



Regulator of
Social Housing

Decision

Southampton City Council (00MS) - Regulatory Judgement: 27 November 2024

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Applies to England

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Our Judgement

	Grade/Judgement	Change	Date of assessment
Consumer	C3 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 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 looked at during the inspection as well as analysis of information received through routine regulatory returns and other regulatory engagement activity.

Summary of findings

Consumer – C3 – November 2024

The inspection has found serious failings in how Southampton CC is delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and evidence that this has had a significant impact on service outcomes for tenants. Our judgement is based on the scale and breadth of the issues identified during the inspection. The issues include a high proportion of homes not meeting the Decent Homes Standard (DHS), limited information on Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) in non-decent homes, lack of clarity in performance monitoring and oversight for some aspects of health and safety, and a poor repairs performance.

The inspection also identified serious failings related to the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, including little evidence that tenants' views are taken into account in decision making about landlord services

and a lack of fairness, effectiveness and timeliness in complaints handling.

The Safety and Quality Standard requires landlords to have an accurate record at an individual property level of the condition of their homes based on a physical assessment of all homes and ensure that homes meet the requirements of the DHS. We found serious failings in relation Southampton CC meeting these requirements. A significant proportion (47%) of Southampton CC's homes do not meet the DHS. Furthermore, as previous stock condition surveys did not include any assessment of HHSRS in its homes, we saw limited evidence that Southampton CC has an accurate and complete understanding 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 the Southampton CC as it takes action to improve the quality of its homes.

Through our inspection, we identified that Southampton CC is also not 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. Southampton CC provided some assurance that it is achieving this requirement, but we identified weaknesses around asbestos safety. Southampton CC received a limited assurance audit for asbestos safety with a number of communal asbestos re-inspections 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 that 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.

We found serious failings in relation to Southampton CC delivering the outcomes of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard. This standard sets out the outcomes landlords must deliver about being open with tenants and treating them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account. During the inspection we observed a respectful approach to tenants, but Southampton CC does not have sufficient data 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 the Council's 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 Council 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 readily available digitally and tenants raised poor communication 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 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

complaints arrangements. Southampton CC acknowledges that it needs to improve its approach to complaints handling. We will continue to monitor the improvements through ongoing engagement with Southampton CC.

Southampton CC has been engaging constructively with us and has put in a place a programme to rectify these failures, including 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 set out in 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 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/regulatory-standards-for-landlords\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/regulatory-standards-for-landlords).

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 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/how-we-regulate\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/how-we-regulate).

Further information

- [Regulating the standards \(https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/how-we-regulate\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/how-we-regulate)
- [Regulatory standards for landlords \(https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/regulatory-standards-for-landlords\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/regulatory-standards-for-landlords)
- [Decent Homes Standard \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-decent-home-definition-and-guidance\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-decent-home-definition-and-guidance)

