



Regulator of
Social Housing

Stevenage Borough Council (26UH) Regulatory Judgement

27 November 2024

Our Judgement

	Grade/Judgement	Change	Date of assessment
Consumer	C2 Our judgement is that there are some weaknesses in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and improvement is needed.	First grading	November 2024

Reason for publication

We are publishing a regulatory judgement for Stevenage Borough Council (Stevenage BC) following an inspection completed in November 2024.

This regulatory judgement confirms a consumer grading of C2. This is the first time we have issued a consumer grade in relation to this landlord.

Summary of the decision

From the evidence and assurance gained during the inspection, we have concluded that there are some weaknesses in Stevenage BC delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards and improvement is needed, specifically in relation to outcomes in our Safety and Quality Standard and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard. Based on this assessment, we have concluded a C2 grade for Stevenage BC.

How we reached our judgement

We carried out an inspection of Stevenage BC to assess how well Stevenage BC is delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards, as part of our planned regulatory inspection programme. During the inspection we considered all four of the consumer standards: Neighbourhood and Community Standard, Safety and Quality Standard, Tenancy Standard, and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

During the inspection we observed the housing board and a tenant workshop. We also met with tenants, officers and elected members including the leader of Stevenage BC, and the portfolio holder for housing. We also reviewed a wide range of documents provided by Stevenage BC.

Our regulatory judgement is based on all the relevant information we obtained during the inspection as well as analysis of information received from Stevenage BC through routine regulatory returns and other regulatory engagement activity.

Summary of findings

Consumer – C2

November 2024

In relation to the Safety and Quality Standard, Stevenage BC provided evidence-based assurance that it has appropriate systems in place to manage its health and safety responsibilities and to ensure the health and safety of its tenants in their homes and associated communal areas. Stevenage BC is meeting statutory health and safety testing and surveying requirements, and performance is monitored by senior officers and councillors. We identified that reporting did not include remedial actions that have arisen from testing and surveying and this has been fed back to Stevenage BC. Stevenage BC has more than 900 overdue remedial actions from fire risk assessments, mostly categorised as medium risk actions. Stevenage BC has provided evidence of plans to complete the actions and is being supported by an external contractor to complete these following a risk-based approach. We will continue to monitor completion of the actions through our ongoing engagement with Stevenage BC.

Stevenage BC has demonstrated that it provides an effective repairs service to tenants and takes action to improve service and outcomes for tenants when issues occur. Stevenage BC identified issues with the quality of its repairs service and time taken to complete repairs. In response, Stevenage BC has made changes to the repairs service to deliver better outcomes for its tenants. We have seen evidence of the effectiveness of the improvement plans, Stevenage BC is now performing above its service standard for the timeliness of repairs, and tenant satisfaction is improving.

Stevenage BC has also developed its approach to damp and mould so that it can respond effectively to reports and manage risks to tenants.

The Safety and Quality Standard also requires landlords to have an accurate, up to date and evidenced, understanding of the condition of its homes at an individual property level based on a physical assessment of all homes and to ensure that homes meet the requirements of the Decent Homes Standard. There is evidence that arrangements are in place to make sure there is an accurate record of the condition of Stevenage BC's homes, including a process for keeping this information up to date through a programme of physical inspections. There is evidence that Stevenage BC uses the information it has on the quality and safety of its homes to make decisions on future investment to maintain and improve the condition of its homes.

The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard includes the requirement for landlords to provide information so tenants can access landlord services, understand what to expect from their landlord, and hold their landlord to account. It also requires landlords to ensure complaints are addressed fairly, effectively, and promptly. Through our inspection, we found that there are weaknesses in Stevenage BC providing meaningful opportunities for tenants to influence and scrutinise its strategies, policies and services. During our engagement, we found that Stevenage BC provided limited performance information to tenants. Stevenage BC acknowledges that this is an area that needs to be improved and has recently established a resident engagement strategy and increased resources to deliver the strategy. Stevenage BC has engaged external support to develop tenant engagement. This work is ongoing, and we will continue to monitor how Stevenage BC is strengthening its approach to tenant engagement.

Through the inspection, we saw evidence that Stevenage BC had identified weaknesses in how it handles tenant complaints and made improvements as a result. We saw evidence that Stevenage BC undertakes work to understand why tenants complain and uses any learning from complaints to improve services for tenants. Stevenage BC identified a significant proportion of complaints related to repairs and the learning from these complaints was used to develop the repairs improvement programme. This has improved Stevenage BC's repairs performance and reduced the number of complaints from tenants about repairs.

Stevenage BC demonstrates a commitment to treating tenants with fairness and respect. Through our inspection, we identified there is scope for it to improve its use of tenant information that will strengthen Stevenage BC's ability to tailor services to tenants' individual needs and demonstrate outcomes for tenants.

In relation to the Neighbourhood and Community Standard, Stevenage BC demonstrated that it works proactively with a range of relevant partner organisations to deter and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where it provides

homes. We saw evidence that it has oversight of the number of anti-social behaviour cases and hate incidents and that it uses a range of powers where appropriate.

In relation to the Tenancy Standard, we saw evidence that Stevenage BC was offering tenancies or terms of occupation that were compatible with the purpose of its accommodation, the needs of individual households, the sustainability of the community, and the efficient use of its housing stock. Stevenage BC has recently revised its allocations policy that sets out its approach to ensuring all properties are let in a fair and transparent way and takes into account the needs of tenants and prospective tenants.

Stevenage BC demonstrated through the inspection that it understands where it needs to make improvements and we will engage with Stevenage BC as it makes improvements in these areas.

Background to the judgement

About the landlord

Stevenage BC owns and manages around 7,700 social housing homes in Hertfordshire. The majority of homes are general needs with some supported and sheltered housing.

Our role and regulatory approach

We regulate for a viable, efficient, and well governed social housing sector able to deliver quality homes and services for current and future tenants.

We regulate at the landlord level to drive improvement in how landlords operate. By landlord we mean a registered provider of social housing. These can either be local authorities, or private registered providers (other organisations registered with us such as non-profit housing associations, co-operatives, or profit-making organisations).

We set standards which state outcomes that landlords must deliver. The outcomes of our standards include both the required outcomes and specific expectations we set. Where we find there are significant failures in landlords which we consider to be material to the landlord's delivery of those outcomes, we hold them to account. Ultimately this provides protection for tenants' homes and services and achieves better outcomes for current and future tenants. It also contributes to a sustainable sector which can attract strong investment.

We have a different role for regulating local authorities than for other landlords. This is because we have a narrower role for local authorities and the Governance and Financial Viability Standard, and Value for Money Standard do not apply. Further detail on which standards apply to different landlords can be found on our [standards page](#).

We assess the performance of landlords through inspections and by reviewing data that landlords are required to submit to us. In-Depth Assessments (IDAs) were one of our previous assessment processes, which are now replaced by our new inspections programme from 1 April 2024. We also respond where there is an issue or a potential issue that may be material to a landlord's delivery of the outcomes of our standards. We publish regulatory judgements that describe our view of landlords' performance with our standards. We also publish grades for landlords with more than 1,000 social housing homes.

The Housing Ombudsman deals with individual complaints. When individual complaints are referred to us, we investigate if we consider that the issue may be material to a landlord's delivery of the outcomes of our standards.

For more information about our approach to regulation, please see [Regulating the standards](#).