

REPORT TITLE: CONSUMER STANDARDS UPDATE

6 JULY 2026

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: Cllr Mark Reach, Good Homes for All

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WARD(S): ALL

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet Committee Housing on the assessment of the Landlord Services against the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) Consumer Standards and improvement plans underway to raise the service from its current C3 judgement, received from the RSH in April 2025, following the decision to self-refer.

To support this work, Housing Quality Network (HQN) were commissioned by the council to undertake a mock inspection of the Landlord Service in May 2026. HQN's feedback has informed service improvement plans for four of the consumer standards which are:

- Transparency, Influence and Accountability
- Safety and Quality
- Neighbourhoods and Community
- Tenancy

Service improvements received via the mock inspection process, will inform improvement plans to ensure the landlord service is inspection ready and focussed on achieving a C1 Judgement through that process.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet Committee Housing is asked to:

1. Note that HQN have been commissioned to assess the Landlord Service against the Consumer Standards.
2. Agree the Consumer Standards service improvement plan/s at Appendix A.

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL PLAN OUTCOME

1.1 Greener Faster

Compliance with the RSH consumer standards is not only a regulatory obligation but also a delivery mechanism for the council's greener faster ambition by enabling better asset management, reduced waste, sustainable communities and informed behaviours as well as stronger performance management, prevention focussed services, skilled staff and improved processes.

1.2 Thriving Places

The council's ambition of creating thriving places is realised through safe and well-maintained homes which contribute positively towards the environment within neighbourhoods which are clean, safe and socially connected whilst communities are engaged, empowered and able to influence their surroundings.

1.3 Healthy Communities

Alignment to the healthy communities ambition is realised as homes are safe and enable healthy living through stable housing preventing both crises and poor health outcomes; also, residents are empowered, informed and supported within their communities which are safe, inclusive and socially connected.

1.4 Good Homes for All

Enabling the delivery of good homes for all is fundamental to regulatory compliance through ensuring homes are maintained in accordance with safety and quality standards as well as ensuring homes are let through a fair and transparent allocations process.

1.5 Efficient and Effective

Compliance with the consumer standards ensures efficient and effective service delivery is achieved as services are proactive rather than reactive, with decisions being data driven so that resources can be targeted where they have the greatest impact and service demand is reduced through both prevention and sustainment.

1.6 Listening and Learning

[Through listening and learning the council are constantly evolving services based on what customers and communities are telling us and what performance data shows. Feedback is actively sought, decisions are informed by data, insight and lived experience, services are continuously reviewed and

improved and the service is transparent, accountable and responsive to its customers.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 HQN Mock inspection was commissioned at a cost of £17,700 and enabled independent subject matter experts to fully scrutinise the council's Landlord Service offer and make recommendations for improvements; alongside our SHINES (Safe Homes, Inclusive Neighbourhoods and Environmentally Sustainable) service purpose, HQN's recommendations will help drive our ambitions to ultimately achieve a C1 rating via the RSH inspection regime.
- 2.2 Having reviewed the mock inspection report and recommendations, these are being costed and budget implications reviewed so that any actions can either be contained within existing resources or opportunities for savings identified elsewhere to help deliver the required improvements.

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Through the self-referral process last year, the service has been working closely with the RSH to provide assurance about the improvement work that is underway whilst ensuring that customers, officers and elected members are kept informed of progress. This has been a positive experience, and the council recognises the value of working closely with the RSH as the service continues its improvement journey, focusing on preparing for inspection and having the ambition to improve our C3 rating to C1.
- 3.2 To further support the council's Landlord Service improvement journey, HQN were procured to undertake a 'mock inspection' of the service and to deliver their recommendations.
- 3.3 Any procurement activity associated with delivering the improvement plan recommendations from the HQN 'mock inspection' will be carried out with the support of the Procurement Team and in accordance with Contract Procedure Rules and requirements of national procurement legislation.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Landlord Service was restructured in October 2025, within existing budgets, in consideration of the changing legislative and regulatory landscape so that key teams have specific responsibility to ensure compliance with the consumer standards.
- 4.2 This has enabled named roles to be accountable and responsible for a specific standard and associated service improvements required in respect of each.

- 4.3 Aligning consumer standard responsibilities in this way, has enabled the creation of an operational Consumer Standard group which meets regularly to oversee progress against each standard, enables gap analysis and prioritisation of service improvements. The progress of this group is then reported directly to the Strategic Consumer Group comprising of members of the Housing Leadership Board to help address any barriers or blockers to progress.
- 4.4 Through working with HQN, the mock inspection is an opportunity for the service to demonstrate not only service improvements, but to be open and honest about where the service can and should be better so that the service is accountable to and transparent with our customers about our continuous improvement journey.
- 4.5 This work is reinforced by the embedding of SHINES (Safe Homes, Inclusive Neighbourhoods and Environmentally Sustainable) as the Landlord Service purpose to which all colleagues are aligned and updated via regular quarterly all Housing service meetings, led by the Strategic Director and Corporate Head of Housing, to drive improvements in both service delivery and the customer journey.

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Landlord Service has obligations to manage and maintain its HRA assets through responsive repairs, compliance with the 'Big 6' health and safety servicing regimes of asbestos, electrical safety, fire safety, gas safety, lifts/ LOLER, water(legionella) as well through cyclical/ planned works to ensure both statutory and regulatory compliance.
- 5.2 The HQN mock inspection has reviewed progress against the existing Safety and Quality improvement plan and identified further opportunities for the Landlord Service to improve against this and the remaining four consumer standards.

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 TACT Board have been informed throughout the regulatory self-referral journey and updated on progress against the Safety and Quality service improvement plan. The January 2026 TACT meeting was also observed by the RSH and positive feedback was received about the engagement of the group in relation to co-regulation and service scrutiny; a suggestion was also made about improvement opportunities to ensure the further embedding of 'tenant voice' via TACT Board.
- 6.2 TACT Board on 12th May 2026 was observed by HQN as part of their mock inspection and their observations about the effectiveness of the board, governance arrangements and opportunities to strengthen transparency, influence and accountability to further embed co-regulation and tenant scrutiny are welcomed and feature in the improvement plan specific to this standard.

- 6.3 The work of the Board is also informed by the outcomes achieved from both topic specific customer scrutiny groups as well as the quarterly Housing Improvement Workshops which focus on the Consumer Standards and our customers lived experience of the Landlord Service. Thus, working together, the service can ensure robust customer engagement and involvement to improve both the service offer, the customer experience and drive improvements in Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).
- 6.4 As referenced at 4.3. colleagues are kept informed of progress on the landlord regulatory journey via the quarterly SHINES meetings, team meetings and via Teams channel updates.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 Environmental considerations link back to the services Greener Faster ambitions through enabling better asset management, reduced waste, sustainable communities and informed behaviours as well as stronger performance management and prevention focussed services.

8 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

- 8.1 Service improvements arising from the HQN mock inspection of our compliance against all of the consumer standards will be subject to Equality Impact Assessment once identified.

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 No data protection considerations.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
Financial Exposure The costs of the proposed action plan and contingency to address regulatory requirements will be additional to the Housing Revenue Account.	Costs have been built into the HRA 2026/27 budget and HRA business plan.	
Exposure to challenge Exposure to enforcement action by either the RSH or Housing Ombudsman Service as they work collaboratively.	Following our self-referral and C3 judgement, engagement with the RSH has gone well, with assurance and progress evident from our current service improvement	Inspection by the RSH, date yet to be confirmed, is the opportunity for the Landlord Service to improve on its C3 rating with the stated ambition

	plans, whilst regulator meetings have moved from monthly to bi-monthly.	that C1 is the outcome we are seeking.
Innovation Service innovation has not progressed as it could have as full exploitation of systems and data has not been achieved.	Working with our Housing Management System (MRI) partners, we have purchased several systems to enable service improvements.	These purchases will enable joined up working across the service along with digital efficiencies to improve both the customer and colleague experience,
Reputation A C3 judgement is a rating for a failing service due to the Landlord Service not being fully compliant with either the Safety and Quality or Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standards.	The delivery of service improvement plans for these standards have been overseen by both PAC Board and the RSH with regular updates provided to Cab Comm Committee	This work will support the Landlord Service focus on achieving a C1 rating at RSH inspection.
Achievement of outcome The HQN mock inspection will support the Landlord Service ambitions to improve upon its C3 RSH rating via inspection.	The mock inspection will inform the delivery of Landlord Service improvement plans against all of the consumer standards, the delivery of which will be overseen by the operational and strategic standards groups with regular updates to TACT and Cab Comm.	The mock inspection is an independent process and enables the opportunity for robust service scrutiny so that action planning and service improvements are clearly defined which support our C1 rating inspection ambitions.
Property Effective management of all HRA assets to ensure compliance with the consumer standards and that our homes, and customers living in them, are safe and secure.	Our engagement with the RSH from January 2025 onwards has enabled robust oversight of our Safety and Quality consumer standard service improvement plan and given assurance about progress against the 'Big 6' compliance areas.	Engaging with HQN is a further opportunity to recognise and deliver service improvements against the Consumer Standards to ensure our tenants receive the best Landlord service, aligned to both SHINES and regulatory expectations.

<p>Community Support Is crucial so that our customers are assured of our commitments to them as their landlord.</p>	<p>The Tenant Partnership & Influence Plan (2025–2030) has been devised as a key step forward in strengthening how we work with tenants and leaseholders.</p>	<p>This is plan has been co-produced with tenants to ensure that our customers lived experience directly shapes our approach. The Plan responds to expectations from the Regulator of Social Housing and sets out how engagement will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely • Meaningful • Influential <p>It introduces a clear, structured approach to embedding tenant voice across all areas of the Landlord Service.</p>
<p>Timescales The timescale for mock inspection is through May with outcomes and recommendations received in June 2026. The date of RSH inspection is yet to be confirmed.</p>	<p>Colleagues/ teams are aligned to the importance of the mock inspection to help drive service improvements linking to both the SHINES service purpose and the consumer standards so that any areas of weakness can be addressed.</p>	<p>The cross-service commitment to service improvement is evident with colleagues aligned in their commitment to improve from C3 to a C1 judgement.</p>
<p>Project capacity The project is being resourced within existing resources.</p>	<p>Inviting HQN to complete the mock inspection has enabled colleagues involved in the consumer standards work to prepare for this alongside delivering operational customer facing services</p>	<p>The mock inspection is being undertaken by a social housing sector consultancy, and their recommendations will enable us to learn from and embed best practice in the delivery of landlord services whilst supporting our journey from C3 to C1.</p>
<p>Local Government Reorganisation Through mid-Hampshire LGR, we will be joining</p>	<p>The HQN mock inspection will enable the landlord service to have robust service improvement plans in</p>	<p>This approach shows transparency in service delivery and a commitment to deliver the best possible services to</p>

one other stock holding LA landlord (NFDC).	place to ensure compliance with all RSH consumer standards, thereby ensuing continuous service improvements for our customers.	our customers during a time of significant change.
Other		

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

- 11.1 In July and August 2024, a self-assessment was completed against all the RSH consumer standards and from this an improvement plan was devised specifically for the Safety and Quality consumer standard, working with Penningtons Choices, an independent social housing specialist consultancy to help inform this, which was shared with the RSH in January 2025 as part of the self-referral process.
- 11.2 In April 2025 the council were given a C3 judgement for the consumer standards As C3 is a judgement that describes a social landlord (council or housing association) has 'having serious failings in meeting consumer standards and must make significant improvements' the service has sought to learn from other council housing providers such as Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, with whom officers met within March 2026 who used HQN to guide their service improvement journeys from C3 to C1 at inspection.
- 11.3 An improvement plan was formed to ensure compliance with the Safety and Quality standard was improved. The progress was and has been shared with the RSH on a monthly basis since the council's C3 judgement
- 11.4 Internal governance and oversight of the service improvement plan is achieved via the monthly performance scorecards which are presented to Housing Leadership Board (HLB) every month, shared monthly with the Cabinet member for Good Homes and overseen via the cyclical TACT Board meetings. In addition, PAC Board receives a monthly update on progress against the improvement plan. Feedback from the March 2026 meeting with the RSH was that 'they were impressed with the speed of progress to date and that they would be recommending moving to bi-monthly meetings' which is viewed as extremely positive.
- 11.5 The self-assessments against the other consumer standards have also informed and influenced the ongoing council's Landlord Service improvement journey thus far with initiatives such as:
- Obtaining Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation in June 2025 which is the UK benchmark for how housing providers should respond to domestic abuse in the UK and includes 8 priority areas that considers an organisation's operations to deliver safe and effective

interventions in domestic abuse. (DAHA accreditation is recognised in the government's 'Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy: 2016 to 2020')

- Working with RESOLVE, the UK's leading community safety experts to review and help us develop best practice in our approach, handling and management of Anti- Social Behaviour. Their recommendations have been used to inform both service structures and policy/ procedural changes to help improve our offer and customer satisfaction with the service.
- A pilot project to help address tenancy fraud throughout the tenancy lifecycle which has seen:

Right To Buys (RTBs): denied or withdrawn since the October 2024 change in discount resulting in 16 withdrawn on request for additional info. This prevented sales of 36 council houses worth £3.3 million which have been retained within the housing stock, safeguarding the associated rental income stream and reducing pressure on the need to replace stock.

The fact that 5 of the 12 applications since the discount was reduced have been denied demonstrates the requirement for ongoing comprehensive checks on all applications

Tenancy Fraud investigations have seen 5 properties recovered without recourse to legal action, a further 4 cases have been referred for legal action and a further 12 investigations are still ongoing.

- 11.6 HQN are a social housing sector consultancy which provides high-quality advice, tailored support and training to housing associations, councils, ALMOs and other housing providers.
- 11.7 HQN undertake their mock inspections over a period of a week using differing methodologies to gather and triangulate their evidence about the Landlord Service. They request documentary evidence to support their work and whilst on site hold meetings with colleagues, involved customers, elected members, focus groups, semi structured interviews, as well as on site visits to our estates and communities.
- 11.8 Their findings will help inform the overarching service improvement plan for the Landlord Service
- 11.9 HQN visited Winchester City Council in May 2026 and 2 inspectors spent a total of 4 days with the senior leadership team, HLB, officers, tenants and visited the council's estates and council homes. They also attended a TACT meeting and an HLB meeting.
- 11.10 The HQN inspectors evaluated our current services against each consumer standard which are outlined in the purpose part of this report

11.11 HQN have provided their feedback, and the feedback was very positive. The key message from the inspection was that clear progress has been made particularly in governance, compliance and tenant engagement but further work is required to evidence full compliance with the consumer standards and that strong foundations are in place and future success depends on consistent delivery, improved data and clear accountability across services.

11.12 A summary of their main findings is outlined below against each consumer standard

- **Safety and Quality-**

- High compliance across core safety areas, but asset management, stock data and long- term investment planning remain key weaknesses requiring urgent development

- **Transparency, influence and accountability (TIA)**

- Good progress on tenant engagement, but lack of robust tenant/household data limit's ability to demonstrate fairness, target services, and evidence impact.

- **Tenancy**

- Solid policy framework and strong tenancy sustainment support, but greater evidence of outcomes and performance reporting is needed to demonstrate effectiveness.

- **Neighbourhood and Community**

- Positive improvement in satisfaction and strong community initiatives, but need to strengthen ASB reporting, partnership evidence, and outcome-based performance.

- **Main conclusions**

- The organisation is firmly on an improvement journey, with clear evidence of commitment, cultural change, and strengthening governance.
- Achieving compliance will require a more robust, structured and clearly owned improvement plan, with defined actions, timelines and measures of success.
- Data quality, insight and evidence are the critical enablers to demonstrate compliance and drive service improvement.
- Programme management and organisational clarity must be strengthened to ensure all staff understand priorities, expectations and their role in delivery.
- With focused effort on these areas, achieving a compliant regulatory position is realistic and within reach.

- A high-level presentation of their findings can be found in Appendix 1 of this report

11.13 HLB have considered these findings, and they have been incorporated into an action plan, and the stand-alone compliance action plan has now been consolidated into this plan. The draft high level action plan can be found in Appendix 2. Priority and key dates will be confirmed at July's HLB

11.14 HQN's feedback and recommendations will be discussed with the regulators at the next scheduled bi-monthly meeting

11.15 The governance of the action plan will be as follows;

- Each standard will be owned by the relevant consumer standard Champion. The Champions will meet fortnightly, feeding into the Consumer Standards strategic group. Once the Housing Assurance board has been set up, it will then feed into this board, and the Consumer Standards Strategic board will become obsolete
- The plan will be monitored monthly at HLB and PAC board may also monitor the progress of the action plan.
- Bi-monthly RSH meetings

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

12.1 The option to do nothing is not recommended. This would not provide the best possible services to our customers and could lead to regulatory intervention. Also, the inspection regime is underway, and we want to be inspection ready and focussed on achieving a C1 judgement.

12.2 Development of our own consumer standard improvement plans has been considered and rejected; through working with HQN we have commissioned advice from external independent experts, and it would not be in the council's interest or resource to develop alternative plans.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

HOUSING COMPLIANCE POLICIES (CAB3520(H)) Reported to November 2025 Committee Meeting

SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION INSPECTION REGIME (CAB3450(H)) Reported to February 2024 Committee meeting

CAB3429 (H) Tenant Satisfaction Survey (TSS) Results Cabinet Committee Housing 14th November 2023

Presentation: Social Housing White paper- the Charter for Social Housing Residents
Economy and Housing Policy Committee (formerly Business and Housing Policy
Committee) 28 February 2023

Other Background Documents:- None

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1- Consumer Standards high level draft action plan

Appendix 2- HQN feedback presentation