

MANAGING DIRECTOR'S REPORT

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report gives Board an update on preparations for the pending changes to consumer regulations, expected to commence in April 2024.
- 1.2 The report covers the broad scope of changes which is already known and shares initial areas under consideration.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note the content of this report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 To ensure that Board Members have sufficient oversight of matters affecting Derby Homes.

4. MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 4.1 We are all aware that conversations about re-shaping consumer regulations have been ongoing for some time. The current timeline indicates that consultation on the revisions to the standards will be issued by the summer of 2023. The broad scope of the proposed changes has already been circulated and this is set out below:

- Safety – All landlords must provide homes and services that are safe.
- Quality – All landlords must provide good quality homes, including decent homes.
- Neighbourhood – Landlords should play their role in contributing to the upkeep and safety of shared spaces.
- Transparency – Landlords must be transparent with their tenants and provide the information tenants need to hold them to account effectively.
- Engagement and Accountability – Landlords who listen to tenants and take their views into account will deliver better outcomes for tenants.
- Tenure – Landlords must have a fair and transparent allocations process.

- 4.2 A broad theme running throughout the work on the new standards is how landlords meet the diverse needs of tenants; this brings in some important questions for us:

- Do landlords know what outcomes are achieved across the spectrum of their tenants?
- What data do landlords have access to?
- Does everyone get fair access to, and receive good services?
- How do landlords know?
- If different groups of tenants are expressing different levels of satisfaction, do landlords know why, and do they have an action plan to assess this?

- 4.3 Of course, it is important to be clear on our role. For most properties that we manage, we do so on behalf of the Council and this arrangement is managed through the Partnership Agreement.
- 4.4 The relationship with the Regulator is primarily one, with the Council as the landlord and it is, therefore, vital that our partnership is maintained as one of openness, transparency, and 'shared' accountability.
- 4.5 Within this report, I aim to inform Board Members on our current focus in preparation for the new standards being issued. Of course, we are still awaiting the final details, but I believe that much can be done now to prepare for the likely changes.
- 4.6 Safety – All landlords must provide homes and services that are safe.

We already understand and acknowledge, that ensuring tenants' homes are safe is the fundamental responsibility of a landlord. The Social Housing Regulation Bill explicitly includes this. The factors not only consider the safety of the home, but also the safety of the tenants living within those homes, and how we deliver our services.

I believe that we have established processes that ensure our homes are safe; these are reported, regularly, to the Board and Council through Compliance Reporting and will continue through the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

However, this is more than achieving 100% on the 'big six', it is about understanding who lives in our homes and what are the factors which can make some people living in our homes more vulnerable than others.

- 4.7 Quality – All landlords must provide good quality homes, including decent homes.

This is an area of our work that has received high profile media attention recently. The examples of poor-quality homes that have been highlighted in the media are unacceptable and have placed a public spotlight on us all. In November 2022, the Regulator wrote to all landlords in respect of our responsibility to ensure that tenants are protected from hazardous damp and mould in their homes.

Information was requested to give assurance that systems are in place to identify and deal with damp and mould issues, and evidence that we take action to address risks to the health of our tenants; this request for information, highlighted that we had a lack of robust data on the prevalence of damp, mould and condensation in our homes. Steps have now been put in place to address this and improve our data moving forwards.

We are concluding consultation on a new Damp, Mould, and Condensation Policy, which brings together all the details of how we work with tenants to address and prevent problems. Additional resources to provide a 'one visit' solution/diagnosis are now in place and will complement the services we already procure through external specialist contractors.

We still have improvements to make in understanding the vulnerabilities of our tenants and their family members, ensuring that these households are prioritised for service.

We know that an effective repairs and maintenance service is essential to tenants having trust and confidence in their landlords. Our recent performance on non-urgent repairs has been of concern, and actions to address this are detailed in a separate report to Board.

4.8 Neighbourhood – Landlords should play their roles in contributing to the upkeep and safety of shared spaces.

Derby Homes works in partnership and recognises that neighbourhood's matter to tenants. My assessment is, that we are totally committed to contributing to the upkeep and safety of shared spaces. We can evidence this through our ongoing commitment to locality working, partnership arrangements with Streetpride, and grant funding to external organisations; all of which help to make our estates and communities places where people want to live.

4.9 Transparency – Landlords must be transparent with their tenants and provide the information tenants need to hold them to account effectively.

There is always room for continuous improvement in the way that we communicate and share information with our tenants. Our annual reports are short, concise, and focus on the things that our tenants and leaseholders have told us matters to them. Performance information is publicly available and through the continual upgrade of our website we aim to make this more accessible.

We are doing work within the organisation on mindset and culture and will shortly be relaunching our Promise to Customers, based upon the Customer First principles.

4.10 Engagement and Accountability – Landlords who listen to tenants and take their views into account will deliver better outcomes for tenants.

We have a wide range of ways in which we communicate with customers and varied levels of opportunity for them to engage with us. We are flexible in how this works and introduce new opportunities regularly.

The role of scrutiny is important, and we are currently considering a proposal to engage independent support for our Customer Voice group.

We are also looking to develop our processes for learning from feedback; a new cross-team working group will analyse trends from feedback, seeking to introduce and implement solution focussed proposals.

4.11 Tenure – Landlords must have a fair and transparent allocations process.

It is understood that a fair and transparent allocations process is a legal requirement, alongside making best use of stock. We have developed data-based processes to identify the needs of applicants on our housing register and use this to inform new build and acquisition programmes.

We also have strong and effective tenancy management supporting those tenants who need it to sustain their tenancies.

- 4.12 Even for high performing organisations there are significant challenges. Whilst expectations on landlords are high, it is difficult to argue that they are unreasonable. For us, like many other organisations, our biggest challenge is around capturing and using the right data that will help inform our decision making and target our services to those in most need. If we use the example of damp, mould, and condensation, we need to be looking at our stock data on type, age, and location of homes, to identify any trends and equally balance this against the profile of customers living in these homes.

Another challenge is how do we know what we don't know? Again, using the topical example of damp, mould, and condensation, we can collect data from reported cases, but what about those cases that do not get reported? Similarly, we can learn from complaints, but what can we learn from those customers that do not engage with us? We need to use our data, again, to understand who and what falls into this category.

4.13 Tenant Satisfaction Measures

The new standards came into effect on 1 April 2023, and we are now finalising the definitions for reporting. Our intention is, that reporting internally will be monthly and then quarterly to the Council. Reporting to the Regulator is required on an annual basis, with the submissions for 2023/24 due around summer 2024. By reporting more frequently internally, we will be able to see trends and spot any areas of concern at the earliest stage.

- 4.14 Recognising the implications of the new requirements, we are due to recruit to a senior position of Head of Quality and Consumer Standards. This post will sit within the Senior Management Team and work across all areas of the organisation. The need to improve the use of our data will be one of the postholder's priorities, and as such, they will oversee the work of the IT Project Team. This investment will strengthen our ability to deliver the expected outcomes and improvements that are required by the new consumer standards. Over time, further structural changes within the organisation will mean that this investment becomes cost neutral on our salary budget.

- 4.15 Last year, we had an independent review on our position against the current consumer standards; this assessment was extremely positive but gave areas where we could still improve. This action plan is still live and going forward progress will be reported to Board.

- 4.16 To ensure that Board Members can engage in this work outside of meetings, we have agreed that over the course of the next year, we will hold some workshop sessions. Building on the recent away-day exercises, we will develop the teamwork approach between Board Members and the Senior Management Team. A date of 27 June 2023 has been provisionally agreed for the first session.

5. COUNCIL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The ultimate responsibility for meeting standards sits with the Council, as the landlord. Derby Homes have responsibility for discharging the service through the Partnership Agreement.

5.2 The Strategic Working Group meeting between Derby City Council and Derby Homes is the formal monitoring mechanism, to ensure that sufficient assurance and oversight is in place.

6. RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Failure to comply with statutory duties can result in the Regulator of Social Housing taking action against the Council, as the responsible body.

6.2 There are equal risks to Derby Homes, as any failure to comply could constitute a breach of the Partnership Agreement.

The areas listed below have no direct implications directly arising from this report:

Legal Implications
Financial & Delivery Plan Implications
Equality Impact Implications
Consultation
Personnel
Environmental
Health & Safety
Policy Review

If Board Members, or others, would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact: Maria Murphy/Managing Director Telephone 01332 888522 Email maria.murphy@derbyhomes.org	
Background Information:	None
Supporting Information:	None

Governance (checked)	Jane Haywood	05.05.2023
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