

# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

## HOUSING COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2024

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Preparations for changes to the regulation of social housing</b>			
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To update on the preparations that are underway at Stroud District Council in response to the imminent regulatory changes resulting from the Social Housing Regulation Act.			
<b>Decision(s)</b>	<b>The Committee RESOLVES to note the report on preparations for changes to the regulation of social housing.</b>			
<b>Consultation and Feedback</b>	A programme of awareness raising about the changes to the regulation of social housing has to date included the Alliance Leadership Team, the Strategic Leadership Team, the Leadership and Management Team and Council officers.			
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<b>Options</b>	None			
<b>Background Papers</b>	None			
<b>Appendices</b>	None			
<b>Implications (further details at the end of the report)</b>	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	No	No	No	No

### 1. INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Regulator of Social Housing is a non-departmental public body that oversees registered providers of social housing. All social housing landlords must comply with a set of regulatory standards that contain specific expectations and outcomes that must be achieved.
- 1.2 The Social Housing Regulation Act, July 2023, has updated the regulatory consumer standards for all social housing landlords. The Regulator of Social Housing has published the detail of the revised consumer standards which contain specific expectations and outcomes that must be achieved.
- 1.3 The Safety and Quality Standard requires landlords to provide safe and good quality homes and landlord services to tenants.
- 1.4 The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account.
- 1.5 The Neighbourhood and Community Standard requires landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.
- 1.6 The Tenancy Standard sets requirements for the fair allocation and letting of homes and for how those tenancies are managed and ended by landlords.

## **2. ENFORCEMENT OF THE REGULATORY STANDARDS**

- 2.1 Compliance with the standards is compulsory for all social housing landlords and the Social Housing Regulation Act grants the Regulator new enforcement powers. Consumer standards will now be proactively regulated through regular performance monitoring and a new inspection regime. These new enforcement powers come into effect in April 2024.
- 2.2 Annual performance data, or Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs), for all social housing landlords will be published on the Regulator's website and made available for public scrutiny. Poor performance will have a reputational impact. Continued poor performance, will trigger increased scrutiny from the Regulator.
- 2.3 If non-compliance at a housing provider is identified, or the risk of non-compliance is identified, the Regulator has the power to request, approve, monitor, and publish Performance Improvement Plans for the housing provider.
- 2.4 Where a housing provider is continually non-compliant, the Regulator has the power to hold an inquiry, including holding an extraordinary audit of the provider's accounts in relation to social housing. They also have powers to enter properties without a warrant to carry out surveys and undertake remedial work to properties. They will have the power to issue enforcement notices and to issue unlimited fines to providers.

## **3. PREPARATIONS: SELF-ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE CONSUMER STANDARDS**

- 3.1 A self-assessment against the four new consumer standards has been completed, with a focus on how the Council can evidence its compliance with the consumer standards. The self-assessment takes the specific details of the new consumer standards and maps the Council's evidence base against this to provide a demonstrable assurance of compliance with the standards. Evidence considered includes documentation, data, and governance/controls. A rating has then been applied to each area, based on the effectiveness of the Council's current evidence base.
- 3.2 The self-assessment has been used to identify specific actions to take to ensure evidenced compliance with the standards. These have been incorporated into an Action Plan and the self-assessment has clearly identified some immediate priority areas for further work. These are being taken forward through a set of priority projects as below.
- 3.3 Tenant profiling: Improving the Council's knowledge and insight about the people living in council-owned dwellings, their diverse needs and vulnerabilities.
- 3.4 Tenant communication: Updating and reshaping the Council's tenant webpages to ensure they are accurate, high-quality and meet regulatory requirements.
- 3.5 Tenant scrutiny: Developing a broader model for effective tenant scrutiny through the provision of different opportunities for tenant involvement. Improved evidencing of the impact that tenant input has on service delivery.
- 3.6 Compliance assurance: Developing an effective governance and assurance framework for managing and monitoring compliance with statutory landlord health and safety obligations.
- 3.7 Repairs service and stock condition: Ensuring comprehensive and effective strategies, policies and performance monitoring are in place which reflect the priorities and regulatory responsibilities of the Council's repairs, maintenance, and asset management services.
- 3.8 Data and Tenant Satisfaction Measures: Carrying out data-accuracy audits, developing a data assurance framework, and managing the Council's first submission of tenant satisfaction data to the Regulator of Social Housing.

## **4. PREPARATIONS: GOVERNANCE AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

- 4.1 It is clear that the new regulation and regulatory process will require strong governance and understanding by elected members, in practice functioning as a management board. Members will be required to have, and be able to demonstrate they have, clear sight of the operation of the housing service.
- 4.2 In Stroud, this management responsibility will sit with Housing Committee and the Chair of this Committee, albeit ultimately with Council.
- 4.3 To enable this level of responsibility and governance, the presentation of council housing performance information will need to be clear, and members responsible for overseeing the service will be required to have a firm grip of the issues and measures to address any weakness/areas of improvement.
- 4.4 The current Housing Committee performance framework covers the principal areas of interest to the regulator but is not detailed or thorough enough to enable the required understanding and control expected by the new regulatory approach.
- 4.5 A Housing Improvement Group (Officer), chaired by the Strategic Director, has been established to monitor priority projects and service performance across the regulatory standards, including the project management of regulatory preparations. This group will develop a strong governance and performance framework for housing going forward. This will be delivered through:
  - 4.5.1 Ensuring a complete and up-to-date suite of housing strategies and policies, covering all aspects of the consumer standards.
  - 4.5.2 Putting in place an effective performance monitoring framework, to monitor service delivery against our strategy/ policies and the consumer standards.
  - 4.5.3 Establishing a strong governance framework of member and tenant involvement to scrutinise performance and monitor service delivery.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 The changes to the Social Housing Regulator will come into force in April 2024. Enforcement of the standards will include annual data returns and inspections every four years.
- 5.2 A self-assessment against the new consumer standards has been completed and this has identified immediate priority areas of further work needed to evidence compliance with the standards. These packages of work will be taken forward alongside other actions identified through the self-assessment.

## **6. IMPLICATIONS**

### **6.1 Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report, however the scope of the changes to the regulatory standards will continue to be monitored to assess any future financial impact that may arise.

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## 6.2 **Legal Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.

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## 6.3 **Equality Implications**

There are not any specific changes to service delivery proposed within this decision.

## 6.4 **Environmental Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.