

SHOULD YOU REQUIRE THIS DOCUMENT IN AN ALTERNATIVE FORMAT PLEASE  
CONTACT AND SEE OUR ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

# Guildford Borough Council

Report to:	Housing Operations Board
Date:	12 March 2025
Ward(s) affected:	All
Report of Strategic Director of:	Strategic Director of: Housing, Communities & Environment
Report Author:	Annalisa Howson
Email:	annalisa.howson@guildford.gov.uk
Lead Executive Member:	Cllr Julia McShane
Email:	Julia.McShane@guildford.gov.uk
Status:	Open
Key decision:	No

## Housing Improvement Plan Update

### 1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update to the Housing Operations Board on the refreshed Housing Improvement Plan, outlining the key priorities, progress to date, and next steps. The report reflects feedback from the Tenant Engagement Group (TEG), which was consulted on the proposed objectives and provided positive feedback

### 2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Housing Operations Board is invited to note the new objectives for the refreshed plan and provide feedback.

### **3.0 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 It is essential to maintain transparent reporting and oversight of the Housing Improvement Plan to meet regulatory requirements and ensure progress is monitored effectively.
- 3.2 The recommendations ensure alignment with best practices and maintain momentum in addressing identified priorities.

### **4.0 Status of Report**

#### **4.1 Open**

This report is classified as open and does not contain exempt information.

### **5.0 Strategic Priorities**

#### **5.1 Alignment with Corporate Strategy**

The Housing Improvement Plan supports Corporate Strategy priorities by ensuring local people have access to decent, affordable homes and fostering a resilient, well-managed council through improved governance, resident engagement, and service delivery

### **6.0 Background**

The original Housing Improvement Plan was developed by the Council in response to the SOLACE governance review, with a primary focus on compliance and ensuring that housing services met basic standards. The refreshed plan takes a more holistic approach, aiming to improve services by incorporating:

- Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) feedback
- Sector best practice
- Staff feedback
- Housing Quality Network (HQN) recommendations
- Housing complaints and other resident feedback

This ensures that the refreshed plan is shaped by real experiences and expert insights, allowing the Council to better meet the needs of residents

The Solace recommendations have been embedded within the refreshed Housing Improvement Plan, maintaining continuity and alignment with key improvement objectives.

The original workstreams have been refined and restructured around four key priority areas, providing a more streamlined programme framework. Additional actions have been introduced to enhance service delivery, ensuring a stronger focus on achieving positive outcomes for residents and making the service more effective and fit for purpose.

## **8.0 Summary of High-Level Objectives and workstreams of the Refreshed Plan**

The full plan is available as an **appendix** to this report.

### **8.1 Quality, Safety & Compliance**

- All homes to meet the Decent Homes Standard, ensuring they are safe, warm, and well-maintained.
- Strengthening oversight to meet or exceed safety regulations.
- Investment in long-term home improvements.

#### **Workstreams:**

- Asset Management Strategy and Planned Works
- Building Safety Engagement Strategy
- Damp and Mould Prevention and Management Programme
- Housing Compliance Improvement Project

### **8.2 Service Improvement & Delivery**

- Faster, high-quality re-letting of homes.
- Reliable and efficient repairs service, ensuring issues are resolved correctly on the first visit.
- Improved leasehold management.
- Clean, safe, and well-kept estates and public spaces.
- Effective responses to anti-social behaviour (ASB), domestic abuse, and hate crime.

#### **Workstreams:**

- Household Data Collection Strategy
- Modern Tenancy Agreements & Tenancy Policy
- ASB / Domestic Abuse Review
- Policy & Procedures Review and Implementation Programme

- Enhancing Estate Management Practices
- Improving Leasehold Management Services
- Improving the Repairs Service
- Voids and Lettings Review

### **8.3 Resident Engagement & Empowerment**

- Working with residents, not just for them.
- Ensuring every resident's voice is heard and acted upon.
- Effective and transparent complaint handling.
- Empowering residents to shape their communities.

#### **Workstreams:**

- Tenant Satisfaction Measures and Feedback
- Resident Engagement Strategy
- Complaint Handling

### **8.4 Organisational Excellence & Modernisation**

- Strong governance and financial integrity.
- Efficient strategies, policies, and procedures.
- Investment in modern ICT systems to enhance services.
- A new operating model to streamline processes and improve efficiency.
- Strengthening staff culture and performance.
- Developing a data-driven housing service to improve outcomes.

#### **Workstreams:**

- Governance and Strategic Oversight
- Service Performance Measurement and Accountability Framework
- Building a Data-Driven Culture
- Sound Financial Management of Housing Services
- Digital Modernisation
- Staff Performance and Culture
- Workforce and Operating Model Transformation
- Housing and Homelessness Strategies
- Robust Regulatory Compliance – Review
- North Downs Housing: Future Options Appraisal

## **9.0 Feedback from Tenants Engagement Group 25 February 2025**

- Agreed with priorities but highlighted key issues such as contract management, transparency, and communication.
- Residents wish to be involved in contract management, particularly regarding poorly performing contracts.
- Transparency needed regarding long-term void properties.
- Poor user experience with repairs reporting; issues with online reporting and residents being kept informed by contractors, residents should be involved in system improvements.
- Estate walkarounds should resume as soon as possible and parking issues, fly-tipping, and rubbish-especially from private sector tenants-require involvement from colleagues in the enforcement team. Need a programme to support elderly residents with overgrown gardens.
- A full communication strategy is needed to keep residents informed.
- Suggest including updates with rent letters and assessing online information access

This feedback has been incorporated into the various workstreams, and will also be reflected in the new tenant engagement strategy action plan

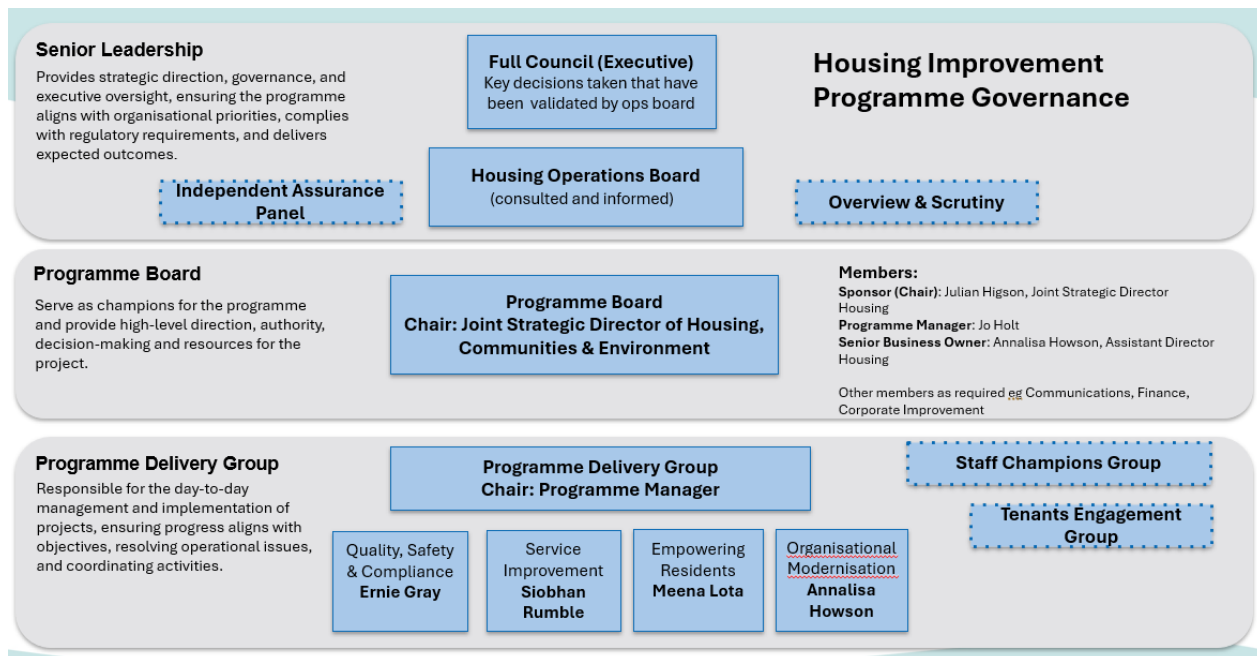
## **9.0 Governance**

9.1 The Housing Improvement Plan is overseen by a Programme Board that ensures delivery against key objectives. Regular progress updates are provided to:

- Tenant Engagement Group (TEG)
- Housing Operations Board
- Independent Assurance Panel
- Regulator of Social Housing
- Tenants via Contact Point magazine and a dedicated page on the council website
- Staff updates
- Full Council

The governance structure ensures strategic oversight, regulatory compliance, and accountability in delivering the objectives of the Housing Improvement Plan.

## 9.2 Governance Chart



## 10. Co-Design & Engagement Approach

**10.1** We have committed to create a sustainable and resident-focused Housing Improvement Plan by actively engaging residents and staff through co-design, workshops, and feedback sessions

### Approach:

- **Resident & Staff Workshops:** Hosting structured workshops where residents and staff can voice their concerns, share experiences, and contribute to shaping the improvement plan.
- **Listening to Feedback:** Ensuring that all feedback collected is reviewed, actioned where feasible, and incorporated into the plan to ensure a collaborative approach.
- **Co-Designing Solutions:** Developing policies, services, and operational changes with direct input from residents and staff, ensuring changes reflect real needs.
- **Transparency & Communication:** Providing regular updates on progress and decisions made based on engagement activities, building trust and accountability.
- **Pilot Programmes & Iterative Testing:** Trialing proposed solutions in selected areas before wider implementation, ensuring effectiveness and refining based on ongoing feedback.

## 11.0 Key Risks

- 11.1 **Resourcing and Capacity:** Recruitment challenges, especially for technical roles, continue to place pressure on interim staff. The upcoming staffing review will address these gaps.
- 11.2 **IT Systems:** Existing housing management systems are outdated, requiring manual workarounds. Procurement of a new system is underway but will be a long-term project.
- 11.3 **Expectations Management:** Visible improvements in key areas like compliance, voids and complaints are helping rebuild confidence, but the scale of the improvement plan means progress will take time.
- 11.4 **Need for Clearer Communication:** To rebuild trust, the programme must ensure transparent decision-making, better communication of changes, and clear accountability for service improvements
- 11.5 **Competing Priorities:** The programme sits within a wider corporate agenda, and resource pressures across teams could slow down delivery or cause project delays.

## 12.0 Financial Implications

- 12.1 Adequate resources are allocated to ensure delivery of the Housing Improvement Plan as part of HRA Business Planning.

## 13.0 Human Resources Implications

- 13.1 The successful delivery of the Housing Improvement Plan relies on sufficient staffing capacity and expertise, particularly in technical and specialist roles.
- 13.2 Recruitment challenges in key areas, such as compliance and asset management, continue to put pressure on existing staff.
- 13.3 The upcoming staffing review aims to address resourcing gaps and ensure the workforce is structured to support long-term improvements.
- 13.4 Investment in training and professional development will be key to embedding cultural and operational changes

## **14.0 Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 14.1 The Housing Improvement Plan is designed to ensure fair and equitable access to services for all residents, including those from protected characteristic groups.
- 14.2 A focus on resident engagement ensures that the voices of diverse communities are heard and acted upon.
- 14.3 Improvements in service delivery will help address any disparities in housing outcomes.
- 14.4 The plan aligns with the Council's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) commitments, ensuring that housing policies and services are accessible to all.

## **15.0 Climate Change and Sustainability Implications**

- 15.1 The Housing Improvement Plan supports Guildford Borough Council's sustainability goals by prioritising energy-efficient homes and long-term investment in sustainable housing solutions.
- 15.2 Planned works and asset management strategies will incorporate carbon reduction measures, including improvements to insulation, heating systems, and energy efficiency to meet government targets that all social housing attains a minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'C' by 2030
- 15.3 The Damp & Mould Prevention Programme will contribute to healthier, more sustainable homes by ensuring better ventilation and reducing energy waste.
- 15.4 The Council will explore opportunities to integrate low-carbon technologies and renewable energy solutions where feasible as part of the Asset Management Strategy
- 15.5 Improvements in estate management, including dealing with fly tipping and other issues on our housing estates will contribute to environmental sustainability.

## **16.0 Next Steps**

- 16.1 Approval of the refreshed Housing Improvement Plan at Executive Council.
- 16.2 Resourcing and assigning responsibilities.



- 16.3 Implementation of the key priorities, aligned with governance and regulatory commitments.
- 16.4 Ongoing monitoring, with updates provided to the Housing Operations Board, Overview & Scrutiny (Resources), Assurance Panel Executive, Tenants Engagement Group, Staff, and key stakeholders.
- 16.6 Communication and Engagement with all key stakeholders on the refreshed plan

## 17.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Housing Improvement Plan – February 2025

### Report clearance progress:

Finance	For information only not required	
Legal & Governance	For information only not required	
Human Resources	For information only not required	
Equalities	For information only not required	
Strategic Director	Julian Higson	3 March 2025