

Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

29 April 2025

Subject:	Housing Improvement and Transformation Plan Update
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1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the Housing Improvement and Transformation Plan update.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 During October 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) issued a 'C3' Regulatory Judgement (RJ) to the council indicating that there are serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and significant improvement is needed. Specifically, 4 areas were of concern to the Regulator.
- Asbestos management surveys or re-inspections had been carried out on only around 2% of relevant buildings.
 - Although electrical safety inspections had been completed for 96% of its homes, the council is unable to monitor or report on the completion of remedial actions arising from those inspections.

- The council reported more than 14,000 overdue repairs, with over 90% of these yet to be assigned for completion.
- The Safety and Quality Standard requires the council to have an accurate, up to date and evidenced understanding of the condition of their homes that reliably informs their provision of good quality, well maintained and safe homes for our tenants. The council reported that while it intended to carry out a comprehensive (100%) stock condition evaluation of its housing stock, only 5% of surveys were at the time completed.

2.2 Since October, the council's housing service has engaged in regular meetings with the RSH to discuss any emerging/ additional issues, progress towards compliance with the Regulatory Standard and to provide clarity on the governance arrangements employed within the council to ensure there is robust and comprehensive oversight of the journey towards compliance. Part of the process is the presentation of a progress update to this Scrutiny Board on a quarterly basis.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

Living in Sandwell	The provision of high quality, safe and well repaired homes that are available at social rents will ensure that those unable to afford open market housing can access accommodation that meets their needs and achieves the 'decent homes' standard in terms of its state of repair and general condition.
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 As well as striving to achieve the Regulatory Standards as swiftly as possible, the council is seeking to transform its housing service into one which provides excellent service and performance when compared to similar housing providers. Therefore, the Housing Improvement and Transformation Plan (HITP) has been developed not only to consider progress towards compliance but to identify the actions required to strive to achieve excellence.
- 4.2 The HITP contains ten key projects each with numerous workstreams below, which are in the process of being completed, implemented or are awaiting delivery. The focus in terms of priorities is on ensuring compliance with the Regulatory Framework and building safety. Progress is monitored monthly via a Housing Transformation and Improvement Board, chaired by the Executive Director Place, which is responsible for reporting on progress, identifying blockages and barriers and

determining how problems can be resolved. The Board reports by exception to the council's Leadership Team and to Cabinet member / Cabinet monthly. This is in addition to the quarterly oversight provided by Scrutiny Board and consideration of any 'limited assurance' internal audit reports that are reported to the council's Audit and Risk Committee.

- 4.3 The presentation appended to this report will be presented by officers and identifies by 'exception', those workstreams where progress has not achieved expected milestones and to set out the remedial action to be taken to return the workstream to the required path of achievement.
- 4.4 Following on from February Scrutiny, the Board asked for more detail on the progress of the new Housing IT Systems.

Compliance System

- 4.5 Sandwell Council previously managed housing compliance information in several ways, outside of a specific compliance management system. The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) highlighted this as a major area of concern and a commitment was made to procure and implement a suitable software system to manage compliance. The recently procured compliance system, C365Cloud, has been populated with clean data and configured to manage the performance of the 6 major safety factors (Gas, Electric, Fire, Asbestos, Water and Lifts). There will be a transition period where dual reporting is maintained, this will ensure accuracy of the data held in C365Cloud, and suitable processes are in place to manage the data.

Integrated Housing Management System

- 4.6 The technical specification for this IT solution has been developed in collaboration with key stakeholders and external Housing IT specialists. The approach taken has been to move away from on-premise systems to cloud-based, in alignment with the council's IT Strategy. In addition, there is also an emphasis on procuring as few systems as possible, but as many as is required to meet operational needs and statutory obligations. The technical specification is split into four lots, detailed as follows.

Lot 1 - Asset Management.

- 4.7 There is currently no asset management system in place for Housing, with limited value achieved from utilisation of data within spreadsheets and other documents. The RSH has highlighted the inability of Sandwell Council to effectively plan investment in its housing portfolio because of not using an effective Asset Management System.

Lot 2 - Housing Management.

- 4.8 Sandwell Council currently uses Capita's OpenHousing software system as its housing management solution. OpenHousing is at 'end of life' (classified as a legacy product) with only limited support available. The most recent support and maintenance contract expired at end March 2025, with an extended support agreement agreed beyond that date to cover the implementation period of a new Housing Management System.

Lot 3 - Lettings and Homelessness.

- 4.9 Sandwell Council currently uses MRI's Jigsaw to manage homelessness cases. Jigsaw does not have any specific functionality for managing advice and prevention and there is no integration with OpenHousing, resulting in re-keying of data across the two systems.

Lot 4 - Property Services.

- 4.10 Sandwell Council currently uses Advanced's JobManager and Dynamic Resource Scheduler to manage most of its housing maintenance job activities. There is good integration between these systems and Sandwell's digital presence, enabling tenants to log and self-appoint a repair. There is no integration with OpenHousing, to keep it updated with job history etc, which is important for all housing staff to be able to see the complete picture from a tenancy / property perspective. There is also no integration with Sandwell's Housing Data Warehouse. The current contract with Advanced is due for renewal in early 2026.

Procurement Route for Software Systems

- 4.11 The procurement route is currently being re-evaluated by Legal colleagues, with provision of a Procurement Options Appraisal report. Procurement delays, and commencement of new Procurement legislation at end of February 2025, has resulted in a delay in start date for procurement activity. The preferred procurement route timeframe will form part of the legal report, until this is received and signed off, the target end date is not known but is likely to be slightly beyond September / October 2025, as originally targeted.

5 Implications

Resources:	The HITP is being delivered within the budgetary envelop established for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), staffing, land/building implications
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Legal and Governance:	The Regulator of Social Housing intervenes where there are serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards regulatory framework and significant improvement is needed. The council also must comply with the statutory and regulatory frameworks established for social landlords.
Risk:	A risk registers specifically relating to the obligations to achieve the requirements of the regulatory framework for social housing has been developed and is monitored monthly.
Equality:	There are no equality implications because of this report
Health and Wellbeing:	Achieving the requirements of the relevant regulatory standards will ensure the fitness, safety and security of the council's homes for use as social housing and in doing so ensure the wellbeing of our tenants.
Social Value:	There are no social value implications because of this report
Climate Change:	There are no climate change implications because of this report
Corporate Parenting:	There are no corporate parenting implications because of this report

6 Appendices

Housing Improvement and Transformation Plan – Exception Report – April 2025

7. Background Papers

None