

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: Tuesday 20 January 2026

Report by: Councillor Sue Nicholls, Chair of Task and Finish Group

Report title: Scrutiny of Registered Providers' Communications Methods

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

- This is a report from the task and finish group agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review communication methods used by Registered Providers of housing in the district. This report makes recommendations for improvements to be put to the Executive for consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

- Consider and amend if required the recommendations made by the appointed Task and Finish Group found at paragraph 2.1; and**
- Agree that the recommendations at paragraph 2.1, subject to any amendments, be forwarded to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods for consideration prior to the Executive Member's onward recommendations to the Executive.**

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed on the 16 September 2025 to establish a task and finish group to review the methods of communication used by Registered Providers (housing associations) to engage with their tenants, elected members and council officers. This area of scrutiny was driven by a wish to

identify actions that could result in tangible improvements to residents.

- 1.2 Task and Finish Group meetings were held on 29 October 2025, 17 November 2025, 4 December 2025 and 6 January 2026. Minutes for these meeting are shown in Appendix A.
- 1.3 There was varied engagement from registered providers, with some engaging fully in the process, others providing information to inform the recommendations made and some organisations not engaging. This highlighted the difficulties with communication experienced by some residents and members, which prompted this scrutiny exercise.
- 1.4 The Task and Finish Group were impressed with the information that was shared through the process by those who engaged. The Task and Finish Group expressed that the process had provided them with a greater understanding of the processes used by Registered Providers, the council and partners to provide services and support residents. Many examples of best practice were shared, and these have been used to inform the recommendations.
- 1.5 Scope for improvements in communication between the council and Citizens Advice Bureau were also identified during this work. This issue was outside of the remit of this review as were not specifically about housing services. Therefore, recommendations in terms of this area have not been included in this report but are being taken forward separately.
- 1.6 The Task and Finish Group also discussed how internal communications between council officers and members could be improved. There was discussion about if/when direct contact might be appropriate and the group suggested guidance on this. This was also felt to be outside of the remit of this review but proposed a future review into the effectiveness of member enquiries processes to consider this.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Task and Finish Group identified a range of recommendations which were felt would improve communications

between Registered Providers, members and officers of the council.

These recommendations were divided into the key themes of contact information, information and training and on-going communication and engagement:

Theme - Contact Information	
Aim	Recommendation/s
1. Provide registered provider contacts for ward members and others, to assist with case work efficiency and effectiveness	<p>Registered Providers to be asked to confirm up-to-date contact details for member enquiries. This would preferably include a neighbourhood management contact to provide the opportunity of relationship building at an estate level.</p> <p>Provide officers with up to date/dedicated contact details</p> <p>Consider also making this list available to Citizens' Advice to help improve communication and advocacy on behalf of tenants</p>
2. Ensure residents have appropriate and up to date contact details for their providers to ensure that they are able to seek advice and support with any issues that they might have.	<p>Work with Registered Providers to update housing association contacts for residents on East Herts website to ensure these are current.</p> <p>Ensure reasonable adjustments are made so that these details are available for everyone who needs them</p>
3. Assist members with the identification of which registered providers manage specific areas	<p>Produce a list of housing providers that have stock in the district, broken down into individual wards</p> <p>Explore if work can be undertaken to map housing providers in East Herts with links to their websites, as used for Arts in East Herts</p>
4. Reduce multiple service specific	Work towards establishing and maintaining a shareable, centrally held spreadsheet of

contact lists for register provider contacts held by different council departments	property ownership and contacts details for Registered Providers operating in East Herts. Make sure that up to date and relevant information is easily accessible to different departments and registered provider partners to improve information gathering and communication. This will serve to reduce duplication and the need for internal sharing of details between different officers and departments.
5. Proactively establish good working relationships with providers new to East Herts	Require that appropriate and relevant contact details are provided by Registered Providers to enable them to engage effectively with key council services and members as early in the process as possible, setting expectations around this in as formal a way as is practicable.
Theme- Information and Training	
Aim	Recommendation
6. Help members to provide residents with the best support community concerns such as antisocial behaviour	<p>Provide advice to members about complaints standards and escalation processes which are common to all registered providers, including the role of the Ombudsman and advice about identifying if council officers are already aware of an issue to reduce duplication</p> <p>Provide advice/training on when it is appropriate to contact departments directly to discuss case work concerning registered providers and when it is preferable to use the members' Infreemation service</p> <p>Provide relevant contact details for different departments as necessary</p>
7. Ensure housing providers are aware of the processes in East Herts to support with community concerns like antisocial behaviour	Provide information and/or training to housing providers highlighting the partnership processes and services available in East Herts which they can access to help them support their tenants and deal with community concerns in a coordinated way

8. Increase the understanding of tenants about the standards they should expect	Review East Herts Council's website content, particularly considering changes under Renters' Rights Act, to provide clearer guidance to tenants and landlords about their rights and obligations. This work is already in progress and Task and Finish Group members would like to be involved in this work as it develops
Theme- Ongoing Communication and Engagement	
Aim	Recommendation
9. Provide all registered providers opportunities to engage with East Herts Council to develop and consolidate relationships	<p>Consider developing a regular newsletter to all Registered Providers with housing stock in East Herts sharing information of interest to them about the council, including details of ward members and key officer contacts.</p> <p>It is also recommended that details of this review are shared with Registered Providers and asks for their comments and suggestions about opportunities to further improve communication</p>
10. Make residents aware that improving communication is a priority	Communicate information about this review via the council's website and other means for those who are digitally excluded

2.2 It is proposed that Overview and Scrutiny Committee support these recommendations to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods.

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 The Task and Finish Group has examined the evidence from a range of participants and developed recommendations in line with this evidence

4.0 Options

4.1 Accept the recommendations - RECOMMENDED for the reasons outlined above.

4.2 Not to accept the recommendations - NOT RECOMMENDED as the recommendations are being made to improve communications, which when not effective are a key driver of poor customer experience and dissatisfaction.

5.0 Risks

5.1 The remit of Overview and Scrutiny is to help review and improve services and functions run by the council and its local partners. A failure to consider ways to improve communications would be detrimental to members and tenants because this could result in reductions in the quality and effectiveness of services and poor customer experience. This can be mitigated by acting on all or some of the recommendations put forward at paragraph 2.1 of this report.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 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.

6.4 Environmental Sustainability

a) None arising directly from this report.

6.5 Financial

- a) None arising directly from this report.
- 6.6 Health and Safety
 - a) None arising directly from this report.
- 6.7 Human Resources
 - a) None arising directly from this report.
- 6.8 Human Rights
 - a) None arising directly from this report.
- 6.9 Legal
 - a) None arising directly from this report.
- 6.10 Specific Wards
 - a) None arising directly from this report.

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

- 7.1 Background Information: None
- 7.2 Appendices
 - a) Minutes from task and finish groups of 29 October 2025, 17 November 2025, 4 December 2025 and 6 January 2026.

Contact Member

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