



Landlord Services Committee (Working group)
19th June 2024

Report of: Director of Housing & Environment

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor N Pryce-Roberts

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SUBJECT : Housing Consumer Standards - Updates

Wards Affected: Borough wide.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on actions and current activity that ensures WLBC housing services operate within the Housing Regulators Consumer standards.
- 1.2 For members to note the current position and areas of focus.
- 1.3 For members to note the results of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures 2023/24 and the proposed areas of focus

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS TO LANDLORD SERVICES COMMITTEE (WORKING GROUP)

- 2.1 That the updates are noted and that the report is circulated via member's update for information.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On July 20th, 2023 the Social Housing (Regulation) Act received royal assent. This strengthened the role of the Housing Regulator for Social Housing and the accountability of Landlords for the provision of safe homes, quality services and treating residents with respect.
- 3.2 The four revised consumer standards of
 - Safety & Quality,
 - Neighbourhood & Community standards,
 - Tenancy

- Transparency Influence and Accountability

- 3.3 Each standard has a required outcome and specific expectations that will be used to measure how a landlord meets the standards. This is supported by a code of guidance that landlords must have due regard to.
- 3.4 To ensure we are responding and focusing on the requirements we have worked in collaboration organisational wide to develop a 3-year transformation plan to support and deliver key projects to support Landlord functions. This has included a review of how property services is delivered, implementation of a property compliance software, a stock condition survey of our homes, and refresh of the tenant engagement framework.
- 3.5 The Housing Regulators extended power sees the introduction of a four-year program of proactive regulation inspection for all Housing providers from 1st April 2024. Whilst there is no published timetable for inspection organisations are given 6 weeks' notice to submit evidence of meeting the standards
- 3.6 Since the last update we have continued to develop and improve Housing Service delivery and focused activity on:
 - ✓ Establishing and embedding a Tenant Voice Team and refreshing our Tenant Involvement Framework.
 - ✓ Having roadshows across the borough and recruiting 53 tenants to be part of our Tenant Voice
 - ✓ A calendar of drop in events, a tenant training plan and mystery shop training so that involvement is informed and provides a robust challenge and outcomes.
 - ✓ Engaging a research company to contact every tenant to improve our understanding of household data, needs and vulnerabilities which supports our Getting to Know you better project.
 - ✓ Using surveyors to access the remaining 14% of homes that require a stock condition survey.
 - ✓ Reviewing and improving our process to gain access to carry out compliance checks.
 - ✓ Reviewing our ASB policy and process and developing a robust improvement plan
 - ✓ Embedding the work of the damp and mould team recruiting additional resources and prioritising activity taking account of the requirements of Awaabs' law
 - ✓ Working to improve services with partners to improve communications and ways of delivering the repairs service to customers.
 - ✓ Working to establish a property compliance service to work independent of day-to-day repairs services
 - ✓ Reviewing stock condition data and the asset management data and developing a quality review process for future in-house stock condition inspections
 - ✓ Implementing a compliance software system to provide a robust one system approach for the management of all housing compliance activity and reporting.

- ✓ Conducting a full review of customer processes in our Housing management system QL and carrying out an upgrade and refresh training. This work provides greater functionality, stability to the system, and supports our getting to know you better, tenant data project.
- ✓ Carrying out a Tenant Satisfaction Measures Survey (appendix A) and reviewing the data and key themes to support the improvement plans to increase overall satisfaction levels.
- ✓ Implementing transactional customer surveys for ASB, New Tenants and Financial Inclusion.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The Regulatory and Quality team have established a program of self-assessments and reviews to ensure that services continue to meet the standards expected.
- 4.2 During February and March 2024 we were supported by an independent company to review our self-assessment of Housing services against the standards. As part of this work a review of the customer journey for repairs, anti-social behaviour and complaints was also carried out. The outcomes of these are due to be reported to us in early June and will inform our ongoing improvement plans.

5.0 KEY THEMES – Consumer Standards

- 5.1 The review has supported the understanding of our strengths and identified future areas for focus.

Strengths:

- ❖ Strong focus on improvement plans and clear evidence of changes in service delivery by a senior team focused on preparing for inspection.
- ❖ Strong complaints process and positive culture of using complaints to learn.
- ❖ Strong approach to tenancy sustainment
- ❖ Good range of activities to support at commencement of tenancy.
- ❖ 86% stock condition completed with plans in place to target the remainder.
- ❖ Good partnership working and a positive approach to Anti-Social Behaviour through reviews and proposed changes.
- ❖ Reviewed and simplified tenancy agreements and opportunities for exchange

Areas for focus:

- ❖ **Data** – review consistency and maintain accurate and reliable data on stock, standards in our homes, compliance, and our tenant's data.

- ❖ **Assurance** – supplement existing reporting, for housing assurance across the Council framework and embed use of Landlord Services to establish testing and monitoring of Housing. Review program of internal and specialist audits
- ❖ **Diverse Needs** - Enhance current reporting and systems to provide a better understanding of diverse needs of the customer linked to service delivery.
- ❖ **Tenant Engagement** - Embed the refreshed tenant involvement framework and strengthen role and challenge from customers and members on service delivery.
- ❖ **Complaints** – Develop lessons learnt and measure impact including tenant profile and understanding the silence.

5.2 Actions we are taking :

- ✓ Completing implementation of software systems to support data accuracy for stock condition and health and safety compliance.
- ✓ Conducting a survey of all tenants to understand household data and vulnerabilities and an on- going plan to have systems to support keeping this regularly updated.
- ✓ Improving our reporting and assurance by planning in a timetable of internal and external audits
- ✓ Providing more detailed performance information for Landlord services to review and developing an assurance framework for Housing performance.
- ✓ Reviewing the data, we have from the Tenant Satisfaction measures to understand and focus on key areas of improvement and using differential of satisfaction by age, and vulnerability to targeting our tenant engagement.
- ✓ Reviewing and implementing a refreshed customer feedback policy which meets the Housing Ombudsman's complaint handling code.
- ✓ Continuing to promote and target ways to be involved, building up a program of tenant training, events, and activities.

6.0 TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES – Consumer Standards

- 6.1 In addition to a self - assessment the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) have been carried out. The survey forms one of the regulatory requirements of Housing Consumer Standards and the results are to be submitted to the regulator by the 30th June 2024.
- 6.2 The Tenant Satisfaction Measures are 10 prescribed questions that all social housing providers must use. They measure customers perception of services and provide valuable insight to recognise what we do well and areas for improvement. There is a requirement for Landlords to publish the results.
- 6.3 The survey was conducted in November 2023 until early January 2024. Key findings were reported February 2024 (Appendix A). We are using benchmarking with other Landlords to support the setting of future targets.

7.0 KEY FINDINGS – Tenant Satisfaction Measures

7.1 Our sample survey was carried out by a specialist research company using various methods - post, digital and telephone, and in line with the prescribed standards. We had 720 responses with confidence level of +3.7% we identified that :

- ❖ 73% of tenants thought we treat tenants fairly and with respect.
- ❖ 68% of tenants thought we provide a home that is safe.
- ❖ 65% were overall satisfied with the services provided.
- ❖ Males were more likely to be satisfied with the safety of their home.
- ❖ Those aged 65 plus are most satisfied with the service.
- ❖ Those living in our homes more than 2 years were more satisfied with the service.

7.2 We have analysed the results which have provided us with the insight we need to focus activity on:

- ❖ Improving communications on repairs and timescales
- ❖ Listening to views and acting on them
- ❖ Keeping tenants informed

7.3 Actions we are taking:

- ✓ Working on systems to improve communications about repair timescales and changes to repair appointments.
- ✓ Implementing the actions in our partnership plans with our repair's contractor
- ✓ Developing a calendar of events/campaigns and communications to keep tenants informed of the work we are doing and how we are performing.
- ✓ Having community engagement events and community roadshows and seeking out feedback on services
- ✓ Providing a You Said We Did update on the website, promoting the annual report and developing a newsletter.
- ✓ Developing a program of regular updates and campaigns on the investment work and compliance program and involvement activity

8.0 NEXT STEPS

8.1 We will continue to review our self- assessment and implement the actions in our Consumer standards action plan, the Housing Transformation Plan and the service operational action plans to ensure focused activity on the key themes identified from our self -assessment and the tenant satisfaction measures.

9.0 STATUTORY REQUIREMENT

9.1 There is a legislative requirement to comply with the standards as set out by the Housing Regulator.

10.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no sustainability issues

11.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Financial requirements can be met within existing budget

12.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

12.1 Failure to comply with the regulations and consumer standards has a risk of causing serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants and the reputation of the Council. The Regulator rating on inspection C1 – C4 can be issued and dependant on rating the Regulator can issue a Regulatory Notice to Comply, or a performance improvement plan, unlimited fines.

12.2 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.

13.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

13.1 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