

## Chief Executive

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AshfordBoroughCouncil

Date: 8 March 2024

Dear Regulator

### Recent Housing Regulation Audit

I am writing to you in regard to a recent internally commissioned independent audit conducted by a housing specialist (Housing Quality Network – HQN) of our Housing Service to help us identify gaps that needed to be closed in order to comply with the new housing regulations, this was conducted earlier this year. We received the final report on 31 January 2024. In the spirit of co-regulation, we would like to notify you of the gaps identified and our plan to improve our position.

The review highlighted the following key areas for improvement:

#### Decent Homes Standard

The review looked at how we measure Decent Homes. The last full condition survey was completed approximately 10 years ago which resulted in us confirming that we did meet decent homes standards. Since that date, we have reviewed Decent Homes based on void properties, inspecting the standard of the property and conducting any works that are required. The review highlighted that this process of measuring Decent Homes is unacceptable, but also acknowledged that we were in the process of procuring a comprehensive condition survey and that this work should progress as soon as possible.

We are in the final stages of procuring this work and the current start date for these works is 16 March 2024.

Systems have now been put in place to receive this data, ensuring that we will respond to any immediate works quickly and the data is used to inform our Planned Programme of works.

Moving forward a number of key modules within our Corporate Housing system will be activated to ensure all data is in one place.



## Data Systems

In addition, the audit found that our property management framework, which should provide assurance that compliance and building safety are being delivered and managed, is not as effective as it should be. Record keeping and reporting mechanisms are not providing a clear audit trail of routine or follow-up maintenance being carried out.

We have reviewed the compliance of our Big Six areas and I can report the following:

- **Gas safety certificate** the data is currently held by our contractor Swale Heating however, we can report that 100% of annual certificates are in place.
- **Fire Risk Assessments** These have been carried out recently so we can report that we are at 100% complete. We have identified works that need to be completed and this is being closely managed by our new Fire Safety Officer.
- **Lift servicing** all certificates are in place for all passenger lifts.
- **Electrical safety** we operate a five yearly testing for all domestic properties. We have found that around 361 certificates are over that five years; therefore we are 93% compliant. We have developed a plan to address these and this is being reported through to the Director on a weekly basis.
- **Water safety** we had two outstanding water risk assessments these were completed on 5 March 2024.
- **Asbestos** there are 5 blocks that we are in the process of re-inspecting.
- We are also auditing all the compliance sub sets and we are looking to complete this work within a three month timeframe.

As explained above we are working to complete all compliance work as soon as possible. However, we are also working to ensure this position does not reoccur by procuring True Compliance, an IT system to manage all our compliance data. This system will link live to our Corporate Housing system to ensure all the data is in one place.

## Moving forward

Ashford Borough Council understands the importance of complying with all aspects of the Consumer Standards and Legal Landlord Health and Safety obligations. To address the issues we have raised above, the following has been/is to be actioned:

**Governance** an asset compliance and improvement board, chaired by Councillor Noel Ovenden, the Leader of the Council. The board will also include a tenant representative, and key officers, including myself as the Chief Executive, the Corporate Director of Housing and the Council's key compliance officers. This board will report into the Audit Committee that is an established committee with experienced Councillors within audit, risk and regulatory backgrounds.

**A robust Action Plan** this plan includes all actions required recommended by our external specialist. This includes responsible officer, timeframes and outcomes expected. We have considered risks of delivery of the programme.

**Compliance IT system** we are currently procuring the system True Compliance and we will look to implement as soon as possible.

**Key performance indicators** are already in place to manage performance, this will be extended to include all Health & Safety indicators including the Big Six and subsets of those. These will be reported to Directors monthly to ensure all data is continuously updated.

**Commenced employment** we have introduced an interim structure and this has been fully recruited to. There are currently a high number of interim staff and we are looking to recruit to permanent roles over the next few months to introduce more stability to the Housing Service.



**Communications** we have been transparent regarding our work on this and the referral process through to you. We have sent a letter to all tenants and released communications through our website and social media for all Ashford residents. We have also communicated to Cabinet and Group Leaders and confirmed their cross party support on the actions we are taking on this.

I have enclosed a copy of:

- The presentation from HQN
- The Action Plan with our current position

If you require any additional information or would like to meet with us, please contact me.

Yours faithfully



**Tracey Kerly**  
Chief Executive