

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet Housing Committee – 1 April 2026

Housing Improvement Programme Update

Accountable member:

Cllr Flo Clucas, Cabinet Member for Housing and Customer Services

Accountable officer:

Claire Hughes, Director of Governance, Housing and Communities

Executive summary:

This report provides a quarterly update on the Council's Housing Improvement Programme, which brings together the actions required to demonstrate compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing consumer standards.

Since the previous report in January 2026, the Council commissioned Housing Quality Network (HQN) to undertake an independent mock inspection to assess readiness for regulatory inspection. The inspection included a review of documentation, interviews with officers and Members, engagement with tenant representatives and observation of governance arrangements.

HQN concluded that Cheltenham Borough Council demonstrates strong leadership, governance and organisational awareness supported by a well-structured improvement programme and positive engagement from staff, Members and tenants.

The review confirmed strong progress in key areas including safety compliance, tenant engagement and performance monitoring. Tenant satisfaction measures relating to property services and repairs compare favourably with sector peers.

The mock inspection also identified areas where further work is required to strengthen compliance and supporting evidence.

HQN identified 25 improvement actions which are now being incorporated into the Housing Improvement Programme action plans, although many of them were areas that had already been identified. Key areas of focus include continuing to strengthen our stock condition data, improving reporting of repairs and safety activity, increasing the visibility of neighbourhood services and improving access to tenant information, specifically updating the council's website.

Overall, the programme continues to make strong progress. Governance arrangements and programme board oversight are supporting delivery across the four consumer standards and preparing the Council for inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing.

Recommendations:

1. That the Cabinet Housing Committee notes the progress reported in this update.
 2. That the Cabinet Housing Committee notes the findings of the HQN mock inspection and the incorporation of the additional improvement actions into the Housing Improvement Programme.
 3. That the Cabinet Housing Committee notes the programme's next phase of activity to strengthen inspection readiness.
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1 Background

1.1 This report provides an update to the Committee on the Council's Housing Improvement Programme.

1.2 The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 introduced strengthened consumer regulation including new consumer standards which came into effect on 1 April 2024.

1.3 The Regulator of Social Housing now operates a proactive inspection regime. Following inspection, landlords receive a grading from C1 to C4, where C1 indicates full compliance and effective delivery of outcomes and C4 indicates significant failings.

1.4 The Council established the Housing Improvement Programme to secure compliance with the consumer standards and provide assurance to Members, tenants and leaseholders.

1.5 The programme also supports the Council's ambition to achieve a C1 regulatory judgement.

1.6 Since the previous report the Council commissioned an independent mock inspection delivered by Housing Quality Network (HQN) to test inspection readiness and identify any remaining gaps in compliance.

2 Governance

2.1 The Housing Improvement Programme continues to be overseen by the Housing Improvement Team which operates as the programme board.

2.2 The board includes subject matter specialists, workstream leads and the programme project manager and meets monthly to:

- review progress against each workstream action plan
- consider risks, issues and interdependencies
- ensure alignment with the Council's digital road map and data improvement activity.

2.3 The programme remains structured around the four consumer standards:

- Safety and Quality
- Transparency Influence and Accountability
- Neighbourhood and Community
- Tenancy

2.4 Each workstream is led by a designated officer who is responsible for:

- delivery of the workstream action plan
- maintaining a clear and consistent evidence base
- reporting progress through monthly highlight reports to the programme board.

2.5 Updates are provided to this Committee on a quarterly basis and also shared with the Tenant Panel and Leaseholder Panel to support tenant scrutiny and engagement

3. HQN Mock Inspection

3.1 In February 2026 the Council commissioned Housing Quality Network (HQN) to undertake a mock inspection of the Council's housing services.

3.2 The process included:

- a review of strategies, policies, compliance information and the Council's self-assessment
- interviews with officers and Members
- engagement with tenant representatives
- observation of governance arrangements including programme board activity and Cabinet reporting.

3.3 HQN concluded that the Council demonstrates strong leadership, governance and organisational awareness, supported by a well-structured improvement programme and strong engagement from Members, officers and tenants.

3.4 The review confirmed that the Council is making significant progress across the consumer standards but also highlighted areas where further work is required to strengthen compliance and evidence.

3.5 The review identified 25 improvement actions, which are being incorporated into the Housing Improvement Programme action plans, although many of them were areas that had already been identified.

4 Progress Against the Programme

Overall, the programme continues to make good progress across the four consumer standards with workstreams focusing on closing actions, strengthening evidence and addressing the findings of the mock inspection.

4.1 Safety and Quality

The Safety and Quality workstream has made significant progress in strengthening safety governance and compliance arrangements.

Key developments include:

- improved governance arrangements and oversight of property safety compliance
- progress in addressing damp and mould issues
- improved monitoring of safety compliance activity including the "big six" compliance areas
- stabilisation of the property services team which is delivering the action plan at pace.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures relating to property services compare favourably with sector peers, including strong results for tenants feeling safe in their homes.

However, the mock inspection identified some areas where further work is required including:

- continuing to strengthen stock condition intelligence
- improving visibility and reporting of health and safety remedial works
- improving the reporting of gas related repairs and safety data.

Currently around 80% of properties have stock condition survey information, with the remaining properties scheduled for survey completion by the end of 2026.

4.2 Transparency Influence and Accountability

This workstream continues to demonstrate strong performance.

Key strengths identified through the mock inspection include:

- high levels of tenant satisfaction through Tenant Satisfaction Measures
- strong engagement arrangements with tenants and leaseholders
- clear governance structures enabling tenant influence in housing policy and decision making
- clear communication with tenants through newsletters and the annual report.

Areas identified for improvement include:

- improving accessibility and navigation of the Council's housing website
- updating the tenant handbook
- strengthening analysis of tenant satisfaction data to better understand the experience of different groups of tenants.

4.3 Neighbourhood and Community

Progress continues across neighbourhood services and estate management activity.

Strengths identified include:

- strong partnership working with local statutory and voluntary organisations to support tenants
- joint working to address antisocial behaviour and community safety issues
- programmes supporting tenants with financial hardship, wellbeing and access to services.

However, the mock inspection identified that neighbourhood services remain an area for further development.

Key improvement areas include:

- strengthening estate service standards and inspection processes
- improving monitoring and follow up actions from estate inspections
- improving visibility of neighbourhood services and service standards to tenants.

4.4 Tenancy

The Tenancy workstream continues to make progress in strengthening tenancy management and tenant support services.

Key strengths include:

- strong tenancy sustainment support including access to financial advice, employment support and family support services
- clear processes for identifying and supporting tenants at risk of tenancy failure
- effective partnership working with voluntary and statutory organisations.

Areas for improvement include:

- addressing long void turnaround times
- strengthening reporting on allocations and lettings outcomes
- improving the evidence base demonstrating the impact of tenancy sustainment support.

5 Key risks

The mock inspection highlighted a number of areas where further improvement is required to strengthen compliance and inspection readiness.

5.1 Stock condition data

The mock inspection identified the importance of strengthening stock condition data to support compliance with the Safety and Quality Standard. Work is under way to complete surveys for the remaining properties and strengthen asset management intelligence.

5.2 Performance reporting

Although tenant satisfaction with repairs performance is strong, improvements are required to ensure performance reporting includes all relevant activity including gas related repairs.

5.3 Neighbourhood services

Tenant satisfaction relating to neighbourhood services is slightly lower than other service areas. Work is under way to strengthen estate management standards and monitoring.

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Housing Improvement Programme Project Manager

Appendices:

- I. Programme Progress by workstream
- II. Risk Assessment

Appendix 1: Programme Progress by Workstream

Workstream	Total actions	% complete Jan 2026	% complete March 2026	Expected % complete Jun 2026
Safety and Quality	63	27%	51%	75%
Neighbourhood and Community	48	50%	81%	90%
Tenancy	56	48%	86%	100%
Transparency Influence and Accountability	89	61%	76%	90%
Programme overall	256	48%	72%	88%

As at March 2026 the programme is 72% complete across the four consumer standards, demonstrating continued progress since the January update.

Appendix 2: Risk Assessment

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
R1	If stock condition data is incomplete or outdated, then asset investment decisions may be poorly informed, and regulatory compliance may be compromised	Technical and Investment Operations Manager	4	3	12	Reduce the risk	Programme to complete remaining stock condition surveys and improve asset data quality and reporting	Technical and Investment Team	December 2026
R2	If repairs and safety reporting does not capture all activity, then the council may be unable to demonstrate effective service oversight and compliance with safety requirements	Repairs and Maintenance Operations manager	4	3	12	Reduce the risk	Strengthen reporting framework to include all repair types including gas related works and improve performance monitoring	Repairs and Maintenance Team	September 2026
R3	If neighbourhood services are not effectively managed, then tenant satisfaction may decline and the council may fail to meet regulatory standards for neighbourhood and	Tenancy Services Manager	3	4	12	Reduce the risk	Develop neighbourhood policy and estate service standards and introduce stronger inspection and follow up monitoring	Tenancy Services Team	October 2026

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	communal areas								
R4	If evidence of compliance is incomplete or not clearly documented, then the council may be unable to demonstrate regulatory compliance during inspection	Programme Lead Consumer Standards	5	3	15	Reduce the risk	Strengthen evidence base through programme board oversight, maintain evidence logs and deliver action plans to ensure inspection readiness	Consumer Standards Programme Lead	Ongoing to inspection