



HOUSING AND COMMUNITY

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report for:	Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Title of report:	Consumer Standards Housing Service Self-Assessment & External Validation
Date:	15 th July 2024
Report on behalf of:	Councillor Simy Dhyani, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property Services
Part:	I
If Part II, reason:	N/A
Appendices:	Appendix A – DBC Housing Self-Assessment & Improvement Plan -Consumer Standards Appendix B – Altair review of self assesment
Background papers:	None
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	DBC – Dacorum Borough Council SQA Team – Strategy, Quality & Assurance TSM’s – Tenant Satisfaction Measures RSH – Regulator of Social Housing

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Corporate Priorities	<p>A clean, safe and enjoyable environment</p> <p>Building strong and vibrant communities</p> <p>Ensuring economic growth and prosperity</p> <p>Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need</p>
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	Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery Climate and ecological emergency
Wards affected	All
Purpose of the report:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To provide H&COSC with an overview of the work of the housing service to demonstrate compliance with the Consumer Standards 2. To present the quality assurance and external validation work commissioned by the housing service, carried out by Altair
Recommendation (s) to the decision maker (s):	<p>That OSC to consider the report and assurance work from Altair.</p> <p>To sign off the self-assessment, receive and monitor progress on action to develop the areas identified as partially compliant. Follow up will be in 6 month time.</p>
Period for post policy/project review:	October 2024

Introduction/Background

Since their introduction in 2010, the government has had long-standing plans to increase what is known as consumer regulation in the social housing sector. This means the powers of the regulator to oversee the services provided to residents and intervene if they are not good enough.

On the 29 February 2024 as a result of the landmark [Social Housing \(Regulation\) Act](#) – which has introduced a series of actions to ensure that tenants in social housing are listened to, live in good quality housing and have access to help when things go wrong. The Regulator of Social Housing has because of the new Act set out its new standards for social housing landlords, designed to protect tenants and improve the service they receive. The regulator has also confirmed how it will regulate landlords against these standards.

The new housing consumer standards will inform the framework of a new programme of cyclical inspections.

The changes, came into effect from 1 April 2024. They will apply to all social landlords, including councils and housing associations.

Under the new standards landlords will need to:

- ensure tenants are safe in their homes
- listen to tenants' complaints and respond promptly to put things right
- be accountable to tenants and treat them with fairness and respect
- know more about the condition of every home and the needs of the people who live in them
- collect and use data effectively across a range of areas, including repairs

The above will be measured through four new consumer standards, which are:

1. The Safety and Quality Homes standard
2. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability standard
3. The Neighbourhood and Community standard
4. The Tenancy standard.

Most social housing tenants live in decent homes, however the new legislation gives the regulator increased powers, when there are problems. The regulator can use a range of tools when needed. To hold landlords to account, it will:

- Inspect larger landlords regularly to check they are meeting the outcomes in the standards – these inspections will take place at least once every 4 years.
- Scrutinise data about tenant satisfaction, repairs and other relevant issues – through annual reporting of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures
- Continue to push landlords to protect tenants and put things right through its enforcement powers

From 1 April, the RSH will inspect large landlords, with 1,000 or more social homes at least once every four years to ensure they are meeting the consumer standards.

Regulator of social housing – Dacorum Housing Service Inspection

Dacorum Borough Council are among the first group of Local Authorities to be inspected by the regulator, the inspection is part of the regular rolling programme, rather than being an identified risk.

The inspectors have completed their desk top review based on a data and evidence submission, and visited on-site visit on the 22nd and 23rd May, to carry out interviews with key members of the service, Housing & Property Services Portfolio Holder, Leader and Chief Executive.

- Following the programmed inspection, the RSH will publish a regulatory judgement and grade for Dacorum. The grading decision is expected 6-12 weeks following the on-site visit.
- The table below shows the potential grades:

Grading	Grading Description
C1	The RSH 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	The RSH judgement is that there are some weaknesses in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and improvement is needed
C3	The RSH judgement is that there are serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and significant improvement is needed
C4	The RSH 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

Housing Service Preparation for Regulation

In the autumn of 2023 the housing service started a project to ensure that the service was prepared and ready for the emerging regulation. The service undertook a self-assessment exercise against the (at that time) proposed consumer standards. The self-assessment allowed the service to map all best practice, data and documents which could be used as supporting evidence for the regulator to demonstrate the services compliance with the new consumer standards.

The self-assessment also identified any gaps or areas where improvements could be made. Individual services developed improvement plans and aligned their annual service plans with the consumer standards to ensure that the direction of travel was aligned with the standards.

All policies, strategies and key documents have also been aligned with the standards to ensure that the consumer standards are a golden thread through services.

A copy of the consumer standards self-assessment is at **appendix A**.

External validation from Altair – regulatory support project

In late 2023 the service commissioned external consultants, Altair to carry out a review of the self-assessment and provide quality assurance, through a regulatory support project.

Key objectives for the regulatory support project:

Complete a detailed review completed against the consumer standards to ensure the self-assessment is robust and meets the RSH requirements.

Review the approach to the self-assessment, to ensure its appropriate, proportionate and meets the expectations of the RSH and to provide foresight for future potential reporting issues.

Complete a deep dive review of the source documentation as part of the self-assessment, based on any key risks identified by DBC through the self-assessment.

Key deliverables:

- Critical friend support
- External validation and quality assurance

Current position

- Altair completed their review of the self-assessment and supporting documents/data by the end of April, they have provided feedback, additional comments and requested additional information on some areas.
- Assistant Directors and Heads of Service have reviewed these comments and provided additional information requested.
- Final review report from Altair is at **Appendix B**.

Next steps

The Consumer Standards self-assessment will form a vital part of the evidence for the regulator as part of their current inspection of Dacorum. When the final judgement of the regulator is made following the inspection the OSC will be fully informed of the outcome.

The OSC will also be briefed on any arising plans developed following the inspection judgement and feedback. The resulting plan will form part of the service's continuous service improvement and will ensure that we continue to deliver excellent customer focused services to our tenants.