



Regulator of  
Social Housing

# Southampton City CC (00MS) Regulatory Judgement

27 November 2024

## Our Judgement

|                 | Grade/Judgement   | Change        | Date of assessment |
|-----------------|---|---------------|--------------------|
| <b>Consumer</b> | C3<br>Our judgement is that there are serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and significant improvement is needed. | First grading | November 2024      |

## Reason for publication

We are publishing a regulatory judgement for Southampton City Council (Southampton CC) following an inspection completed in November 2024.

This regulatory judgment confirms a consumer grading of C3. This is the first time we have issued a consumer grade in relation to this landlord.

## Summary of the decision

From the evidence and assurance gained during the inspection, we have concluded that there are serious failings in Southampton CC delivering the outcomes of the

consumer standards and significant improvement is needed, specifically in relation to the outcomes in our Safety and Quality Standard and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard. Based on this assessment, we have concluded a C3 grade for Southampton CC.

## **How we reached our judgement**

We carried out an inspection of Southampton CC to assess how well it is delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards, as part of our planned regulatory inspection programme. We considered all four of the consumer standards: Neighbourhood and Community Standard, Safety and Quality Standard, Tenancy Standard, and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

During the inspection we observed a Southampton CC cabinet meeting, a tenant repairs meeting and a tenant scrutiny panel. We met with tenants, officers, the leader of Southampton CC and the Councillor who is the portfolio holder for housing. We also reviewed a wide range of documents provided by Southampton CC.

Our regulatory judgement is based on all the relevant information we obtained during the inspection as well as analysis of information received from Southampton CC through routine regulatory returns and other regulatory engagement activity.

## **Summary of findings**

### **Consumer – C3 - November 2024**

The Safety and Quality Standard requires Southampton CC to have an accurate, up to date and evidenced understanding of the condition of its homes that reliably informs the provision of good quality, well maintained and safe homes for tenants and to ensure that its tenants' homes meet the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard.

We found serious failings in relation to Southampton CC meeting these requirements. A significant proportion (47%) of Southampton CC's homes do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. Furthermore, as previous stock condition surveys did not include any assessment of hazards in the homes, we saw limited evidence that Southampton CC has an accurate and complete understanding of the condition of its homes. A root cause analysis into the low level of decency has taken place and Southampton CC has recently implemented a housing improvement plan to address these failings. We will continue to engage with Southampton CC as it takes action to improve the quality of its homes.

Through our inspection, we identified that action is needed to ensure that Southampton CC is delivering an effective, efficient and timely repairs service as required by the Safety and Quality Standard. Evidence from our on-site work and in documents provided by Southampton CC indicated this was an area of concern for tenants, with poor performance for routine repairs, long void turnaround times and long call waiting times. Southampton CC told us the poor performance was in part due to underinvestment in planned capital works over a prolonged period and has identified the repairs service as a priority area in its housing improvement plan. We will continue to engage with Southampton CC as it seeks to deliver an improved repairs service for tenants.

The Safety and Quality Standard also requires landlords to identify and meet all legal requirements that relate to the health and safety of tenants in their homes and communal areas and ensure that all required actions arising from legally required health and safety assessments are carried out within appropriate timescales. We saw some evidence that Southampton CC is achieving this requirement, but Southampton CC has failed to ensure it is meeting health and safety requirements around asbestos safety.

Southampton CC received limited assurance following an audit for asbestos safety, which identified a number of asbestos re-inspections in communal areas had not been completed and were overdue. Our engagement following the inspection will include monitoring that Southampton CC completes all required health and safety checks and is managing any risks arising from those checks.

The Neighbourhood and Community Standard states that landlords must work in partnership with appropriate local authority departments, the police and other relevant organisations to deter and tackle anti-social behaviour and hate incidents in the neighbourhoods where they provide social housing. We saw evidence that Southampton CC deals effectively with anti-social behaviour and hate incidents in line with its policy and procedures and in partnership with relevant organisations.

In relation to the Tenancy Standard, we saw evidence that Southampton CC is offering tenancies or terms of occupation which were compatible with the purpose of its accommodation, the needs of individual households, the sustainability of the community, and the efficient use of its housing stock.

The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard includes the requirement for landlords to provide information so tenants can use landlord services, understand what to expect from their landlord, and hold their landlord to account. We found serious failings in relation to Southampton CC delivering the outcomes of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

During the inspection we observed a respectful approach to tenants, but Southampton CC does not have sufficient information to demonstrate how it understands the diverse needs of its tenants nor how its services deliver fair and equitable outcomes for tenants. Southampton CC has identified this as an area for improvement and it is included within its housing improvement plan.

We also found serious failings in how Southampton CC is using tenant engagement as a mechanism to influence how it delivers its services. We saw no evidence of tenants being meaningfully involved in decision making, or able to challenge decisions. Southampton CC informed us it will be producing a new tenant engagement strategy and that tenants will be included on a new advisory panel. We will continue to engage with Southampton CC as it makes improvements to tenant engagement.

Through the inspection, we found Southampton CC could not demonstrate that it regularly provides a range of relevant and accessible information to tenants, including about its performance in delivering landlord services. We found most information for tenants is only easily available online and tenants raised poor communication from Southampton CC as a concern. Staff and tenants do not have access to all performance information, undermining tenants' capacity to hold their landlord to account.

The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard also requires landlords to ensure complaints are addressed fairly, effectively, and promptly and provide accessible information to tenants about the type of complaints received and how they have learnt from complaints to continuously improve services.

Complaints reports indicate Southampton CC does not address complaints promptly, and there is very limited evidence of learning or consideration of the fairness and effectiveness of Southampton CC's complaints arrangements. Southampton CC acknowledges that it needs to improve its approach to complaints handling. We will continue to monitor the improvements through our ongoing engagement with Southampton CC.

Southampton CC has been engaging constructively with us and is taking steps to rectify the failures identified. This includes work to complete improvements to systems and processes for delivery and oversight of health and safety checks, improvements to the repairs service, better complaints handling resources and processes, and developing a tenant engagement strategy. Southampton CC is working to develop an investment plan to address non-decency and delivery of repairs, maintenance and planned improvements.

We are engaging with Southampton CC as it continues to address the issues that have led to this judgement. Our engagement will be intensive, and we will seek

evidence that gives us the assurance that sufficient change and progress is being made, including ongoing monitoring of how it delivers its improvement programme. Our priority will be that risks to tenants are adequately managed and mitigated. We are not proposing to use our enforcement powers at this stage but will keep this under review as Southampton CC seeks to resolve these issues.

## **Background to the judgement**

### **About the landlord**

Southampton CC is a unitary authority situated in Hampshire. Southampton CC owns around 18,000 homes. It provides predominately general needs accommodation, with some supported/sheltered accommodation.

### **Our role and regulatory approach**

We regulate for a viable, efficient, and well governed social housing sector able to deliver quality homes and services for current and future tenants.

We regulate at the landlord level to drive improvement in how landlords operate. By landlord we mean a registered provider of social housing. These can either be local authorities, or private registered providers (other organisations registered with us such as non-profit housing associations, co-operatives, or profit-making organisations).

We set standards which state outcomes that landlords must deliver. The outcomes of our standards include both the required outcomes and specific expectations we set. Where we find there are significant failures in landlords which we consider to be material to the landlord's delivery of those outcomes, we hold them to account. Ultimately this provides protection for tenants' homes and services and achieves better outcomes for current and future tenants. It also contributes to a sustainable sector which can attract strong investment.

We have a different role for regulating local authorities than for other landlords. This is because we have a narrower role for local authorities and the Governance and Financial Viability Standard, and Value for Money Standard do not apply. Further detail on which standards apply to different landlords can be found on our [standards page](#).

We assess the performance of landlords through inspections and by reviewing data that landlords are required to submit to us. In-Depth Assessments (IDAs) were one of our previous assessment processes, which are now replaced by our new inspections programme from 1 April 2024. We also respond where there is an issue or a potential issue that may be material to a landlord's delivery of the outcomes of our standards. We publish regulatory judgements that describe our view of landlords'

performance with our standards. We also publish grades for landlords with more than 1,000 social housing homes.

The Housing Ombudsman deals with individual complaints. When individual complaints are referred to us, we investigate if we consider that the issue may be material to a landlord's delivery of the outcomes of our standards.

For more information about our approach to regulation, please see [Regulating the standards](#).