

# Housing Improvement Plan

*March 2022*

# Croydon's housing improvement plan

Five themes and the outcomes we are working to achieve for each



## Vision & governance

- A comprehensive vision to guide staff
- Strong governance around everything we do
- A trusted performance management system which provides assurance
- Transparent and accurate financial reporting

## Improving your homes

- Confidence in our stock data and our ability to utilise it
- A robust Asset Management Strategy
- Fit-for-purpose vehicles for delivering investment
- Robust arrangements for managing capital delivery contractors to drive satisfaction and value for money

## Our workforce

- A resident-focused and performance-oriented service
- Housing staff have the right skills, capacity, capability and tools to effectively perform their role
- Accountable and resilient leadership and management
- A diverse and talented workforce reflective of the community it serves

## Repairs & safety

- A system that makes reporting a repair easy
- Repairs done on time and right first time
- Full compliance with the Building Safety Act
- Quick turnaround of voids

## Customer service & resident engagement

- Residents find it easy to contact us
- Resident engagement is at the heart of all we do
- All residents are provided with the information they need
- Compliance with complaints handling requirements and best practice



## **LBC HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

### **1. Introduction**

The independent ARK investigation in spring 2021 into living conditions at 1-87 Regina Road, South Norwood discovered a wide range of problems across the Council's housing service. The report concluded that there were a range of issues across the Council's operational teams and with the main repairs contractor. These issues led to a failure to deliver even basic core housing services effectively and were symptomatic of poor performance across the Council's housing service.

Specific issues identified include:

- A lack of capacity and competence
- A poor operating culture with a lack of respect and care for tenants
- Systemic problems in how the Council communicates and deals with tenants' concerns and complaints
- Weak performance management meaning senior managers did not have oversight of issues
- Poor use of data and intelligence by the Council and its contractors

In response, we have produced the Croydon Housing Improvement Plan to set out a clear set of objectives and actions that will address these problems and improve services across the new Housing Directorate. The Housing Improvement Plan addresses the seven recommendations for improvement listed in the ARK investigation:

1. Establish clear governance arrangements to provide strategic leadership to the service.
2. Undertake a forward-looking skills gap analysis.
3. Implement a development programme to ensure all staff consistently demonstrate the attitudinal and behavioural competences need to support the Council's values and shape its culture.
4. Strengthen the Council's capacity, competence and commitment to tenant involvement through training and development of staff and councillors.
5. Develop 'business intelligence' systems that allow the Council to collect and share real-time information on asset condition and performance (including from the contractor).
6. Conduct a fundamental review of performance management arrangements.
7. Make improvements to complaints handling in line with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

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### **2. What difference will this make?**

In establishing this Improvement Plan, the Council is setting out a vision that enshrines learning lessons from the past and providing safe homes for our tenants and leaseholders.

We aim to provide residents with homes that are safe, warm and dry, and that they are proud to call home. In doing so, we will always aim to treat them with respect and dignity, and listen to their voices, irrespective of race, disability or any other protected characteristic. We will seek to ensure that our contractors do the same. We will aim to measure the things that are important to our residents. We will aim to provide services that offer good value for money.

In order to deliver on this commitment, we know that we need to change the culture of the organisation so that we become more focused on the needs of residents. We will need to put resident engagement at the heart of what we do. We will need to build organisational capacity and competence, and work in partnership with our contractors.

In doing this we will be guided by, and aim to be in compliance with, the four consumer standards set out by the Regulator of Social Housing:

- Home Standard
- Tenancy Standard
- Neighbourhood & Community Standard
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard

This change cannot happen overnight, but progress must be demonstrable and visible. If we deliver the outcomes of this Plan successfully, residents will find it much easier to get the services they need from their landlord. These services should also be delivered in a timely manner and to a good standard - and we know that our responsive repairs service is a resident priority for improvement.

All residents should feel that they have the opportunity to have their voices heard in the management of their homes. When we get things wrong, complaints must be dealt with in line with the requirements of the Housing Ombudsman, and we must act swiftly to put things right. We must also invest in resident homes to maintain and improve them - not only for our current occupants, but also for future generations.

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### 3. Work to date

Since spring 2021, considerable work has already taken place to lay the foundations for this Plan. As well as basing this Plan on the recommendations of the ARK report, we have listened to the voices of our tenants and leaseholders, councillors, staff, and the independent Housing Improvement Board.

At Regina Road, the worst affected households have either been moved, or approved for a move and are currently waiting for a suitable property to become vacant. An extensive programme of repairs, including fire safety works, has been carried out and further repairs are planned in the immediate future. Detailed surveys of all blocks have been undertaken and shared with residents. A resident reference group has been established to discuss longer term investment plans and the future of the estate.

Previously fragmented elements of the housing service have been brought together into a unified Housing Department and a Corporate Director for Housing has been appointed. A new top-level management structure is in place. Housing staff have run a major exercise of door-knocking and roadshows to gather the views of residents.

Performance reporting has been improved and regular reports are submitted to the Council's Cabinet. Performance in relation to compliance with health and safety requirements is prominent in this improvement. Improvements in governance and contract management have been put in place.

Drafts of this Plan have been widely discussed with stakeholders including the Council's Streets, Environment and Homes Scrutiny Sub Committee and the Housing Improvement Board. Their feedback has helped shape the Plan.

As a result of this feedback, we have organised the Plan into five clear Areas of Focus:

- Vision and Governance
- Customer Service and Resident Engagement
- Repairs and Safety
- Improving Your Homes
- Our Workforce

For each Area of Focus, we have set out our desired outcomes, the key milestones on the way to delivering those outcomes, and suggested metrics for measuring progress in that area.

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### **4. Resident engagement**

In delivering the outcomes required by this Plan, resident engagement must be placed at the heart of our landlord service. This means that we must expand and improve our resident engagement structures and processes to enable tenants and leaseholders to set priorities, shape policies and co-design improvements to the service. Feedback from our satisfaction surveys will be central to assessing the progress of our services and the success of this Plan.

In order for this to be successful, we will need to significantly improve the way we provide information about services to our residents, via whichever channels work best for them.

In developing and delivering the Plan, we also need to build upon the excellent work already done by residents as part of the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel, Performance Monitoring Group, and Resident Scrutiny Panel, especially in relation to voids processes and developing a Residents Charter.

### **5. Equalities**

The Council is committed to treating all of our residents with respect and dignity irrespective of race, disability or any other protected characteristic. This commitment needs to be reflected in the delivery of all aspects of this Plan.

Ensuring all council tenants and leaseholders are treated with respect and empathy must align with the council's statutory responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. No council tenant or leaseholder should feel discriminated against on the basis of their race, religion, age or gender. The impact of the Plan on council tenants with protected characteristics will be scrutinised and regularly assessed to promote equality. The Housing service must be tailored to reflect the diverse community it serves.

Where compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation, this will mean looking at the outcomes of our services by protected characteristics. Where required, we will prepare Equality Impact Assessments in respect of major service changes.

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### 6. Dependencies and interdependencies

The various areas of focus set out in this plan interact with other to a considerable extent and will only be effective in improving the housing service if they working together as a coherent, integrated set of processes and people working across the Housing service as one team. Furthermore, there are a number of key activities that sit outside of this Plan which will have a significant impact on the desired outcomes of the Plan:

**Mayoral election** - the move to an elected Mayor in May 2022 will be a key moment in the development of this Plan. The Mayor will no doubt wish to continue to shape the Housing directorate and the development of this Plan.

**Croydon Renewal Plan** - the Housing Improvement Plan must be read as an important element of the wider Croydon Renewal Plan.

**ICT** - the Plan references the move towards adopting the new NEC Housing IT System. This is a major project in its own right. As the Plan develops, we will also need to address the Housing aspects of an evolving Croydon Digital Strategy.

**Recruitment** - the recruitment and retention of key housing staff has been a significant challenge for the Council. If we are unable to recruit and retain housing staff in the future, this will constitute an obstacle to the delivery of the Plan.

**Housing Revenue Account** – Money has been set aside in the 22/23 HRA budget to fund compliance with the Building Safety Bill. The delivery of the other objectives of the Plan must either be achieved within existing resources or become a draw on HRA Reserves. The Housing Improvement Board will be kept advised as to any spending over and above existing resources.

**Procurement** – The Plan will involve significant procurement work and the results of this will obviously be influenced by the condition of the market.

**Public Health** – Whilst there is no specific public health workstream within the Plan, the enormous impact of housing on health is recognised by the Council. Alignment of this work with wider public health objective is therefore essential.

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### 7. Area of Focus: Vision & Governance

In order to deliver a high standard of service to our tenants and leaseholders, it is essential that we have a clear vision that is understood by all our staff. We also need strong governance arrangements that align with the Council's wider governance requirements and link to other key stakeholder such as tenants and leaseholders, and the Regulator for Social Housing.

Our governance must be supported by accurate performance management information that fulfils a dual purpose.

- 1) It measures how we run our business in line with the targets and objectives we set for ourselves; and,
- 2) It also captures how, as a landlord, we meet expectations of our tenants and leaseholders. Likewise, financial reporting needs to be comprehensive, accurate and sufficiently transparent to allow tenant and leaseholder scrutiny.

#### **Outcomes**

- A comprehensive vision to guide staff
- Strong governance around everything we do
- A trusted performance management system which provides assurance
- Transparent and accurate financial reporting

#### **Milestones and metrics**

<b>A comprehensive vision to guide staff</b>	
Initial statement of values made to the Regulator of Social Housing and communicated to staff	March 2022
Delivery of strategy and service plan for the Department, which sets out the way forward	April 2022
New operating model approved by Cabinet	January 2023
<i>Associated Metric:</i> Staff understand the objectives of the Council and their role in delivering them – as measured through annual staff survey	

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<b>Strong governance around everything we do</b>	
Internal governance statement that captures relevant controls and stakeholder involvement	March 2022
Housing Improvement Plan finalised and approved	March 2022
Regulator of Social Housing determination of compliance with Tenancy and Homes Standards	Mid-2023
<i>Associated Metric:</i> None. Compliance will be set out in an annual governance statement submitted to Internal Audit	

<b>A trusted performance management system which provides assurance</b>	
Policy & Performance Team established to lead work	May 2022
Refreshed set of indicators agreed with Tenant & Leaseholder Panel	September 2022
Accuracy of data and systems used for performance indicators audited	March 2023
<i>Associated Metric:</i> None. Success to be determined by sign-off of management information reports by Tenant & Leaseholder Panel	

<b>Transparent and accurate financial reporting</b>	
Refreshed Housing Revenue Account Business Plan approved by Cabinet	March 2022
Review of Tenant Service Charges to establish accuracy and transparency	October 2022
Regular financial reports made accessible to all tenants and leaseholders for scrutiny	November 2022
<i>Associated Metric:</i> None. Success to be determined by sign-off of financial reports by Tenant & Leaseholder Panel.	

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### 8. Area of Focus: Customer Service & Resident Engagement

The overarching aim of the Housing Improvement Plan is to improve the Council's landlord services for our tenants and leaseholders. We have devised a work stream which will improve our customer services and engage tenants and leaseholders in our improvement plans.

Tenant and leaseholder satisfaction with the Council's housing services will enable the Council to assess whether the Improvement Plan has been effective. Improvements to our 'front-door' and engaging residents to co-design these improvements will be crucial.

#### **Outcomes**

- Residents find it easy to contact us
- Resident engagement is at the heart of all we do
- All residents are provided with the information they need
- Compliance with complaints handling requirements and best practice

#### **Milestones and metrics**

<b>Residents find it easy to contact us</b>	
Revised policy on telephony contact developed and implemented	October 2022
Revised access and support offer for vulnerable tenants developed and implemented	October 2022
Clear policy on digital contact and transactions developed and implemented	April 2023
<i>Associated metrics:</i> STAR tenant satisfaction survey ("how satisfied or dissatisfied are you that the housing service is easy to deal with?")	

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<b>Resident engagement is at the heart of all we do</b>	
Programme developed of resident engagement to ensure that we create opportunities for all tenants to tell us about and shape their experience of the housing service	October 2022
Resident engagement strategy developed around building safety in high-rise blocks	October 2022
Prepare for implementation of the Charter for Social Housing Residents (Social Housing White Paper)	March 2023
<i>Associated metric:</i> STAR tenant satisfaction survey	

<b>Provide all our residents with the information they need</b>	
Key information is advertised locally via estate and block noticeboards	April 2022
Comprehensive service information is available to residents on the Council's website	October 2022
Comprehensive service information is available via telephone, correspondence or in-person	October 2022
<i>Associated metric:</i> Audit of information through the Housing Scrutiny Panel	

<b>Compliance with complaints handling requirements and best practice</b>	
Full range of service standards co-created and co-produced with tenants and leaseholders	June 2022
Quality of responses to complaints is audited and analysed	July 2022
Learning from complaints is systematically used to improve services	October 2022
<i>Associated metric:</i> Number of complaints received and resident satisfaction with complaints handling	

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### 9. Area of Focus: Repairs & Safety

The Council's failings at Regina Road and the subsequent criticism set out in the ARK report were, first and foremost, the consequence of failings of our repairs processes. It is essential that the Council has a responsive repairs system that residents find easy to use and can deliver the required repairs on time and to a high standard.

This must be achieved within the context of forthcoming post-Grenfell building safety legislation that places considerable new statutory responsibilities on landlords. We also have to address the challenge of making the best use of our housing stock by turning around empty homes as quickly as possible.

#### **Outcomes**

- A system that makes reporting a repair easy
- Repairs done on time and right first time
- Full compliance with the Building Safety Act
- Quick turnaround of voids

#### **Milestones and metrics**

<b>A system that makes reporting a repair easy</b>	
Additional tenant and leaseholder engagement on repair contact	July 2022
Redesigned repairs reporting process	September 2022
NEC <sup>1</sup> Housing management solution implemented	November 2022
<i>Associated Metric:</i> 'Get through on first time' satisfaction rating and overall satisfaction rating with repairs	

<sup>1</sup> NEC is a housing management system provided by NEC Software Solutions.

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<b>Repairs done on time and right first time</b>	
Improvement plan with current contractor agreed and implemented	July 2022
Re-procurement of new tenant and leaseholder focused repairs contractor	June 2023
Start of new repairs contract	August 2023
<i>Associated Metrics:</i> Repairs completed first time and overall satisfaction with repairs	

<b>Full compliance with existing and upcoming safety regulations</b>	
Additional resource joins the building safety and compliance team	September 2022
Demonstrable satisfactory compliance within existing regulatory frameworks	March 2023
Demonstrable compliance with Fire Safety Act and Building Safety Act upon enactment ensured	May 2023
<i>Associated Metrics:</i> "Big six" main compliance indicators	

<b>Quick turnaround of voids</b>	
Complete benchmarking review to establish best practice	September 2022
Completed business process re-engineering review of void management building upon resident task and finish and scrutiny recommendations	December 2022
NEC Housing Reports available to support decision making	December 2022
<i>Associated Metric:</i> Key-to-key turnaround in calendar days	

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### 10. Area of Focus: Improving Your Homes

Over the next 30 years, the Council expects to invest almost £750m in its housing stock. It is essential that the Council is able to prioritise and direct this investment as efficiently as possible and obtain good value for money. As part of this process, it is important that the Council develops and implements business systems that enable collection and sharing of real-time information on asset condition and performance, in order to improve the management of repairs and drive better investment decisions. We must utilise all available data to develop a cost-effective plan for improving the housing stock to ensure homes are safe, warm and dry.

#### **Outcomes**

- Confidence in our stock data and our ability to utilise it
- A robust Asset Management Strategy
- Fit-for-purpose vehicles for delivering investment
- Robust arrangements for managing capital delivery contractors to drive satisfaction and value for money

#### **Milestones and metrics**

<b>Confidence in our stock data and our ability to utilise it</b>	
Capacity within the team to analyse and audit data	June 2022
NEC Housing System go-live	November 2022
Receive next tranche of stock condition data	January 2023
<i>Associated Metric:</i> Number of non-decent homes as per statutory return	

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<b>A robust Asset Management Strategy</b>	
Draft Asset Management Strategy available for resident consultation	October 2022
Resident consultation complete	December 2022
Strategy approved by Full Council	January 2023
<i>Associated Metric:</i> None	

<b>Fit-for-purpose vehicles for delivering investment</b>	
Completed review of existing capital delivery vehicles	June 2023
Agreement as to future procurement needs and strategy	September 2023
Additional procurement complete	September 2024
<i>Associated Metric:</i> Resident satisfaction with major repairs to their homes	

<b>Robust arrangements for managing capital delivery contractors to drive resident satisfaction and value for money</b>	
Complete review of Housing contract management processes	July 2022
Review external contract support arrangements	October 2022
Revised contract management process and structure in place	TBC
<i>Associated Metric:</i> Resident satisfaction with major repairs to their homes	

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### 11. Area of Focus: Our Workforce

Everything we do will be determined by the quality and motivation of our workforce. We need to ensure that we recruit and retain the best possible staff, and we want to ensure that the composition of our workforce- at all levels of the organisation- reflects that of the community we serve. The ARK report was highly critical of the culture within the housing service and this must be addressed.

We want our staff to be highly motivated and have the right tools to do the jobs being asked of them. And this can only be achieved if we have good quality leaders and managers who can give staff the support they need and model the behaviours required by the organisation.

#### **Outcomes**

- A resident-focused and performance-oriented service
- Housing staff have the right skills, capacity, capability and tools to effectively perform their role
- Accountable and resilient leadership and management
- A diverse and talented workforce reflective of the community it serves

#### **Milestones and metrics**

<b>A resident-focussed and performance-oriented service</b>	
Values-based, customer service focused behavioural framework developed and implemented	September 2022
Staff survey culture recommendations for housing directorate implemented	April 2023
Refreshed performance management framework, appraisals and 1-2-1s implemented and monitored	October 2022
<i>Associated Metrics:</i> Tenant and leaseholder satisfaction with staff interaction – as measured through STAR survey. Staff survey questions on organisational culture	

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<b>Housing staff have the right skills, capability and tools to effectively perform their role</b>	
Staff skills audit completed	June 2022
Comprehensive learning & development programme developed and delivered	February 2023
Impact of learning & development interventions programme measured	June 2023
<i>Associated Metrics:</i> Staff feel equipped to do the jobs required of them – as measured through annual staff survey	

<b>Accountable and resilient leadership and management</b>	
Leadership and management behaviours and skills audit completed	July 2022
Capability interventions to equip all levels of management with skills, tools and behavioural frameworks to effectively lead their teams are implemented	December 2022
Compliance with new behavioural frameworks is measured	April 2023
<i>Associated Metrics:</i> Staff understand the objectives of the Council and feel supported by their managers to deliver them	

<b>A diverse and talented workforce reflective of the community it serves</b>	
Comprehensive data on workforce composition and gap analysis is collected	May 2022
Workforce Plan to address recruitment and retention challenges is updated	October 2022
Systems developed and implemented where housing staff can share their views and regularly be heard	October 2022
<i>Associated Metric:</i> Our workforce data – reporting format still to be confirmed.	

