

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 16th September 2025

Report by: Councillor Sue Nicholls

Report title: Scrutiny of Registered Providers'
Communications Methods

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

- This report discusses actions the Overview and Scrutiny Committee proposes to take to review methods used by registered providers of housing in the district, and the effectiveness of these methods, when they communicate with their tenants and customers, elected members dealing with constituent casework and council officers. Having conducted this review, the Overview and Scrutiny will be able to, should they wish, make recommendations regarding registered providers' means of communication to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods for her consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

- A) Approve the project plan at Appendix 1;**
- B) Approve the establishment of a task and finish group as outlined in the project plan.**

1.0 Background

- 1.1 East Herts is a non-stock holding authority. The council, however, has a duty to allocate homes by means of nominations to registered providers. To aid this, the council maintains a housing register of people eligible and qualifying for access to affordable

rented housing provided by registered providers operating in the district.

- 1.2 There are 40 registered providers operating in East Herts with a total of over 9,700 homes between them.
- 1.3 The council has limited control over how registered providers (also known as housing associations) manage their homes and their communication with their customers, elected members and other stakeholders. Communications are key to resolving issues and the experience of tenants.
- 1.4 The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) regulates registered social housing providers. The RSH is a stand-alone non-departmental public body of government. The Regulator of Social Housing sets consumer and economic standards for social housing providers and can act if these are breached. Individual complaints about social housing providers can be made to the Housing Ombudsman Service.

2.0 Purpose of the Review

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have identified a need to scrutinise how registered providers communicate with their customers, elected members and councils and, importantly, how effective or otherwise these methods are. Members have told officers that they have received a considerable number of enquiries from tenants about the difficulty contacting their landlord, with many members experiencing similar problems.
- 2.2 It is worth bearing in mind that registered providers are inspected by the RSH in terms of how they communicate and engage with their customers and other stakeholders, as part of the nationally set Consumer Standards. This exercise is not intended to under the work of the RSH but instead to aid registered providers in reviewing and strengthening their communication processes, recognising the important role elected members and council officers also have in supporting residents.
- 2.3 Implicit in the emphasis placed in the council's Housing Strategy 2022-2027 on providing and enabling '*support for our most vulnerable residents*', is the council's ambition that all registered providers operating in East Herts have excellent customer care

ratings and so the council wishes to support providers to meet this aim through sharing best practice and establishing mechanisms for improved communication where this would benefit customers.

2.4 This scrutiny exercise seeks to examine how registered providers operating within East Herts communicate with their customers and with the council. The aims are to identify:

- areas for improvement by housing associations and/or the council
- examples of best practice that can be shared among housing associations
- potential issues for lobbying national bodies, such as regulators or government, to improve housing association communications.

3.0 Progress and Future Steps

3.1 The project plan is shown as **Appendix 1** to this report and outlines the timeline to deliver the objectives in 2.4.

3.2 Work has commenced. An initial survey of registered providers has been developed and information gathering on current practices and processes, areas of good practice and any gaps has started.

3.3 It is proposed that the information gathered from registered providers will be shared at a task and finish group and for this group to make recommendations to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It is proposed that to facilitate the development of the task and finish group, Overview and Scrutiny Committee agree a chair and the chair agrees the task and finish group membership and leads the work programme for this group. It is proposed that the task and finish group would consider the information from the register provider and council officer surveys and may request further information from registered providers, council officers or other stakeholders to inform their recommendations as required.

3.4 We anticipate an update report to the Overview and Scrutiny in November with a final report coming to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2026 which will provide an update on the findings and recommendations identified.

- 3.5 The findings and recommendations will be presented to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods for consideration.

4.0 Reason(s)

- 4.1 This report has been prepared as a direct response to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's wish to review the effectiveness of communication between registered providers, their customers, elected members and the council.

5.0 Options

- 5.1 To not undertake a review of potential opportunities for improved communications – NOT RECOMMENDED. The review into registered provider communication is within the remit of Overview and Scrutiny, in line with their role to represent the interests of residents.

6.0 Risks

- 6.1 The remit of Overview and Scrutiny is to help review and improve services and functions run by the council and its local partners. Therefore, there is no risk associated with this review.

7.0 Implications/Consultations

- 7.1 Community Safety
a) Yes – the purpose of this review is to improve communication and customer experience and therefore would have a positive impact in terms of community safety as would ensure customer concerns are responded to at the earliest opportunity, preventing escalation of issues.
- 7.2 Data Protection
a) Yes – legislation prohibits disclosure of personal information. Those taking part in this work would be reminded that no personal information should be shared in the process of the review and guidance provided about the depersonalisation of data

- 7.3 Equalities
a) Yes – the purpose of this review is to improve communication and therefore would have a positive impact on customer service standards. This is particularly important for groups who find communication more challenging. This review will consider equalities issues in the recommendations made.
- 7.4 Environmental Sustainability
a) None arising directly from this report.
- 7.5 Financial
a) None arising directly from this report.
- 7.6 Health and Safety
a) None arising directly from this report.
- 7.7 Human Resources
a) None arising directly from this report.
- 7.8 Human Rights
a) None arising directly from this report.
- 7.9 Legal
a) None arising directly from this report.
- 7.10 Specific Wards
a) None arising directly from this report.

8.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

6.1 Background Information: None

6.2 Appendices
Appendix A - Project Plan
Appendix B - Questionnaire

Contact Member

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