



REPORT TO THE MEETING OF CABINET – 15 OCTOBER 2025

PORTFOLIO: PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HEALTH, WELLBEING AND HOUSING – CLLR R LILLIS

REPORT FROM INTERIM DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

SUBJECT: HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME UPDATE

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet with details of the current position relating to the Housing Improvement Programme. This report highlights the progress made since June 2025 against the core Regulatory Consumer Standards and the critical work being progressed to achieve compliance with the Big 6 compliance issues and damp and mould.

2 LINKS TO COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The Housing improvement Programme links to the Corporate Plan ambitions for:
- Healthier and safer communities - in providing quality, safe and healthy homes that also support vulnerable people and homes for the young and elderly;
 - Working for a prosperous future - supporting economic growth by providing a stable and sustainable housing base for residents to be employed locally, attend training and improve skills plus business opportunities for contractors; and
 - Restoring our Council to good health - by moving the Council out of Regulatory Judgement by the Regulator of Social Housing.

3 RECOMMENDATION

3.1 It is proposed that Cabinet **RESOLVES**

- (1) To note the contents of this report and in particular the ongoing reprofiling of the Housing Revenue Account budget for the next 10 years alongside the results of the stock condition surveys that form the Asset Management Plan.

4 INTRODUCTION

- 4.1 In November 2024 the Cabinet approved the establishment of a Housing Improvement Programme (HIP) and HIP Board in response to a C3 grading by the Regulator of Social Housing (the “Regulator”). In December 2024, the Regulator downgraded the Council’s housing services to C4 following an inspection in November 2024 and in response the Cabinet approved investment in additional resources into the service to ensure that it can deliver the changes required to meet the Regulator’s Consumer Standards at pace.
- 4.2 At that time the focus was on the priority deficiencies identified by the Regulator around health and safety compliance, tenant engagement and policies. That has been the priority of the investment made into the service.
- 4.3 This report follows the report to Cabinet on 18 June 2025 which detailed the significant progress made with the Housing Improvement Programme to that date.
- 4.4 Following a gap analysis to assess the Housing Service’s compliance against the Regulator’s Consumer Standards, the HIP has been expanded to include a Service Improvement Plan which will seek to rectify all known gaps in delivery across the entire service and create an estimated timeline for completion of those deliverables.
- 4.5 This has included a temporary change to the Housing Service’s management team to create additional capacity so that the pace of and capacity for the improvements to date can be maintained, which includes the completion of the Housing Service Review. In addition, decisions have been made on increasing the level of investment in the housing stock and accelerate work on repairs and maintenance to ensure all standards are being met.

5 PROGRESS

- 5.1 The following work has been completed or is underway in respect of service improvement activity.

Repairs and Maintenance

- 5.2 Working with MCP Property Services using established evidence-based Key Performance Indicator (KPI) data is demonstrating continued signs of improvement. ‘Work in progress’ numbers continue to be managed and positive feedback on services received continues to emerge from tenants.

Tenant Health and Safety

- 5.3 Compliance with the Big 6 compliance areas (Asbestos, Electrical, Fire, Gas, Lifts and Water Safety) continues to be delivered at pace with the delivery of a programme of required inspections now fully embedded in service delivery.
- 5.4 As of 1 September 2025, primary compliance with the Big 6 areas is at 100%. Remedial actions identified from required inspections are being progressed at pace.
- 5.5 Secondary compliance (sub-sets to the Big 6 such as smoke detection, CO² monitors, stairlifts, PAT testing) are in discovery phase with remedial action being taken as soon as identified.
- 5.6 New policies and procedures for Asbestos, Electrical, Fire, Gas, Lifts and Water Safety have been approved through Cabinet Member Authorisations and embedded into service delivery.
- 5.7 Quality assurance and verification has been embedded to ensure that the Council can be confident in the data reported.
- 5.8 A policy and procedure for managing reports of damp and mould has been approved by the Cabinet Member and embedded in service delivery since June 2025. The Council can be confident that the service is prepared for the introduction of Awaab's Law.
- 5.9 Review of current warden call systems in Sheltered Accommodation schemes, including fire alarms and door entry systems, with cost impacts of replacement is now complete. The necessary procurement phase is now underway. Subject to agreeing the preferred supplier, it is anticipated that the installation of the new warden call system and upgraded fire alarm system will be complete before the end of this financial year.
- 5.10 The full Stock Condition Survey programme commenced in May 2025 to form the basis for the long-term planned and preventive maintenance programme. The programme is expected to be minorly delayed due to access issues, with revised completion expected by the end of November 2025. It should be noted that by the end of October 2025, data received from completed stock condition surveys will effectively enable the Asset Management Plan and review of the HRA Business Plan to be completed accurately.
- 5.11 To support the delivery of the Housing Technical Services work relating to health and safety, a new and updated Resident Safety Information Leaflet (Appendix 1) has been created to support tenants and leaseholders to better understand health and safety issues relating to the Big 6 compliance areas and damp and mould.

Other Activity

- 5.12 The Housing Service Review involves a restructure of the service with employee consultation running between 11 September and 11 October 2025.

It is intended that the new structure will effectively deliver a housing service that is fully regulatory compliant, customer focused, data led and performance driven.

- 5.13 The HIP Board (HIPB) continues to meet monthly to monitor and challenge delivery of the Programme.
- 5.14 HQN continues to support the HIPB with its work plan and work associated with its critical friend role, to challenge and support the HIPB in understanding wider best practices.
- 5.15 The HIPB has also held discussions with Tpas, which is advising on how to establish far greater tenant involvement, which is now subject to the appropriate procurement process and Acuity, which advises on and undertakes the Tenant Satisfaction Measures surveys and reporting.
- 5.16 Significant progress has been made in respect of securing a full Housing Management System rather than having to rely on a single module procurement for rent accounting only. Detailed procurement and contract arrangements are at an advanced stage with the intention to ensure a preferred partner which will allow delivery of the full system by 31 March 2026. Further details and information will be provided to Members as the necessary procurement is concluded. Phase two of the Housing Management System will include the introduction of systems covering Asset Management, repairs and compliance.
- 5.17 Work continues in respect of other key elements of service improvement and compliance activity in the following areas:
- a) Review of Sheltered Housing facilities relating to furniture provision in communal areas, decorations, floor coverings, white goods and laundry equipment is in progress and being delivered in consultation with tenants and wardens.
 - b) The Council's Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) survey results for 2024-2025 were agreed and submitted to the Regulator of Social Housing online portal on 18 June 2025. Additional questions to support the delivery of the 2025-2026 TSM survey have been agreed with the first wave of surveys commencing in September 2025 and concluding in October 2025.
 - c) Review of policies, procedures and strategies continues at pace and reports seeking the necessary approvals will be presented either through the delegated authorisation process or through Cabinet, as required.
 - d) The Council has received a comprehensive tenant engagement framework from tenant engagement experts, Tpas, following their re-engineering engagement project. The Council is seeking to procure support from Tpas or another suitable alternative via the Council's procurement process to support the initial stages of embedding the framework with a particular focus on securing tenant representation at HIPB.

- e) Three editions of the Tenants' Newsletter have been distributed since February 2025 with the latest edition delivered in early September 2025. The fourth edition is forecast for November 2025.

6 OPTIONS

- 6.1 The focus of the HIP is now moving to the strategic phase of the improvement process which specifically picks up and aligns the Consumer Standards with the Council's improvement plan and regulatory requirements. A meeting with the Regulator has been completed and Members will be updated in due course (including HIPB) on the finally agreed strategic process to deliver full compliance with the Consumer Standards. There are no other options if the Council is to continue to satisfactorily manage its relationship with the Regulator.

7 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 A risk assessment is a key component of the Housing Improvement Programme and risk management will be reported to the HIPB as required. Key risks will be subsequently reported to the Cabinet as part of update reports or key decisions. A review of Housing Service risks is being undertaken during September 2025 and the necessary updates will be provided once the review is concluded.
- 7.2 The risk of enforcement action being taken by the Regulator remains the single biggest risk to the HIP.

8 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Council continues to be the Social Landlord for its housing stock and retains all its statutory duties until such time as it is dissolved and those statutory responsibilities pass to another organisation. This will be part of the Structural Changes Order agreed by Government as part of the process of achieving local government reorganisation.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 On 10 September a new [Hate Crime Policy](#) went live on the Council's website following the approval of the Cabinet Member for People and Community. This Policy outlines the Council's role in dealing with hate crime related incidents. Essex Police, however, has the main responsibility for investigating hate incidents/crimes which includes physical assault, verbal abuse and incitement to hatred. The Council will consider taking action under 'The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014' and/or 'Housing Act 2004' as and when appropriate.
- 9.2 The Council takes all forms of hate crimes and hate incidents seriously and is committed to doing all it can to support the reduction of hate crimes and incidents across the Borough in accordance with its new Hate Crime Policy.

10 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are none.

11 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report as no decision is being made. Members should, however, note that once the necessary stock condition data has been analysed and incorporated into a new Asset Management Plan which then informs the revised HRA Business Plan it is expected that additional funding requirements will be necessary. The detail for this new funding and the budget impacts will be identified in the Budget process reports.

12 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The HIP was set up to ensure that the Council complies with the duties and obligations under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. The Act introduced a new, proactive approach to regulating social housing landlords on issues such as safety, transparency, standards, staff conduct and tenant engagement. It also strengthened the powers of the Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman Service in respect of those landlords who are failing to meet those standards.

12.2 The Act has three core objectives:

1. To facilitate a new, proactive consumer regulation regime.

To achieve this, the Regulator's statutory objectives will now include safety and transparency and it will have new powers to support this. Significantly, the 'serious detriment' test will be removed paving the way for action to be taken by the Regulator in a greater number of cases of breaches of the consumer standards.

2. To refine the existing economic regime.

Whilst the emphasis is on improving consumer regulation, it is clear that this is not to be at the detriment of the economic standards. The Act also seeks to maintain and refine the Regulator's current economic regulatory role. Ensuring that providers are well governed and financially viable remains a core priority for the Regulator.

3. To strengthen the Regulator's powers to enforce the consumer and economic regime.

The Act will strengthen the Regulator by giving it new enforcement powers, seeking to ensure it can effectively intervene when required. This is particularly the case in relation to the Consumer Standards in order to underpin the importance of these.

- 12.3 The Regulator and the Housing Ombudsman both have a role in overseeing the performance of social housing landlords and making sure that landlords treat their tenants fairly. The Regulator regulates registered providers in England and the Housing Ombudsman seeks to resolve complaints from residents about registered providers.
- 12.4 The Act gives power to the Regulator to issue fines which now are not capped and intervene in Council housing services. It can also issue a judgment against those who have failed with their duties and is published on its website.

13 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Housing Service Review and associated restructure is being supported by the Council's Human Resources team and is being delivered in line with existing policy.

14 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is not required for this report as no decision is being taken. EQIAs are, however, completed alongside all new policies that are developed. Any inequalities identified in the EQIA are addressed in the new policy. These are all public documents and are attached as supportive documentation to the revised policies.



Chris Stratford

Interim Director of Housing

Background Papers:

[Cabinet report 20 November 2024](#)

[Cabinet report 22 January 2025](#)

[Cabinet report 18 June 2025](#)

Appendices:

Resident Safety Information Leaflet

For further information please contact Chris Stratford (Interim Director of Housing):

Phone: 01268 882322

Email: CStratford@castlepoint.gov.uk

Keeping you safe at home



Resident Safety Information

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Asbestos

Having asbestos in your home is no reason to panic. Due to our safety and management procedures any asbestos containing materials in your home are likely to be in good condition.



Asbestos advice

It is only when asbestos materials are damaged or disturbed that they become hazardous. If you carry out any DIY jobs such as sanding or drilling, you could potentially release asbestos fibres into the air. You must ask us for approval before carrying out DIY works that could disturb asbestos in your home. If you think the asbestos materials in your home have been disturbed, contact us right away so we can evaluate and manage the risk to ensure your continued safety. If you think you may have damaged asbestos materials in your home do not attempt to clean it up yourself. Stop whatever you are doing and contact us immediately. Try to avoid moving debris around and leave any tools or equipment that you have been using. Do not use a domestic vacuum cleaner as this can make the situation worse.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous material. It is resistant to heat, electricity, and chemical damage. Asbestos containing materials (ACMs) are versatile and were used extensively as building materials in the UK between the 1950s and 1980s. Asbestos use was banned in 1999, however asbestos-containing materials can still be found in many buildings built or refurbished before the year 1999.

Examples of asbestos containing materials include:

- **Texture coating (artex)**
- **Cement water tanks**
- **Asbestos insulating board (AIB)**
- **Corrugated cement roofing**
- **Toilet cisterns**
- **Vinyl floor tiles**
- **Pipe insulation**

The government advises that if asbestos materials are in good condition, then it is safest to leave them where they are. We have a duty to manage, not remove, asbestos in your home.



Damp and mould

Damp is the build-up of moisture. As well as causing damage, some types of damp can lead to mould growth. Damp can occur in homes for many reasons and affects both building materials (like walls, floors, ceilings, foundations) as well as fittings and furnishings (like carpets, curtains, wallpaper, furniture, clothing).

Types of damp: Rising damp



Occurs when water in the ground enters a property by travelling up through the pores in brickwork, usually due to a broken or missing damp proof course. Rising damp only affects basements/cellars and ground floor rooms. It usually leaves a brown 'tide' mark caused by salts from the ground. Black mould does not normally develop with rising damp because the salts prevent it growing.

Traumatic damp



Leaks from water and waste pipes in the home are common, especially in bathrooms and kitchens. With traumatic damp you will see an area or patch of damp that looks and feels wet. Black mould does not normally develop with traumatic damp because chemicals in the water prevent it growing.

Penetrating damp



Penetrating damp is caused by water passing through the external walls or roof of a house because of a problem such as missing roof tiles, damaged pointing to brickwork, or cracked render. It is only found on external walls and sometimes on ceilings if there is damage to the roof.

Condensation



Condensation is the most common form of damp. You will often notice condensation build up on windows, window frames and in the corner of rooms. Black mould often occurs with condensation.

Tips for reducing condensation

- If you notice condensation, wipe it away with a dry cloth
- Keep your curtains open during the day
- Use extractor fans in the kitchen and bathroom and clean them regularly
- Do not block air vents or trickle vents
- Open windows after a bath or shower
- Keep kitchen and bathroom doors closed to prevent moisture escaping
- Do not dry washing on radiators
- Open windows when using a tumble dryer and make sure they are vented correctly

Report damp and mould concerns

You can report damp and mould by:

Phone: 01268 882326

Email: dampandmould@castlepoint.gov.uk

(please remember to include your address and photos if possible)

Electrical safety

It is vital to look after your electrical equipment. Electric shocks and fires caused by electrical faults are a major cause of injury and can be fatal.

Checking your electrical items:



Cables

- Check cables for damage - there should not be any cuts or frays.
- Do not overload extension cables.
- Make sure extension cables are fully uncoiled during use.
- Do not 'daisy chain' extension cables.

Plugs

- Plugs should fit tightly into sockets.
- Plug casings should not be cracked or chipped.
- Do not use a plug if it has burn marks or signs of damage.

Sockets

- Check sockets for burn marks and signs of overheating.
- Make sure sockets are properly secured to the wall and not loose.
- Make sure the socket switches work properly.

Chargers

- Different devices require different levels of charge. Branded chargers are specifically designed for a particular device.
- Fake chargers often fail to meet UK safety regulations. Fake chargers may supply too much energy to a device, leading to overheating that can cause injury, electric shock and even fires.

E-bike and e-scooter charging



E-bikes and e-scooters can pose serious safety risks if used and charged incorrectly. If you own an e-bike, e-scooter, or mobility scooter, always follow the guidance for charging safely as most fires occur whilst charging.

E-bikes, e-scooters, and mobility scooters must be stored and charged inside your home rather than in communal areas. They should never be charged in your hallway where a fire might block your only escape route.

Top tips for keeping safe whilst charging e-bikes, e-scooters, and mobility scooters at home:

- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when charging.
- Never leave the device unattended while charging.
- Only charge your device when you are at home and awake - avoid charging when you are asleep.
- Always unplug your charger once it has finished charging your device.
- Always use a charger approved by the product manufacturer and buy an official one from a reputable seller.
- Do not attempt to modify or tamper with the battery. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Check the battery for damage before charging. If there is any damage, do not use it.
- Do not dispose of lithium-ion batteries in general household or recycling waste.

Fire safety

Fires are more likely to start at home than anywhere else. We are doing all that we can to keep you and your home safe from the devastating effects of fire, and you can help too.

Smoke alarms save lives



Test your smoke alarms once a month. You can do this yourself by holding the button on the alarm for up to five seconds. If your smoke alarm goes off by mistake, wait for it to stop. Do not take out the batteries or cover the smoke alarm – it is in place for your safety. Please tell us if your smoke alarm doesn't work properly – it's our job to repair it or replace it.

Communal areas

If you live in a building with multiple flats, communal areas including: entrances, stairwells, corridors, landings and service cupboards, must be kept clear of personal belongings. In the event of a fire, items in communal areas can fuel a fire, block important escape routes, and obstruct firefighter access to emergency equipment. You must clear any items that you may have outside your home, in communal areas, or in service cupboards, including:

- Bikes including e-bikes.
- Pushchairs.
- Mobility scooters or e-scooters.
- Shoes or shoe racks.
- Plants and other decorations including picture frames, posters, Christmas or other religious decorations.
- Furniture, including white goods.
- Household rubbish.

Highly flammable items like barbecues, gas cylinders, petrol, diesel, or oil cans must not be stored anywhere in the building.

Know your escape route



If there is a fire in your home, you must leave immediately and call the fire service on 999. It is important that you know what to do in the event of a fire or other emergency and make sure children in the home know what to do.

If you live in a building with multiple flats, you should make sure you know where your building's emergency exits are. You can find Fire Action Notices around the building telling you what to do in the event of a fire.

Fire doors



Fire doors are one of the most important measures to keep you safe. They create a barrier from fire and smoke to prevent them from travelling through a building. Controlling the spread of fire and smoke is vital to allow residents to evacuate safely. If you live in a building with multiple flats, you will see fire doors in stairwells, corridors, and anywhere there is a risk of combustion, like electricity service cupboards and riser cupboards. Fire doors will have blue signage showing they are fire doors. Your flat entrance door is also a fire door. Flat entrance doors should never be adapted or replaced, unless by the council. It is vital that flat entrance doors are regularly inspected and maintained to make sure they work properly if a fire breaks out. Fire doors must either be kept locked shut or self-close completely into the door frame. Please let us know if you see any damage to or fault with any fire door including your flat entrance door.

Gas safety

We are legally required to make sure that all gas appliances and associated pipework provided by us in your home are safe to use.

The Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR)

It is important for your safety that we carry out a gas safety check, known as an LGSR, every year. If you have a gas cooker or hob, we will carry out a visual inspection. If you have a gas fire, we will check the flue. Even if you do not have a gas cooker or boiler, we will still arrange for an inspection if there is a gas supply to your property. As part of your tenancy agreement with us, you must allow access for our contractors to complete these checks. Unchecked properties risk a gas explosion or carbon monoxide poisoning.

If you suspect a gas leak



If you smell gas or suspect a leak you should immediately:

1. Put out all naked flames such as candles.
2. Do not turn electrical appliances or switches on or off.
3. Open all doors and windows.
4. Switch off your gas supply by pulling the gas lever down. This should be located next to or near your gas meter.
5. Leave the property and call the 24-hour National Gas Emergency Helpline on 0800 111 999.

Water safety

As your landlord, we carry out thorough checks of communal water systems to make sure water is safe for you to use and does not contain legionella.

What is legionella?

Legionella is a type of bacteria found in stagnant water. Legionella bacteria is generally not harmful in low concentrations. However, if it develops in your home water system it can cause a bacterial infection such as legionnaires' disease. The risk of contracting legionnaire's disease is very low, however, certain residents will be at greater risk. If your home does not have a stored water installation the risk is even lower.

If you breathe in tiny droplets of water containing legionella bacteria this will cause the infection. You cannot get legionnaire's disease by drinking water containing legionella bacteria or from people who have the infection.

How can I prevent legionella?



Legionella bacteria grows in stagnant water. If your home has been vacant for more than one week, we recommend the following to reduce the risk:

- Run the hot water tap for a minimum of 60 seconds.
- Remove the showerhead and run water for at least 10 minutes.
- Flush the toilet twice to circulate fresh water.

Get in touch with us

Maintenance:

Phone: 01268 882 326

Damp and mould:

Phone: 01268 882 326

Email: dampandmould@castlepoint.gov.uk

See something you feel is unsafe?
Report it immediately.
In an emergency, call 999

Gas repairs & LGSR: contact SureServe

Phone: 01702 415 891

Email: chelmsford.admin@sureserve.co.uk

Statutory safety checks in communal areas

We carry out legal inspections in communal areas regularly to keep you and your neighbours safe, secure, and protected. Here is what we check and why it matters:

| What | Why | How often (communal areas only) |
|--|--|--|
| Communal area asbestos | To make sure any asbestos is safely managed and not a risk to your health | Annual (where asbestos has been identified) |
| Electrical Installation Condition Reports (EICR's) | As well as your homes, we check that all communal wiring and systems are safe and up to standard | 5 years or annual depending on type of building |
| Fire Risk Assessments (FRA's) | FRA's are carried out in communal areas to make sure exits are safe, alarms work, and fire hazards are managed | Annual (sheltered schemes and hostels only). Every 2 years (general needs buildings) |
| Communal gas appliances and pipework | To ensure they are operating safely | Annual (where applicable) |
| Communal lifts | To ensure lifts and lifting equipment are safe to use | Monthly |
| Communal water storage tanks and pipework | To prevent harmful bacteria developing | Monthly |

Further advice

Health and Safety Executive

Search: Asbestos

Citizens Advice

Search: If you have damp and mould in your rented home

National Energy Action

Search: Dealing with condensation and mould

Gas Safe Register

www.gassaferegister.co.uk

Electrical Safety First

Search: Safety around the home

White Goods Safety

Register your white goods – it could save your life if a product is recalled for safety reasons.

www.whitegoodsafety.com

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

Call 999 in the event of a fire

www.essex-fire.gov.uk

NHS

Search: Legionnaires' disease