

FINAL

Strategic Root Cause and Lessons Learned from events leading to regulatory grading

Bristol City Council

Housing and Consumer Standards Programme Board

January 2025

PREPARED FOR:



Root Causes and Lessons Learned



A strategic root cause and lessons learned workshop was held with officers and councillors on 18th December 2024. Attendees reflected on the issues outlined in the Regulatory Judgement published on 9 July 2024 by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) which gave the following assessment:

C3: Our judgement is that there are serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and significant improvement is needed

The events and root causes that resulted in the regulatory grading were then explored in detail.

These root causes are presented in this report. They have been grouped into four themes.

The specific observations are captured together with the impacts and suggested actions. The related benchmark provides an opportunity to assess progress towards meeting these outcomes in the future.

The workshop was well attended and had full engagement from those present.

Corporate
Approach

Culture and
Performance

Data and
Systems

Skills and
Capacity

Corporate Approach to Housing Services



<u>Observation</u>	<u>Impact</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Benchmark</u>
Consumer regulation was reactive until April 2024	Regulatory expectations were insufficiently prominent and not prioritised until shortly before proactive consumer regulation was introduced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign clear accountability for meeting regulatory expectations across management and oversight structures Align priorities and reporting to meeting regulatory expectations Commission further independent reviews to provide regulatory assurance on progress at appropriate times Training for Homes and Housing Delivery Committee and elected members on core role in relation to performance, accountability and regulatory requirements 	<p>Evidenced position against the extent to which the outcomes of RSH Consumer Standards are being met</p> <p>Housing Ombudsman requirements are met</p>
Priority of housing was relatively low in overall Council strategy and focus at senior level	Governance and strategic focus around Bristol's social housing was insufficiently prioritised and robust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee Leaders and Senior Leadership to set expectations for housing and ensure its visibility Review governance arrangements to ensure sufficient oversight through to Senior Leadership and the Homes and Housing Delivery Committee Implement the strategic housing review recommendations and embed a new senior leadership structure for the housing service Establish clear routes for tenant influence, scrutiny and accountability to decision makers and political leads 	<p>Supportive challenge and high accountability at all levels evident</p> <p>Embedded reporting to The Homes & Housing Delivery Committee and senior leadership</p> <p>Appropriate balance of senior leadership time on oversight and foresight</p> <p>Accurate and timely information to enable effective oversight and insight</p>
Housing seen as 'separate' within the Council with different ways of engaging in corporate processes	Lack of strategic alignment and low accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt and monitor Housing Services compliance with corporate functions following further discussion at HCSPB on key areas of friction 	

Culture and Performance

<u>Observation</u>	<u>Impact</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Benchmark</u>
<p>Culture did not promote transparency, with a lack of clarity on escalation of important information</p>	<p>There were significant information gaps at all levels, meaning that performance, risks and issues were not properly understood or managed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Housing Review scope covered culture – embed recommendations and reset culture to ensure clear expectations about customer service, performance, collaboration, transparency and accountability • Develop colleague engagement and training plan to reset approach • The Homes and Housing Delivery Committee and Senior Leadership commitment to set the tone in wanting to uncover the issues and respond with appropriate solutions • Recent reviews and implementation of performance, data governance, risk management and audit frameworks increases transparency 	<p>Collective responsibility and clear accountability for delivery of plans</p> <p>Appropriate stability and strength in depth across the directorate</p> <p>Culture of continuous improvement and high performance</p> <p>Reporting is balanced and transparent on both improvement and problems</p>
<p>High performance and accountability culture was absent</p>	<p>Low collaboration across teams. Poor customer outcomes, complacency and a lack of problem solving</p>		
<p>Organisational silos meant teams have difficulty achieving correct outcomes</p>	<p>Culture (compounded by structural and system barriers) meant that issues were not addressed and solutions for customers were missed or hard to achieve</p>		

Data and Systems



<u>Observation</u>	<u>Impact</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Benchmark</u>
<p>Historic approach to data and systems (data governance) resulted in poor-quality data</p>	<p>Low accountability and flawed decision making as data could not be relied upon to understand performance and manage work plans; increased risks to tenants, to the Council's assets and reputation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce robust approach to data governance, control and usage • Map key assurance on data sets and identify areas for improvement • Review data quality ahead of NEC go live 	<p>Data is reliable and provides a sound basis for decision making</p> <p>Reporting is reliable and of good quality</p> <p>Adequate assurance of key datasets</p> <p>Good data governance is embedded into ways of working to ensure sustainable improvement</p>
<p>Perception that The new housing IT system (NEC) will solve data issues but can't assume the system will fix all issues</p>	<p>Historic data issues referred to above may be recreated in the new Housing IT system</p> <p>Benefits of new housing IT system may not be realised if data isn't of high quality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure data workstream of the IT system implementation is delivered • Launch of new system or modules to only take place when data quality is assured 	
<p>Lack of clear ownership and accountability for data with instances of multiple versions of the same dataset held by different teams</p>	<p>Siloed management of data has led to disfunction between teams and difficulty identifying actual position</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce robust approach to data governance, control and usage, including clarity of data ownership 	<p>'Single version of the truth' for each dataset (one reliable source of data for each dataset)</p>
<p>Focus on 'quick wins' and compulsory actions rather than a time-consuming strategic approach i.e. data</p>	<p>Data quality did not have appropriate organisation support and attention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure robust approach to programme/project management which ensures that non-urgent and important actions are delivered 	<p>Longer term outcomes as well as deliverables are evaluated and reported</p>

Skills and Capacity



Observation	Impact	Action	Benchmark
Staff managing scarcity and pressure with limited capacity and frequent change in leadership	Predominantly a reactive focus Lack of continuity of ownership and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of capacity through recruitment, improved efficiency and removing waste (failure demand) Review use of HRA resources to maximise effectiveness 	<p>Meeting targets for increased customer satisfaction (Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs))</p> <p>Meeting targets for increased staff satisfaction</p>
External networking is low and staff have less access to what is coming down the line, shared ideas and solutions	Standards of service and expectations remain low and new ideas less likely to be generated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide learning and development and networking opportunities which increase exposure to sector/customer service good practice Create an environment where new ideas, innovation and news ways of working are encouraged. 	<p>Housing Services Learning & Development Plan in place and monitored</p> <p>Sufficient progress against the Housing and consumer standards Improvement Plan</p>
senior staff capacity to respond to the needs of the housing service was insufficient	Failure to provide leadership, direction and to understand the operating environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embed new senior leadership structure. Review management structure and undertake a skills and competency assessment aligned to corporate leadership values and behaviours. 	
Challenges in recruiting the right people with the right skills	Gaps, high number of interims, high staff turnover, loss of corporate knowledge and continuity resulting in poor customer outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the employment offer and operating model Consider options for hard to recruit/retain areas to make BCC an attractive place to work 	<p>Reduced staff turnover/higher retention</p> <p>Key roles appointed and delivering expected results</p>

Next Steps

The themes and learning captured will be discussed with the Housing and Consumer Standards Programme Board on 30th January 2025.

Agreed actions will then be cross-referenced and added to the improvement plan where appropriate. Some actions will remain with management or be captured in other existing plans (e.g. Strategic Review of Housing Implementation Plan, training). All actions will be mapped to where they are being progressed and reported to the Housing and Consumer Standards Programme Board.

The outcome benchmarks will be revisited at a later date and evaluated for 'look and feel' as well as action deliverables.

This report will be reported through the Housing and Consumer Standards Programme Board, Corporate Leadership Team and Homes and Housing Delivery Committee, and also shared with the RSH.



Bristol City Council's Response So Far



An improvement plan to meet the Consumer Standards is in place and is coordinated by the Housing & Consumer Standards Programme (H&CSP). Oversight and governance includes a dedicated programme team, Programme Board chaired by the Executive Director of Growth & Regeneration. Updates are presented to each Homes & Housing Delivery Committee (H&HDC) who are accountable for ensuring the Council meets the new Consumer Regulation. Monthly regulatory engagement meetings take place with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH).

Corporate Approach to Housing Services

A key objective of the programme is to ensure that the council meets its social landlord regulatory requirements. This includes strengthening of the performance, risk and assurance reporting.

An external critical friend (Savills) with specialist governance and regulatory expertise provides external assurance on the delivery of outcomes to meet the regulatory requirements.

The programme has senior officer and member oversight and is being embedded within the council as a corporate priority. A strategic housing review has taken place and actions to strengthen senior leadership capacity are now being implemented.

A task and finish group on resident engagement will be led by members to look at the service's resident engagement approach and ensure resident voice is at the heart of decision making.

Culture and Performance

We are committed to transparency regarding performance. We regularly report to the; H&CSP Board, RSH, residents via the Housing Scrutiny Panel, and senior leaders and members. Monitoring of our compliance with regulations and building safety related risks are now embedded within the council's corporate risk management approach.

Embedding a strong resident and customer service, data and performance led culture is a key objective within the improvement plan. Operational services are working with BCC's Organisational Development team to improve management of performance, complaints handling, change management and leadership development.

An interim Director of Transformation and Building Safety has been appointed to bring additional capacity and support to developing culture and improving performance.

Data and Systems

Good data management, reporting and effective use of IT systems are key priorities for the programme. Improvement plan actions include the design and implementation of a robust data governance framework.

The introduction of a new IT system (NEC) is an important part of improving the council's approach to data and system management. Ensuring high quality data is transferred to the NEC system is a key priority of both the H&CSP and the Housing IT Transformation Programme.

The programme is supporting the development of clear processes and guidance on data ownership and accountabilities to embed good practice.

Skills and Capacity

A Strategic Housing Review explored staff capacity. Recommendations to increase the capacity of the senior leadership within the service have been accepted in principle and are starting to be implemented through the formation of a dedicated Housing directorate.

A review of Director, Heads of Service and Senior Manager qualifications against the upcoming Competence and Conduct Standard for Social Housing will take place.

Opportunities to support continued professional development and peer learning will be explored and implemented as part of the improvement plan.

There is a dedicated HR team focused on recruitment to vacancies and hard to fill roles.