

# Regulator of Social Housing - update



<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date:</b>	24 April 2025
<b>Portfolio Holders:</b>	Councillor Dan Swords, Leader of the Council  Councillor David Carter, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Cara Stevens, Assistant Director - Housing Operations (People) (01279) 446490
<b>Contributing Officer:</b>	Alan Townshend, Executive Director
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Forward Plan:</b>	Forward Plan Number I018336
<b>Call In:</b>	This item is subject to call in procedures
<b>Corporate Missions:</b>	Transform Harlow's Housing Deliver high-performing council services
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	None specifically

## Executive Summary:

- A** This report provides an update on the progress the council is making in respect of the actions agreed with the Regulator of Social Housing following the Regulatory Judgement and C3 grading relating to Fire Safety.

## Recommended that:

- A** Cabinet notes the progress being made and actions agreed with the Regulator of Social Housing to manage and improve our ongoing social housing compliance responsibilities and the wider elements of the Safety and Quality standard, along with the agreed reformatting of the draft improvement plan and amended brief for the independent review.

- B** Cabinet keeps under review the option of making a voluntary undertaking to the Regulator for Social Housing as work on finalising and implementing the improvement plan continues.

### **Reason for decision:**

- A** Achieving compliance with the Consumer Standards, is a statutory requirement for local authority housing providers. Meeting the requirements of the Consumer Standards will help the council deliver its corporate priorities to (1) Transform Harlow's housing and (2) Delivery of high-performing services as well as ensuring it is a good landlord for tenants.

### **Other Options**

- A** No other options are appropriate. The Cabinet must remain fully informed about and in control of the council's compliance with social housing regulation and the progress the council is making against the actions agreed with the Regulator for Social Housing and next steps.

### **Background**

1. The Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Housing continue to be updated about the progress being made in line with the agreed actions (as set out in previous reports to Cabinet) on a weekly basis. This report is made to each Cabinet meeting to ensure full oversight and control of the council's compliance with social housing regulation.
2. The council continues to work closely and constructively with the Regulator of Social Housing to review and monitor performance. Regular monthly meetings with the Regulator are currently in the process of being set up to monitor all compliance areas and monitor the progress of the improvement plan and the recommendations and outcomes highlighted within the recently commissioned independent review.

### **Progress update**

3. 97.20% of all required FRA's have now been completed. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances with one of the Fire Risk Consultants, the timeframe for completion of all FRA's has slipped slightly, which will now result in 100% completion of all FRA's by the end of April 2025. A programme of FRAs will continue after April to ensure 100% compliance is maintained. Issues of no access continue to be actively prioritised.
4. Actions identified from the FRAs continue to be allocated into one of the four work streams, as set out below, and are prioritised as either High, Medium or Low, which aligns to the Regulator's requirements.

- Compliance
- Housing Management
- Responsive repairs
- Programmed major works

5. The total number of actions outstanding as a result of the completed FRAs are as follows:

	<b>High Rise (18M+)</b>	<b>Low Rise (&lt;11M)</b>	<b>Medium Rise (11M+ &lt;18M)</b>	<b>Sheltered</b>	<b>Total</b>
Compliance	45 (0)	1028 (+292)	18 (+3)	35 (0)	1126 (+295)
Housing Management	152 (-1)	3871 (+1011)	43 (+4)	91 (-60)	4157 (+954)
Programmed works	1293 (-79)	5464 (+696)	180 (+12)	630 (-16)	7567 (+613)
Responsive repairs	9 (0)	56 (+27)	0 (-1)	1(0)	66 (+26)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1499 (-80)</b>	<b>10419 (+2026)</b>	<b>241 (+18)</b>	<b>757 (-76)</b>	<b>12916 (+1888)</b>

NB: The (+) and (-) indicate the increase or reduction in actions since the last report to Cabinet.

6. Work has commenced on the 2025/26 capital programme with a number of sites already in progress in terms of completion of work specifications and procurement processes, delivering both minor and major works packages. As previously advised, a further ten sites are in various stages of the procurement process with works due to commence in the Spring. In addition, six further schemes identified within the 2025/26 programme are now in the final stages of design and procurement. Works on three schemes are already on site at two Sheltered Housing Schemes (Hintons and Toddbrook), along with works currently being carried out in the Felmongers area.
7. The council continue to use Risk Base, which is a performance management system to record all actions identified through FRAs that require prioritisation and completion. This allows access to real time performance data for surveying and the associated tasks/actions as they are identified, ensuring there are no delays from point of identification through to the allocation and completion of tasks.
8. A meeting took place with the Regulator of Social Housing on the 24 March 2025, to discuss the councils progress on compliance, the proposed draft improvement plan and the brief for a further independent review to be commissioned.
9. The feedback received recognised the work that had been undertaken and what was underway and that the council had made a positive start on the improvement plan, which showed that considerable thought had gone into the first draft. However, whilst the regulators initial focus of engagement related to Fire Safety, they would now be looking at the wider elements of the Safety and Quality Standard, including the remaining areas of health and safety compliance, stock condition and decency. It was

noted that the council's draft improvement plan had already reflected the broadening of this scope within its proposed actions for improvement, which was well received.

10. Following the advice received from the regulator regarding the draft improvement plan, we are currently in the process of reformatting the document and layout to align the improvement actions between specific compliance areas and underpinning overarching cross-cutting themes for each area, such as data, root cause analysis, remedial action management, outcomes, validation of completed actions and how tenants would benefit.
11. Feedback was also provided on the proposed independent review due to be commissioned which will be carried out in two phases and will cover all compliance areas, which will also now include Disrepair and Smoke and CO2 monitors. The brief is currently being updated in readiness for the review to be commissioned. Once completed, the outcomes identified will be incorporated within the already established improvement plan.

## **Next Steps**

12. The Improvement Plan will be reformatted following the helpful feedback from the regulator. This will include dedicating actions to officers, more clarity on what the objective is, assurance that the action is complete and how the outcomes will help tenants feel safer in their home. This process will take a little time to complete, and we will continue to work closely with the regulator to get this into a clear format where all stakeholders can track and monitor progress. A revised version of the Improvement Plan will be provided to Cabinet in May 2025.
13. There are now nearly 13,000 fire tasks that require attention and other wider compliance activities that need completing. Getting these completed at pace is a top priority for the Housing team.
14. The Property Compliance Review is being commissioned and will commence in May 2025. This comprehensive compliance data review will cover the 'big 6': gas, electrical, asbestos, lifts, fire, water plus smoke and carbon detection. The review will also look at damp mould and the council's readiness to implement Awaab's Law from October 2025, and disrepair.

## **Implications**

### **Equalities and Diversity**

None directly related to this report.

### **Climate Change**

None directly related to this report.

### **Finance**

The appropriate budget requirements and resources required have been allocated within the HRA of the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

Author: Jacqueline Van Mellaerts, Assistant Director – Finance and Section 151 Officer

## **Governance**

Cabinet received a Housing Regulator Update report at its 24 October 2024 meeting. That report adequately summarised the Housing Regulator's *Consumer Standards* regime, the detail underpinning Harlow's C3 grading and the positive actions against the same.

Harlow is currently operating within the Regulator's "responsive engagement" process which is a co-operative regime to agree and measure progress against its improvement plan. Having a clear process of internal governance to ensure demonstrable pace of progress against the plan will be key to ensuring Harlow progressing successfully through the responsive engagement process to achieving a target rating of C1, being a regulatory judgement that Harlow is delivering the required consumer standards outcomes. The regular reporting to Cabinet that is proposed here is designed to ensure the requisite governance arrangements are in place.

Author: Daniel Dickinson, Assistant Director – Legal and Democratic Services (Interim) and Monitoring Officer

## **Appendices**

None.

## **Background Papers**

None.

## **Glossary of terms/abbreviations used**

FRAs – Fire Risk Assessments