Once the legislation is passed (expected in the coming months) this will change the purpose and legal powers of the Regulator for Social Housing. Some of the proposals will also be taken forward by the Housing Ombudsman and the Building Safety Regulator.
- 4.3 To be prepared for the changes of the Regulators remit, there is a requirement that those responsible for social housing look at how they can continue to identify and address how they improve services and engagement with tenants. The key areas of focus are customer feedback, stock investment, building safety, energy efficiency improvements, alongside delivering homes to meet housing needs of the borough.
- 4.3 Once enacted the Regulators extended powers will require them to regulate in a proactive rather than reactive way. For Local Authority housing providers, the regulation of Governance or Financial viability remains outside scope. However, whilst inspections of local authority landlords will focus on consumer issues, the inspections will have the same focus on service outcomes and accountability as for all housing providers. In line with all registered providers any breaches may result in the issue of a regulatory notice of findings, enforcement of Improvement plans, fines and a referral to Chief Officers and the Lead Members.
- 4.4 The outcomes and key objectives that providers will be measured against are:
- ✚ Social housing is well managed
 - ✚ Tenants' complaints are dealt with efficiently and effectively.
 - ✚ Tenants are treated with fairness and respect, and diverse needs are taken into account.
 - ✚ Social housing stock meets the decent homes standard.
 - ✚ Landlords ensure social housing meets health and safety requirements and consider safety in the management of housing.
 - ✚ Landlords comply with tenancy law and regulations and avoid unnecessary evictions.
 - ✚ Tenants have access to information to hold their landlords to account.
 - ✚ Tenants have opportunities to influence the decisions and priorities of their landlords with respect to their housing.
 - ✚ Landlords take account of the views of tenants in the management of their homes.
 - ✚ Landlords work with other agencies to contribute to the safety and well-being of the areas in which the homes they are responsible for are situated.

- 4.5 The Regulator has already issued guidance on standards and definitions that will be used to measure tenants' satisfaction called Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM). The new measures come into effect in April 2023 landlords will need to start to collect this data and findings will be provided to the Regulator in Summer 2023. The standard questions and data measures are to be carried out annually and we will be required to make these available and published from Summer 2024.
- 4.6 There are 12 tenant perception questions and 10 measures provided from Landlord management information. (**see appendix A**) To ensure that we understand customers perception and in preparation for the formal submission to the regulator the TSM survey has been prepared and will take place in February 2023.
- 4.7 In January 2023 the Regulator announced a full implementation plan in preparation for April 2024, when it is expected that the new consumer regulation standards will be implemented

5.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 5.1 The broad themes that the Regulator expects to set standards for are
- Safety
 - Quality
 - Transparency
 - Engagement and accountability
 - Neighbourhood
 - Tenancy
- 5.2 The Regulator intends to consult in summer 2023 on the standards and themes taking account of an additional power which has been included in the bill for competency and conduct of those delivering housing services.
- 5.3 In preparation for the new standards Officers have:
- ✓ Reviewed and implemented a new customer feedback policy which meets the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code and requirements of the Regulator.
 - ✓ Prepared the Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey which will go out to a sample of tenants on the 10 February 2023 for 6 weeks. Interim feedback will be available early April and final report mid- April
 - ✓ Set up a specific damp and mould working group
 - ✓ Carried out a stock condition survey covering 4839 our of properties so far.
 - ✓ On track to review and update a comprehensive suite of policies
 - ✓ Reviewed housing services against the existing 4 consumer standards themes and the 2021/22 Consumer Regulation review and identified the main service areas of focus for service improvement activity in 2023/24
 - ✓ Worked in collaboration across services with Customer Engagement Customer Services, Business Transformation & Change, Wellbeing & Place to review services

- ✓ Worked with HR to develop a training matrix and plan for competency and skills training for those in Housing in addition to the Councils core behaviour standards

5.5 In addition to themes that have been identified customer insight from the tenant satisfaction measures will be used to recognise what we do well and areas for improvement. This will form the basis of the priorities of work to be undertaken to ensure that we are meeting the requirements of the consumer regulatory standards.

6 KEY THEMES

6.1 The review of current services against the Consumer standards has identified the main themes of work to be focused on in preparation for the changes:

- ❖ Have accurate and reliable data on stock, standards in our homes and assurance on compliance
- ❖ Customer profiling and insight linked to wider health and wellbeing, managing feedback and refresh of service standards
- ❖ Further develop tenancy support for vulnerable tenants
- ❖ Develop a wider range of tenant engagement options and access for tenants
- ❖ Review policy's and process across the service

7 NEXT STEPS

7.1 The Regulator will start pilot inspections over the coming months with 8 organisations Bernicia Homes, Brunelcare, Peaks & Plains Housing Trust, The Guinness Partnership, Torus, and Eastbourne, Folkestone & Hythe councils and use this to inform the implementation plans. It is expected that the main methods for inspection will be :

- ✓ Consumer inspection - planned approach or in response to information that a standard has not been met.
- ✓ Reactive engagement - if there is a requirement to follow up on a breach of standards raised by the Housing Ombudsman
- ✓ Desk top reviews – using performance data from the TSM and a range of other sources
- ✓ Data returns

7.2 Officers will work to ensure services meet requirements of emerging guidance and will continue to review updates from the Regulator, and the outcomes of the pilot areas

8.0 STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

8.1 There is a legislative requirement to comply with the standards as set out by the Housing Regulator. These powers will be strengthened when the Social Housing White paper is enacted in parliament this year

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no sustainability issues

9.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There will be a requirement to conduct a one- off data profiling exercise when the housing management systems are upgraded so that there is a full profile of all customers. This will be financed through existing budgets

10.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

10.1 Failure to comply with the regulations and consumer standards has a risk of causing serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants and the Regulator issuing a Regulatory Notice to Comply, or a performance improvement plan. Going forward the Regulator will have the cap on fines removed and the role will be strengthened as they will be able to act without applying the serious detriment test.

10.2 The risks have been identified in the risk register and current work and plans that are in place will mitigate against risks of non- compliance

11.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

11.1 By meeting the consumer standards we will ensure that as a landlord, we are providing quality accommodation that is safe and well managed in neighbourhoods that are well managed and that our customers have a voice in the services that are delivered.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is a direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and / or stakeholders. Therefore, an Equality Impact Assessment is required. A formal Equality Impact Assessment is attached as an Appendix B to this report.

Appendices

Appendix A – TSM questions

Appendix B - Equality Impact Assessment