

Stevenage Borough Council's Housing Annual Report 2024/25

Introduction

We are pleased to present our Housing Annual Report, which provides a comprehensive overview of our performance, priorities and achievements over the past year as a registered social landlord. It also outlines our plan for the year ahead as we continue to build a more sustainable housing future for all.

Our focus this year has been on strengthening compliance, improving tenant experience, and embedding accountability across all areas of housing management.

In April 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) introduced a new regulatory framework and started to inspect social landlords to assess how well they were delivering against the outcomes of the Consumer Standards: Neighbourhood and Community, Safety and Quality, Tenancy, and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability.

Stevenage Borough Council was inspected in the Summer 2024 and awarded a C2 grade, the second highest, which confirms the council has provided assurance that it meets the Consumer Standards in many areas. Nonetheless, the Regulator has identified there is more work to be done and reassuringly we were already working on the areas identified as requiring improvement.

As part of the Regulator's new regime, it has introduced new Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM). These are a suite of 22 measures used to give our tenants greater transparency over our performance and to inform the RSH of our compliance with the Consumer Standards.

We continue to make improvements to the way we manage our housing stock in accordance with the requirements of the new regulatory regime, and through closer collaboration with our tenants and local communities.

We remain fully committed to delivering the best possible outcomes for our tenants and leaseholders, providing a stable foundation for thousands of residents in the Borough.

Regulatory Judgement

This year we were subject to a planned inspection, which took place over the summer of 2024 and judged our performance against the new Consumer Standards. Following inspection, the RSH grade landlords ranging from C1 (top) to C4 (lowest). In November 2024 the Council was notified by the RSH that it has been awarded a C2 grade.

In common with all landlords who have been inspected, we have developed a Provider Improvement Plan (PIP), which focuses on areas where we need to develop services, specifically relating to the Safety and Quality Standard and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard; and approved by the RSH. This plan is reported to Cabinet as part of the Quarterly Corporate Performance Framework.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs)

These were introduced in 2023/24 as a Regulatory requirement for all Registered Social Landlords in England, and consist of:

- 12 perception measures
- 10 management information measures

There are five key themes that the measures relate to:

- Keeping properties in good repair
- Maintaining building safety
- Respectful and helpful engagement
- Effective handling of complaints
- Responsible neighbourhood management

Tenant Perception Measure Results 2024/25

These measures focus on how tenants feel about the services they receive and help us to identify issues that data alone might miss.

The Council commissioned Housemark to conduct the tenant perception surveys, in line with the regulatory requirements and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

The survey questions are prescribed by the Regulator of Social Housing and respondents are given five options for their response, across all survey areas. In addition to the prescribed questions, our tenants were given the option to provide additional free-text information, and we used this qualitative feedback to help inform and implement wider service improvement work across service areas.

These results have been obtained through a quarterly survey and are based on 988 responses, collected by combination of online survey (120 responses) and telephone interviews (868 completed).

Based on a total of 7,794 properties and the 988 responses received this year, the overall margin of error for the survey is +/-2.91% (compliance requiring +/-4.0%). The overall response rate was 12.8%.

Whilst the Tenant Perception Survey is largely made up of prescribed questions, scores reported to the Regulator may vary significantly dependent on landlord context and the survey method used. As such, it is important that scores are interpreted carefully when comparing across providers.

Housemark has generally seen lower satisfaction results for online surveys compared to telephone surveys for the social housing providers it is supporting. The survey results are presented in **Appendix D** for both last year and 2024/25, along with details of the percentage change for each measure.

As the data shows there has been an improvement across all twelve measures compared to the 2023/24 data, with cumulative overall satisfaction at 66.9% representing an increase of 10.9%. The highest increase relates to satisfaction with speed of repairs, which is now 64.4%, an increase of 12.0%. Tenants are most satisfied with being provided with a home that is safe at 76.4%, representing an increase of 6.5%.

As part of the survey tenants are able to use free text to provide additional detail. Feedback from the surveys is being used to help inform specific development and improvement work across service areas. Of the tenants that provided a reason for overall satisfaction and have given permission for their

responses to be shared, 33% of these have been reported to individual teams for further contact to be made. 51% of the follow-ups requested are in relation to repairs (including damp and mould).

Whilst the perception surveys are a useful tool, it should be noted that in some cases households are asked about specific reporting or services that they have accessed. However, on reviewing the data we are aware that there is a mismatch in some cases between the survey results and actual reporting. For example, we are aware that a number of households who have said that they were unhappy with their handling of their complaint had not made a formal complaint but had raised a repair request or other issue. Feedback from Housemark has confirmed that such issues are not only a factor for SBC. Therefore, when looking at service development we use data from this and other sources, including actual transactional surveys.

Housemark's full report presenting the findings of the Tenant Perception Survey can be found in **Appendix E**.

Management Information Measure Results 2024/25

The table presented in **Appendix F** provides the scores of each measure per quarter as well as the annual figures for both 2023/24 and 2024/25. The arrows highlight the direction of travel when comparing scores across the last two years. The colour coding system, that has been developed locally as part of the Council Corporate Performance Framework, indicates if the performance is within tolerance (green), nearing tolerance limits (amber) or outside of the acceptable tolerance range (red).

Of the 14 figures reported across the 10 TSM Management Data measures, 7 have shown positive change, 3 have reduced, and 4 have remained unchanged. The four unchanged figures fall within the Building Safety category and are attributable to last year's results already being at 100%.

Several areas have recorded significant gains, demonstrating improvement. This is most notable within the Complaints Handling category, where the percentage of complaints responded to within the required timescales has increased to 94.62% for Stage 1 complaints (up from 77.14%) and 81.18% for Stage 2 complaints (up from 69.32%). The council has also observed a meaningful reduction in the proportion of homes not meeting the Decent Homes Standard, which has decreased to 3.36% (down from 5.89%). Similarly, there has been a strong increase in the percentage of emergency repairs completed within target timescales, now at 98.93% (up from 87.01%).

These measures have shown a reduction compared to last years' figures; these are:

NM01: Both general anti-social behaviour (ASB) cases and those involving hate crime have seen small increases this year, with ASB cases rising from 107 to 108 and hate incidents from one to four. While the numbers remain relatively low, we recognise that every incident matters to those affected. It is also important to note that part of this change reflects improvements in data collection methods, which allow us to capture and respond to issues more accurately.

RP02: This measure has seen a slight decline in respect of non-emergency repairs completed on time, although the change is not significant. It is worth noting that while RP02 in respect of non-emergency repairs has seen a slight decline, RP02 in respect of emergency repairs has recorded a marked improvement. In the 2023/24 reporting year, the completion rate for emergency repairs had fallen below that of non-emergency repairs. Consequently, the council prioritised emergency repairs, resulting in substantial improvement in this area. As the service

continues to refine resource allocation and demand management, further improvement is anticipated for RP01 in respect of non-emergency repairs, in the next reporting cycle.

Overall, the performance across the TSM Management Data demonstrates a positive trajectory, with several key areas showing marked improvement and others maintaining consistently high standards. While a small number of indicators reflect minor reductions, these are not considered significant and are being actively addressed as required.

As part of the new Regulatory framework the Council is required to submit this data to the Regulator of Social Housing each year, and this has now been completed. The data is also published on our website and is shared with residents through the quarterly newsletter, social media and it will also be included in our Housing Annual Report to tenants.

Looking ahead, the council remains committed to building on this success in the coming year as it continues to deliver against the Regulator for Social Housing's Performance Improvement Plan and begins the journey toward improving its current C2 grade.

Transactional Survey Results

We have introduced transactional surveys across a range of our housing services, including complaint handling, ASB and Repairs. This insight will dovetail with our performance data and our wider engagement feedback to help build a rounded picture of the tenant experience and how our services are operating, enabling us to direct improvements, where it matters most to our tenant and leaseholders.

This year we will be rolling out a programme of satisfaction surveys across a wider selection of housing areas, and we have been developing a Satisfaction Survey Framework that will provide a consistent, structured approach to gathering and analysing feedback across services, ensuring results are reliable and comparable.

We remain mindful of the risk of survey fatigue and are taking steps to ensure our approach is proportionate and targeted, whilst making better use of existing feedback channels to avoid overwhelming residents while still gathering meaningful insights. This forms part of our commitment to embedding customer feedback at the heart of service design and delivery.

The following satisfaction scores reflect resident feedback across some housing areas where transactional surveys have been implemented:

Complaint Handling - Nearly **37%** of complainants were satisfied with the handling of their Stage One or Two complaint. This is slightly higher than the satisfaction reported in the TSM Tenant Survey.

We are committed to improving satisfaction in complaint handling and have set a target of 40% satisfaction for the coming year. Alongside this, we have outsourced these transactional surveys to an external, independent organisation to ensure that our service-users feel comfortable to respond honestly, adding credibility to the results.

Customer Service Centre (CSC) - Over **88%** of our customers are satisfied with the CSC, as per survey results captured through an external research organisation. Qualitative feedback indicate that staff are found to be polite, helpful and effective in resolving their issues where possible.

Repairs - Over **91%** of our customers are satisfied with our repairs service, exceeding last year's satisfaction score of 87% and our target of 90%.

We are exploring the feasibility of capturing repair satisfaction via an external provider, who would carry out deeper analysis work. This would help us triangulate insights with the data collected via TSMs.

Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) - Our Housing Management service survey both complainants and alleged perpetrators when closing ASB cases. This year, an average satisfaction score of 77.25% was achieved, with higher satisfaction seen amongst complainants.

Income Service Team - This year, our Income Services Team has introduced transactional surveys, carried out independently by Voicescape. Every tenant the team has had contact with in the previous week, will be contacted to gather timely feedback on their experience, which we will use to shape and improve services.

Specialist Support Services - Our Specialist Support Service conduct satisfaction surveys at different stages of the resident journey. Feedback is used both to address any issues promptly and to assess how well our services are meeting resident expectations. Last year, over 93% of customers felt that the service helped them to live more independently in their home, while nearly 99% felt that the alarm service made them feel more safe and secure.

Conclusions

Overall, our performance across the full TSM suite demonstrates a broadly positive trajectory, with several key areas showing marked improvement and others maintaining consistently high standards. While a small number of the management information indicators reflect minor reductions, these are not considered significant and are being actively addressed as required.

It is encouraging to see that tenant satisfaction has increased this year across all of the tenant perception measures, however it is clear that there remains room for improvement in some areas, when comparing against peer medians. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to see that in the areas where we have concentrated our efforts, e.g. repairs and complaints, we are now competing with – and in some cases outperforming – our peers, demonstrating that our targeted improvements are making a tangible difference, and that tenant insight is helping us drive through these improvements.

As we work to define our transactional survey regime further, as part of our commitment to improving customer experience, we hope to be able to expand insight beyond these headline

satisfaction scores, allowing for more granular, timely and actionable insight, following service specific interactions.

In response to these findings, we will now reflect on our approach to the provision of our services in 2024-25, and how this has contributed to our improved performance and tenant satisfaction. We view the gains made this year as a positive step forward, but not the final destination. As such, we will also share our plans for the coming year as we strive to continue to build upon this positive momentum. We remain focused on making meaningful progress, addressing challenges and continuing to build a housing service that delivers consistently for all.

Our approach can be split across four key themes:

- Property
- Housing Management
- Supporting People
- Engaging with People

Property
76.4% of tenants are satisfied that they are provided with a home that is safe (TP05), with 100% compliance across all safety management information measures (Gas, Fire, Water, Lift and Asbestos). 70.8% of tenants were satisfied with the overall repairs service in the last 12 months (TP02), with 64.4% satisfied with the time to complete their most recent repair after reporting it (TP03). Whilst an improvement on last years' scores, these scores still sit below national and peer medians. Our management information measures mark an improvement in the average time taken to complete emergency repairs, however a slight reduction in the average time taken to complete non-emergency repairs. We have also continued to reduce the number of homes that do not meet the Decent Homes Standard and this now stands at just 3.36% of stock. 67.7% were satisfied that their home is well-maintained (TP04) and 64% satisfaction with communal areas being kept clean and well-maintained (TP10). These scores sit above peer medians but there is still significant room for improvement when benchmarking against peer high scores. A review of Caretaking Services is underway and we will consult further with tenants and leaseholders on their expectations for this service. Insights from Key Driver analysis confirm that TP04, TP02 and TP05 are considered to have a strong impact on overall satisfaction.
In the last 12 months, we have:
✓ Surveyed 2,866 properties as part of our Stock Condition Survey Programme ✓ Upgraded approximately 240 homes through Wave Two of the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund (SHF) Programme to achieve a minimum of EPC Band C, resulting in 66.46% of council homes now rated Band C or above.

- ✓ Increased the proportion of our homes deemed 'Decent' from 94.11% to **96.64%**
- ✓ Continued to deliver the Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC), bringing the total to 477 flat blocks with completed communal works to enhance their structure and appearance.
- ✓ Invested in our homes to provide: -
 - 443 Boiler replacements
 - 18 Kitchens
 - 74 bathrooms
 - 13 heating systems
 - 3 window replacements
 - 14 door replacements
- ✓ Implemented new policies covering the areas of Responsive Repairs and Maintenance, Aids and Adaptations, Fencing, Voids Management and the Lettable Standard
- ✓ Delivered **639** home adaptations ranging from minor works such as grab rails to more complex installation including through-floor lifts
- ✓ Procured a new specialist contractor to deliver the majority of our adaptations, enabling us to accelerate programme delivery
- ✓ Completed 98% of emergency repairs and 91% of non-emergency repairs within target timescales
- ✓ Fixed **95.72%** of repairs first time
- ✓ Completed over 80% of Damp, Mould and Condensation cases on time

In the next 12 months, we will:

- Examine a variety of approaches for optimising the Council's housing stock and identify where future investment will deliver the greatest value
- Deliver the Decent Homes Programme to achieve 100% of our housing stock meeting national decency standards including the installation of:-
 - 3936 heating upgrades
 - 1316 new kitchens or bathrooms
 - 1014 window or door upgrades
 - 379 properties will receive energy efficiency works over the next 3 years
- Review existing processes within the Repairs team and work with our new contractors and in-house team to drive improvements across the service, including preparation for the implementation of Awaab's Law
- Ensure that all of our homes have had a stock condition survey within the last 5 years, with a spotlight on the importance of the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Procure new contracts for works and services inclusive of Fire Risk Assessment remedial actions, fire door repairs and replacements, electrical testing, servicing of life saving equipment, and works to void properties
- Work on reintroducing an in-house team to carry out works to void properties
- Finalise refurbishment plans for the 5 high rise blocks, including building safety related works and commence works subject to the necessary consents and procurement of a suitably qualified contractor and in consultation with residents.
- Deliver the Building Safety Action Plan to ensure 100% compliance with legal and regulatory requirements
- Commence delivery of Wave Three of the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund (SHF) Programme, which is a three-year programme involving works to 379 homes to improve energy efficiency and support decarbonisation
- Deliver the final year of MRC by completing communal works to the remaining 33 flat blocks

Housing Management

63.1% of tenants are *satisfied that Stevenage Borough Council keeps communal areas clean and well-maintained (TP10)*; an improvement of over 10% on last year's score.

Respondents reported **over 64%** satisfaction that *we make a positive contribution to their neighbourhood*. (TP11). Again, a significant improvement on last year's score of over 15%. **57.9%** of respondents are *satisfied with our handling of anti-social behaviour*, compared with 49.5% of respondents from last year (TP12).

In the last 12 months, we have:

- ✓ Let **293** general needs and **195** specialist accommodation properties
- ✓ Implemented our new Allocations Policy to optimise use of housing stock and ensure fairer and more transparent allocations
- ✓ Published a summary version of the Allocations Policy in response to requests to feedback asking us to make clearer
- ✓ Regenerated our downsizing scheme and supported **51** home moves making best use of our housing stock
- ✓ Conducted **1417** Tenancy Audits, **115** Settling-In Visits and **125** 8-Month Visits, building stronger relationships with our tenants and helping to sustain tenancies
- ✓ Collected over **98%** of rent due; a 0.67% increase on last year; while developing tailored payment arrangements in collaboration with customers with outstanding debt
- ✓ Dealt with **107** cases of ASB, ranging from low to high level, with **94%** of cases resulting in successful enforcement action

In the next 12 months, we will:

- Produce a Lettings Data infographic, to share routinely with customers, on lettings activity including number of lets, applications to join the Housing Register, and direct lets including those for adapted properties
- Gather and use tenant information more effectively to ensure our strategies, plans and service improvements are driven by their views and needs
- Utilise improved insights into the needs and preferences of our customer base, to tailor service provision, accordingly, ensuring a more responsive and person-centred approach
- Provide effective, timely and relevant information to residents who have reported ASB issue, to help manage expectations and to help maintain trust in the process

Supporting People

73.3% of tenants agree that *Stevenage Borough Council as their landlord treats them fairly and with respect* (TP08); an increase on last year's result of 70.2%.

We recognise that TP08 is a strong driver of overall satisfaction and improvements in our scores reflect the progress we are making in building positive relationships with our tenants.

In the last 12 months, we have:

- ✓ Provided more than 7,900 households with safe, affordable and secure social housing, offering a stable foundation for their future
- ✓ Introduced a new Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- ✓ Supported all parties involved in ASB cases, including alleged victims and perpetrators, harnessing collaborative working with partner agencies including the Police and Herts County Council
- ✓ Improved the support that we provided to households who need to move to more suitable accommodation by recruiting a Decant Officer
- ✓ Set in motion our 'Know our Tenants' initiative; a comprehensive programme of home-visits to help build stronger relationships with our tenants, whilst assessing vulnerability and improving understanding of support needs.
- ✓ Responded to over 32,000 calls and carried out nearly 21,000 homes visits to tenants living in our Supported Housing schemes, helping them to maintain their independence
- ✓ Attended to a total of 1126 calls from our Care Connect 24/7 service users, enabling them to remain safe and independent within their communities
- ✓ Assisted our tenants in 1022 welfare benefit related cases, helping to safeguard tenancies and reduce financial pressures

In the next 12 months, we will:

- Work with residents to ensure that we can access their homes to make sure they remain safe and healthy
- Deliver our Tenant Profiling Improvement Plan, to strengthen how we collect and use tenant data, ensuring services are better tailored to their needs
- Make sure our Independent Living Service continues to provide the right level of support and assistance to our community, and allows people to remain living independently

- Work to identify any groups of residents who may not be sharing their ideas and experiences with us, and identify how we can encourage and support them to become involved
- Strengthen our understanding of tenants' needs and priorities to refine and optimise the services they rely on

Engaging People

61.6% of tenants report *they are satisfied with being kept informed about things that matter to them* (TP07), while **55.1%** report they are satisfied that their views are being listened to and acted upon (TP06); again, these results mark a significant improvement on last year's results.

Key Driver analysis of our TSM survey results tells us that how tenants feel about TP06 has a strong impact on their overall satisfaction (TP01). This means that as well as getting our services working well, we can improve perception with good communication.

In the last 12 months, we have:

- ✓ Strengthened our approach to tenant and leaseholder participation, influence and scrutiny based on 'engaging, listening and acting', by developing and implementing our new Resident Engagement Strategy, Framework and Improvement Plan, in collaboration with the Tenants Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) and residents.
- ✓ Integrated tenant feedback more effectively into service design and delivery by appointing a Resident Engagement Manager, putting the tenant voice at the centre of our work
- ✓ Shared clearer and more consistent updates with residents, supported by a new Communication Plan, that sets out how we will keep them regularly and meaningfully informed
- ✓ Kept out tenants informed, engaged and connected throughout the year by launching a quarterly tenant newsletter
- ✓ Sought residents' views on building safety works, through a dedicated High Rise Resident Engagement Plan
- ✓ Engaged with our residents on our high-rise Capital Investment Programme, and our Repairs and Maintenance Policy, helping us to shape our priorities and influence decision making
- ✓ Ensured residents have the opportunity to help shape outstanding strategies and policies captured in our forward plan, following the development and approval of a comprehensive Strategy and Policy Register

In the next 12 months, we will:

- Capture resident feedback through a wide range of channels as we continue to evolve our dynamic Resident Engagement Strategy and Framework
- Enable tenants to directly influence improvement actions plans for housing services, through the introduction of dedicated scrutiny groups, this will include continued work on our high rise development proposals, caretaking and sheltered housing.
- Give residents clear visibility of our performance as a landlord, through the publication of quarterly performance data
- Ensure residents can access clear information on staff roles, responsibilities, and named leads for meeting legal and regulatory standard
- Give residents' certainty over how their involvement shapes change, through an annually agreed forward plan of scrutiny, aligned with service reviews and housing transformation work streams

Closing remarks

This year's improved performance marks a positive step forward and reflects the hard work and commitment of our teams. However, we recognise that there is still work to do as standards and regulation continues to develop and evolve and we are committed to building on this positive momentum, to meet the standards that our residents expect and deserve.

Looking ahead, the Council remains focused on building upon this progress over the coming year. We are determined to deliver the commitments set out in this report, continue to make strides against the Regulator of Social Housing's Performance Improvement Plan, and working towards a C1 rating.