

Report for: Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel – 6 March

Title: Mock Housing Inspection - Update

Report authorised by: Jahedur Rahman, Operational Director of Housing Services and Building Safety

Lead Officer: Claire Linnane, Programme Manager.

Ward(s) affected: All

**Report for Key/
Non Key Decision:** For information.

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Panel note the information contained in the report.

2. Describe the issue under consideration

Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel requested an update on the mock housing inspection of relevant housing services conducted against the Regulator of Social Housing's consumer standards, carried out by specialist housing consultants, Housing Quality Network (HQN) between September and October 2024.

3. Background

- 3.1 The new regulatory regime for social landlords came into effect from 1st April 2024. This included the introduction of four new consumer standards covering key aspects of service delivery – Safety and Quality, which covers stock quality and Decent Homes, resident safety and compliance, repairs, and aids and adaptations; Transparency, Influence and Accountability, which covers resident engagement, complaints, equalities and diversity, performance and information about landlord services; Neighbourhood and Community which covers dealing with antisocial behaviour and hate crime, domestic abuse, local cooperation around shared areas etc; and Tenancy, which deals with allocations, mutual exchanges, tenancy fraud, tenancy management and sustainment.
- 3.2 The Regulator will inspect all social landlords at relatively short notice over a period of four years commencing from April 2024, using a risk-based approach to determine its programme. Where there are serious concerns about performance, the timing of inspections will be accelerated. Landlords are given a grading from C1 – C4, as set out below. The Regulator has been clear that in the first round of inspections very few C1

gradings will be awarded, reflecting the considerable scope for improvement in the sector.

Grading	Description
C1	Our judgement is that overall the landlord is delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards. The landlord has demonstrated that it identifies when issues occur and puts plans in place to remedy and minimise recurrence.
C2	Our judgement is that there are some weaknesses in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and improvement is needed.
C3	Our judgement is that there are serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and significant improvement is needed.
C4	Our judgement is that there are very serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards. The landlord must make fundamental changes so that improved outcomes are delivered.

- 3.3 To assist the Council, HQN were commissioned by Housing Services to carry out a mock inspection of the housing service's state of preparedness for inspection by the Regulator and compliance with the consumer standards.
- 3.4 A team of specialists from HQN carried out the mock inspection, with an expert in asset management, repairs and compliance leading on the Safety and Quality standard, and their Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive carrying out the estate visits and other reality checks.

4. Details

- 4.1. The mock inspection took place between September – October 2024. A range of evidence was submitted in advance including:
- Completed self-assessments against the four HQN consumer standard toolkits
 - A range of key documents e.g. strategies, policies, and plans including our Housing Improvement Plan, and performance information
 - A summary of where the service has come from since it came back in-house, including details of the self-referral to the Regulator, and the current direction of travel.
- 4.2. The inspection consisted of:
- A review of the submitted evidence
 - Interviews with the Chief Executive, Cabinet Members, and key managers

- Carrying out focus groups with involved residents and frontline staff
- Conducting reality checks:
 - Sampling complaints and anti-social behaviour case files
 - Observing contact centre calls from housing residents
 - Carrying out visits to a number of housing estates including Broadwater Farm
 - Visiting several void properties
- Observing key meetings i.e., Housing Improvement Board and Resident Voice Board.

HQN's main findings:

Preparation, organisation, and document submission

- 4.3. HQN found this was well-managed, including document submission, inspector team welcome, and organisation of site visits, and responses to queries was timely and effective.

Reality checks - estates

- 4.4. The visit to Broadwater Farm was found to be a positive experience by the inspector who visited this estate. No graffiti was observed on this estate or the others visited, although there was some inconsistency in grounds maintenance. Inspectors also commented on very clean lifts and areas were generally well-maintained, although noted some were very tired. Staff were found to be impressive, enthusiastic and professional.

Safety and quality standard - findings

- 4.5. In HQN's opinion, the Council's current position is such that it may be able to provide the level of assurance the Regulator will be seeking. HQN stated that *'Significant progress has been made in securing a better understanding of the stock and in addressing each of the health and safety weaknesses that necessitated self-referral.'* However, it considered that tenant satisfaction with the repairs service has seen some improvement, weaknesses remain and need to be addressed in a timely manner if the relevant 'required outcomes' in the safety and quality standard are to be evidenced.
- 4.6. HQN made the following recommendations as priorities for improvement against this standard:
- Ensure the frequency of stock condition surveys is in accordance with accepted best practice (five yearly)
 - Take steps to 'map out' and report on all health and safety risks (not just the 'big six')
 - Regularly review, and report on the progress of migrating key health and safety data from spreadsheets to the integrated health and safety capability

- Ensure the Housing Improvement Board has effective oversight of the organisation's approach to facilitating, coordinating and delivering aids and adaptations
- Take urgent steps to formalise and implement the organisation's response to the 'no access' problems currently hampering the ability to undertake electrical inspections in a timely manner
- Ensure the planned improvements to the responsive maintenance and voids management service deliver the expected outcomes for the council and tenants

Transparency, Influence and Accountability standard - findings

- 4.7. In HQN's opinion, the Council's current position is such that it may be able to provide the level of assurance the Regulator will be seeking to confirm compliance with this standard, *'but more rigour should be brought to the collection of household data, and management of complaints is a work in progress (though on an upward curve).'*
- 4.8. HQN made the following recommendations as priorities for improvement against this standard:
- Set out the approach to developing the culture of the team – much work is going on, but you would benefit (and make it easy for the regulator to understand) from setting this out – consider developing a people strategy
 - Draft a household data collection strategy to bring rigour to this area, track progress and set out how you will use the data – set targets for collection of data
 - Consider implementation of an annual engagement impact report
 - Continue to focus on improvements to complaints management process – review progress after an appropriate period (suggest six months)
 - Ensure you are compliant with Ombudsman's Complaint handling Code
 - Include percentage of stage two complaints responded to within target in performance report
 - Ensure the complaints policy is visible, and website is user-friendly
 - Consider changes to the transactional survey on complaints to improve feedback – for example, targeted telephone surveys to get richer feedback (rather than just trying to boost response rate)
 - Review the number and range of improvement plans – would you benefit from streamlining? Are they all reviewed at the appropriate level of governance?

Neighbourhood and Community standard - findings

- 4.9. In HQN's opinion, the Council's current position is such that it should be able to provide the level of assurance that the Regulator will be seeking to confirm compliance with this standard.

4.10. The following recommendations were identified as key priorities for improvement:

- Several actions are underway to develop and/or improve services – in particular relating to IT and processes and seek accreditation. There is a need to retain the focus on these and at the appropriate time review progress and success
- Review the approach to estate inspections – is there an opportunity to harmonise, achieve economies of scale and more tenant engagement
- Ensure all relevant policies, strategies and procedures are reviewed on a regular basis – e.g. communal area policy
- Set out the approach to managing ASB and hate crime – tell the story to the regulator
- Review the monitoring and reporting on hate incidents and crime to ensure data is reliable
- There is significant activity happening in this area – consider how best you can capture the outcomes.

Tenancy Standard - findings

4.11. In HQN's opinion, the Council's current position is such that it may be able to provide the level of assurance the Regulator (RSH) will be seeking to confirm compliance with this standard, particularly in respect of allocations. However, HQN considers there is much work needed to turn the end-to-end lettings process into positive practice.

4.12. HQN identified the following key priorities for improvement:

- Review the housing allocations policy to ensure it remains appropriate
- Review the current position re the backlog of vacant properties and set targets to eradicate
- Review the key-to-key process to identify opportunities to streamline and improve process, including: Making use of notice period – e.g. inspect, identify any significant works required while vacant, advise outgoing tenants on requirements pre-termination
- As soon as feasible, introduce the six-week visit for new tenants to aid effective support to new tenants
- Consider the introduction of a comprehensive transactional survey for the end-to-end process
- Review the approach to supporting new tenants – can more support to furnish and equip properties be offered
- Set out the approach to tackling social housing fraud – amend or develop a new policy
- Review the tenancy policy to ensure it is up-to-date and remains relevant
- Review the approach to 'right-sizing' to ensure process is rigorous, comprehensive and well promoted.

Overall assessment

- 4.13. HQN's overall assessment was that their experience was '*one of the strongest we have seen in the last couple of years*'. They commented positively on examples of working with the community and resident engagement, and the Housing Improvement Board for having the right levels of challenge and support and focussing on looking at the right issues.
- 4.14. HQN believed having looked at the results from over 50 consumer standard inspections undertaken by the RSH, Haringey would be likely to be rated as a C2 ("some weaknesses and improvements are needed").
- 4.15. HQN also noted that addressing the identified issues around safety and quality and continued progress on key activities under the transparency, influence and accountability standard could well result in the RSH deeming the service to be at C1 standard.

Action plan and monitoring arrangements

- 4.16. A housing inspection action plan has been developed in partnership with relevant assistant directors and heads of service by the Transformation team to address the key priorities identified by HQN.
- 4.17. The action plan has been loaded onto Monday.com, the Council's project management monitoring system. Lead officers will be responsible for providing six-weekly progress updates on delivery of the action plan to the Member-led Housing Improvement Board.

5. Contribution to the Corporate Delivery Plan 2022-2024 High level Strategic outcomes'?

- 5.1. By delivering the housing inspection action plan the service is contributing to meeting Theme 5 of the Corporate Delivery Plan – Homes for the Future, particularly the following outcome: An improvement in the quality of housing and resident services in the social rented and leasehold sector. The service is also contributing to meeting Haringey 2035 – Our Vision Call to action 1- Safe and affordable housing in Haringey.

6. Carbon and Climate Change

- 6.1. N/A

7. Statutory Officers comments (Director of Finance (procurement), Head of Legal and Governance, Equalities)

Not required on the advice of the Principal Scrutiny Officer.

7.1. Procurement

Not required.

7.2. Head of Legal & Governance [Name and title of Officer completing these comments]

Not required.

7.3. Equality

The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.

Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristic.

The Regulator's new Consumer Standards, particularly the Transparency, Influence and Accountability standard are likely to have a positive impact on Haringey council tenants as there is a requirement for landlords to 'understand the diverse needs of tenants, including those arising from protected characteristics, language barriers, and additional support needs' and 'assess whether all tenants have fair access to, and equitable outcomes of, housing and landlord services. Additionally, the standard requires that landlords must ensure that their services are accessible.

8. Use of Appendices

None.

9. Background papers

None.