**The Foundations of an Effective Local Authority Landlord Service: Assurance Framework**

**April 2023**

Introduction to the Foundations Assurance Framework

The London Housing Directors Group and London Councils have worked with local authority staff, councillors and residents to illustrate the principles, actions and practices that should give strength to the foundations that support effective delivery of local authority landlord services.

The foundations are set out in the accompanying report, *Delivering for tenants, The Foundations of An Effective Local Authority Landlord Service*, which is available on the London Councils website.

We have developed this assurance framework to assist local authorities in undertaking an open, evidence-based assessment of the strength of the foundations within their own area.

The foundations, and this framework, have been voluntarily adopted by local authorities to support continuous improvements in the light of changes in the regulatory framework for social housing, updated health and safety expectations, and their own ongoing commitment to providing good services to their residents.

For each of the foundations, the principles and expected outcomes detailed in the report are listed, alongside space for local authorities to input:

* Their own sources of assurance that they are undertaking the suggested actions and practices, and achieving the expected outcomes
* Evidence of adherence
* Areas identified for improvement.

The appendix includes some examples to show how a self-assessment might be completed. In particular it illustrates possible ways an authority might get confidence that components of the foundations are in place and working well, and sources of evidence that could confirm components of the foundations are in place. These examples are included only to guide local authorities as they adopt this new framework – the foundations do not set any requirements to have particular documents or processes in place.

When thinking about the evidence and level/types of checks (assurance) they could use to show the foundations are in place, individual local authorities should think about the consequences if they do not deliver the principles and stated outcomes. Once they understand the amount and impact of risk faced by the council and its residents, they can then decide on the amount of checks and intervention required to minimise the chance that these consequences will occur.

Our intention is that the principles are forward looking and stretching, and that local authorities will work towards full adherence over time. We suggest that local authorities will find it helpful to develop an action plan following assessment against the assurance framework, to support continuous improvement. Involvement of residents will be a valuable part of self-assessment (e.g. though resident scrutiny groups or less formal interactions), as will external review (through peer challenge and/or professional advisors), to bring fresh perspectives and insight, and therefore to test the strength and transparency of assessment undertaken and conclusions reached.

**Self-assessment against the Foundations of an Effective Landlord Service**

**Date of assessment \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

Vision and strategy

| **#** | **Principle** | **Detail (actions & practices)** | **Expected outcomes** | **Sources of assurance** | **Evidence of adherence** | **Improvement required** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1.1 | The local authority sets a clear and realistic vision for its landlord service | The vision is publicly available and regularly refreshed | Members, staff and residents understand the vision for the service; and progress towards its achievement can be demonstrated |  |  |  |
| 1.2 | The needs and aspirations of diverse groups of residents are clearly seen to inform landlord service priorities | Formal and informal feedback from residents (such as complaints and comments raised on estate/ward walks) is recorded, responded to, shared, and used to shape service priorities | Officers and accountable people are aware of feedback received and engage positively with residents around this  Residents from diverse demographics and geographies can see their needs and opinions reflected in decisions and priorities |  |  |  |
| Where the needs and aspirations of different groups are in tension, there is clarity over how opinions are mediated, and decisions reached | Residents express satisfaction with decision making processes |  |  |  |
| 1.3 | The landlord service strategy and priorities are appropriately resourced | Financial plans are aligned with strategy, service needs are prioritised with account taken of capacity, and constraints/opportunities are transparently presented | Service quality is aligned to make best use of capacity |  |  |  |

Leadership

| **#** | **Principle** | **Detail (actions & practices)** | **Expected outcomes** | **Sources of assurance** | **Evidence of adherence** | **Improvement required** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2.1 | Corporate culture is proactively managed to include openness and honesty and problem solving | Officers and elected members create and sustain a safe environment in which concerns can be raised and there is accountability for responses | Concerns and problems are raised early on |  |  |  |
| Difficulties in service delivery and operational management are routinely reported and recorded | Concerns and problems are tackled early on |  |  |  |
| Problems are identified proactively rather than reactively, with preventative measures put in place in advance of issues being identified. | Concerns and problems are tackled in a strategic and proactive way |  |  |  |
| 2.2 | The landlord service has a strong voice across the wider council | Officers in the corporate leadership team and elected members are familiar with the activities, responsibilities/duties and contributions of the landlord service and the regulatory requirements on it | Corporate services align with the needs of the landlord service |  |  |  |
| Housing’s contribution to local priorities and outcomes is reflected in wider corporate strategies | The impact of landlord services is maximised and understood |  |  |  |
| Members and senior staff participate in horizon scanning | Landlord services are forward-looking; and understanding of the changing context is brought to bear on resourcing, decision making and communications with staff |  |  |  |
| 2.3 | Corporate culture is proactively managed to include partnership working, inclusivity and task ownership | Officers are empowered to resolve problems reported to them, including through coordinating activities outside of their own department | Residents’ queries and problems are resolved promptly  Holistic improvements in quality of life |  |  |  |
| Liaison between inter-related services is routine and there is clarity on relevant service standards and expectations | Local authority services within and outside of the housing department are responsive to the needs of landlord functions that use and rely on their activities  Residents see and experience a seamless landlord service |  |  |  |
| Officers, members and active tenants share knowledge and collaborate with people involved with social housing outside of the local authority | Service changes are implemented to drive performance improvement, and are informed by good and emerging practice from elsewhere |  |  |  |
| 2.4 | Leadership and professionalism are highly regarded and are practiced at all levels | Good practice in leadership is nurtured and demonstrated  Members and officers demonstrate core leadership values | The values of the council and landlord service are understood and adhered to |  |  |  |
| Attainment of professional qualifications and membership of professional bodies is supported | Officers feel confident, included and inspired, and demonstrate professionalism |  |  |  |

Management

| **#** | **Principle** | **Detail (actions & practices)** | **Expected outcomes** | **Sources of assurance** | **Evidence of adherence** | **Improvement required** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 3.1 | Corporate services have sufficient flexibility to align with the needs of the landlord service | Procurement functions and policies facilitate access to technical skills and enable prompt access to services when required | Landlord services have access to required technical skills and facilities, at the point when they are required  Officers and members feel confident in the skills and services procured |  |  |  |
| There is proactive liaison with, and monitoring of, service delivery between the landlord service and other customer-facing services | Services address customer needs |  |  |  |
| Human Resources, legal and finance functions report and operate in a manner that provides the personnel, reporting and advice required by the landlord service | Landlord services have access to staff with the required skills and aptitudes  Business planning includes opportunities for a range of officers, members and residents to contribute. Refinements to the draft plan are made over time informed by their contributions, and in the approved plan resources are clearly and closely linked with delivery of strategic aims and statutory requirements  Financial reporting gives meaningful insight into the current and projected financial positions, and the depth of awareness is reflected in management decisions and scrutiny |  |  |  |
| Modern IT services are available, that meet requirements for functionality, data management and user support | Data is accurately maintained, reported and deployed; delivering high levels of compliance and value for money investment in properties  Records of interactions with tenants are accurate and inform the actions of staff/contractors, as well as providing insights that improve service performance (e.g. by harnessing repairs reporting to identify wider defects within a block) |  |  |  |
| 3.2 | The service is able to recruit and retain the skills and aptitudes required to operate a modern, compliant housing function | The landlord service is sighted on its staffing needs and is able to articulate and monitor the impact of different methods for meeting these requirements | Staffing levels meet requirements (as far as possible)  Staff skills keep pace with changing needs e.g. (digital and technical property disciplines) |  |  |  |
| There is sufficient flexibility in recruitment policies that the landlord service can engage with all required sections of the labour market | Landlord services have access to required technical skills and facilities, at the point when they are required |  |  |  |
| Staff with up-to-date professional skills in risk, data management, contract management and asset management are available to the landlord service | Risks are well controlled, minimising incidences of harm, non-compliance, and unnecessary expenditure  Modern practices in asset management deliver high levels of property safety and value for money investment in property  Services delivered under contract meet needs and expectations |  |  |  |
| 3.3 | Local knowledge is valued and widespread | Resident and contractor feedback on local issues is recorded and shared with front-line teams | Value for money in remedial works, and smaller problems are addressed before they escalate |  |  |  |
| There is a culture of respect and partnership between staff (and contractors) and residents | Estate management decisions are informed by local knowledge |  |  |  |
| Strategies and policies are developed through co-production; with account taken of the diversity of residents’ views and experiences | Residents feel a sense of ownership of directions taken and see their priorities reflected in actions or understand why their views have not been incorporated into policy/service delivery approaches  The sense of ownership and recognition of priorities is felt equally by residents from diverse demographics and geographies |  |  |  |

Performance and compliance

| **#** | **Principle** | **Detail (actions & practices)** | **Expected outcomes** | **Sources of assurance** | **Evidence of adherence** | **Improvement required** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 4.1 | Performance reporting is comprehensive, covers all services that make up the landlord function, and includes multiple sources of information | There is a codified framework for performance reporting, that articulates the nature and purpose of reporting to members, senior officers, local managers, residents etc | Review of performance is efficient, with attention to detail at the right levels and duplication of activity minimised |  |  |  |
| Different sources of management information are combined to cross-check the position reported | Performance reports reflect the experience of services felt in homes and communities |  |  |  |
| 4.2 | The landlord service is accountable to residents | Performance information is publicly reported in a clear and timely manner | Residents feel informed and are confident in their landlords’ delivery |  |  |  |
| Benchmarking information is available alongside performance reporting | Members, staff and residents have a clear picture of their comparative performance and adopt realistic targets |  |  |  |
| 4.3 | Records are accurately kept and used in service planning, delivery and accountability | IT capability supports robust data management and service administration | Rates of compliance are high  Investment in property represents good value for money  Services are delivered right first time, and resident satisfaction reflects this |  |  |  |
| There is a strong performance reporting culture, with proactive reference to trends, targets and triggers | Difficulties are anticipated, escalated in a timely manner, and promptly responded to |  |  |  |
| Performance information is reported in a format that can be easily understood by people who do not have technical expertise | Members, residents, and landlord service staff have a clear understanding of performance |  |  |  |
| 4.4 | The landlord service has access to specialist and technical skills when required | Procurement facilitates prompt access to specialist services when an un-anticipated need arises | Property is compliant and service standards are maintained over the longer term |  |  |  |
| 4.5 | Service delivery and performance action plans are actively used | Action plans are appropriately resourced and monitored | The aims of action plans and performance improvement programmes are met |  |  |  |
| There is a culture of learning from mistakes and service failures experienced by the service and by other providers | Approaches are regularly refined, strengthened and improved |  |  |  |

Assurance

| **#** | **Principle** | **Detail (actions & practices)** | **Expected outcomes** | **Sources of assurance** | **Evidence of adherence** | **Improvement required** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 5.1 | There is clarity on the shape of accountability structures and the frameworks that sit under these | People involved in oversight of the landlord service have, or have access to, sufficient experience to understand relevant matters | Councils have clear and accurate insight into their landlord operations  Informed, proactive challenge drives performance improvement |  |  |  |
| Elected members and senior officers are clear about who/which body is accountable for different aspects operational delivery, including statutory and regulatory requirements. | Attention and appropriate intervention is focused on all key issues, with flows of information operating effectively |  |  |  |
| Where line management responsibility for landlord services is divided, there is a single senior officer with cross-cutting accountability for the council landlord | Functions comprising the landlord service can be viewed as a whole, with queries and problems addressed promptly and comprehensively |  |  |  |
| It is possible for the accountable person or committee to get a holistic overview of the landlord service’s finance, performance, objectives and obligations | Attention is focused on all key issues, with flows of information operating effectively  Realistic service planning delivers performance improvement |  |  |  |
| 5.2 | A risk-based assurance framework is in place, documented, and widely understood | Risks associated with landlord services are identified and recorded at service and corporate level in line with responsibility/delegation | Appropriate controls and mitigations are in place for the risks faced |  |  |  |
| Risks and controls are regularly reviewed, discussed and revised | Controls and mitigations are effective at protecting the local authority and residents from negative operational, financial and other impacts  Controls and mitigations are adapted as context/needs change |  |  |  |
| Risk registers are used to inform agendas for senior officer, committee and lead member/cabinet meetings | Officer and member time is appropriately focused on the priority issues and challenges facing the landlord service, enabling their management and resolution |  |  |  |
| Assurance activities are appropriately scoped in advance, take residents’ service priorities and concerns into account, and are delivered by people with the requisite skills, knowledge and experience | Attention is focused on all key issues, with effective controls in place and competence to manage key risks |  |  |  |
| 5.3 | There are learning and development programmes in place for staff, elected members and active tenants | Personal development opportunities around scrutiny skills, effective assurance, external policy agendas, statutory requirements, and professional practice are routinely available | Members and residents involved with oversight and scrutiny are able to interpret and probe information sufficiently to get to the heart of key issues |  |  |  |
| Knowledge and skills are kept up to date | Members and residents involved with oversight and scrutiny are supported to give informed consideration to matters on the horizon and the changing operating environment |  |  |  |
| Independent input and expertise is available to members and residents | Members and residents are not solely reliant on officers to tell them what they need and how to approach particular tasks |  |  |  |
| 5.4 | Assurance and accountability frameworks are known to be effective | There is periodic independent review of accountability structures, delegations, controls framework etc | The type and depth of assurance is appropriate for the landlord service, the risks faced, and its changing needs/activities/context  Assurance addresses concerns flagged formally or informally by residents |  |  |  |
| Decisions taken and the reasons for them are recorded, tracked and communicated | Focus on progress towards longer term objectives is sustained |  |  |  |

**Appendix**

**Examples of sources of assurance and evidence of adherence**

Vision and strategy

| **#** | **Principle** | **Detail (actions & practices)** | **Expected outcomes** | **Sources of assurance** | **Evidence of adherence** | **Improvement required** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1.1 | The local authority sets a clear and realistic vision for its landlord service | The vision is publicly available and regularly refreshed | Members, staff and residents understand the vision for the service; and progress towards its achievement can be demonstrated | Vision set out clearly in periodically refreshed  Landlord Service Strategy and published on website  Inclusion of vision statement on annual residents survey and newsletter  HRA business plan shows how vision is to be achieved | The document “Our vision for landlord services” can be found in PDF format on the thiscouncil.gov.uk website  2022-23 annual residents survey found 87% of residents recognised the key priorities in the vision document  HRA business plan 2022-25 narrative, pp6-8, reported to Cabinet on 24 April 2022 | Cabinet approval to be included on forward agenda planner  Publication of a summary document could make the vision more easily accessible to a wider range of tenants |

Leadership

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2.1 | Corporate culture is proactively managed to include openness and honesty and problem solving | Officers and elected members create and sustain a safe environment in which concerns can be raised and there is accountability for responses | Concerns and problems are raised early on | Employee surveys include questions relating to confidence in raising concerns and the extent to which senior leadership listen to their views  Where possible, examples of issues raised are fed back through ‘you said, we did’ briefings  Whistleblowing policy is in place and annually reviewed | 2021-22 staff survey shows 85% of staff describe themselves as confident to raise concerns. This is up from 75% in 2020-21  55% of staff said that senior leadership always listen to their views. This is down from 75% in 2020-21  Bi-monthly You Said We Did updates can be found on the culture pages of the intranet at intranet.council.gov.uk/culture. 5 examples have been included in 2021-22  Whistleblowing report and policy review presented to Cabinet on 19 Jun 2022 | 2022-23 listening performance to be minimum 65%. Director of People to review the drop in performance and report an action plan to the Senior Leadership Team by September 2022 |

Management

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| 3.1 | Corporate services have sufficient flexibility to align with the needs of the landlord service | Modern IT services are available, that meet requirements for functionality, data management and user support | Data is accurately maintained, reported and deployed; delivering high levels of compliance and value for money investment in properties  Records of interactions with tenants are accurate and inform the actions of staff/contractors | Specialist and independent reviews are undertaken to provide assurance on data governance in areas such as landlord health and safety compliance, stock condition, rents and tenant data  IT Strategy in place which describes hardware, software and human resourcing requirements  Compliance with IT Strategy | Data governance review on Health & Safety completed by ABC Consultants in January 2022 and reported to SLT on 15 February 2022  Resourcing requirements are on p7 of the IT Strategy 2021-25 which can be found at intranet.council.gov.uk/IT  Internal audit report on IT Strategy presented to Scrutiny Committee on 15 March 2022, with substantial assurance on all areas | Instruct external review of rents and GDPR compliance for tenant data |

Performance and compliance

| **#** | **Principle** | **Detail (actions & practices)** | **Expected outcomes** | **Sources of assurance** | **Evidence of adherence** | **Improvement required** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 4.2 | The landlord service is accountable to residents | Benchmarking information is available alongside performance reporting | Members, staff and residents have a clear picture of their comparative performance and adopt realistic targets | Local and national benchmarking against Tenant Satisfaction Measures or similar is reported annually  Explanations are provided where there is a significant difference between council performance and comparator organisations | Shadow TSM report presented to Housing Scrutiny Committee 15 July 2022, alongside comparative figures from LB X and LB Y  Summary report shared with staff in e-bulletin 18 July 2022 | Identify an appropriate peer group e.g. other West London boroughs; boroughs with a similar size stock holding for presentation to Scrutiny by the end of 2022, before 2023 targets are set by Heads of Service  Include TSM reporting in Annual Report to Residents 2022-23 |

Assurance

| **#** | **Principle** | **Detail (actions & practices)** | **Expected outcomes** | **Sources of assurance** | **Evidence of adherence** | **Improvement required** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 5.1 | There is clarity on the shape of accountability structures and the frameworks that sit under these | Elected members and senior officers are clear about who/which body is accountable for different aspects operational delivery, including statutory and regulatory requirements | Attention and appropriate intervention is focused on all key issues, with flows of information operating effectively | There is a published statement which explains how accountability and scrutiny in respect of landlord services is undertaken, explaining the role of councillors, officers and residents  Where management is outsourced (for example to an ALMO), contractual or service agreements confirm that the council remains accountable for the landlord service and this is reflected in reporting arrangements | n/a  SLA with our ALMO – statement on landlord accountability at p30  Review of ALMO performance reporting, provided by XYZ Consulting to Housing Scrutiny 27 April 2022 | Draft and publish a landlord accountability and scrutiny statement by December 2022  Amend Housing Scrutiny Terms of Reference in line with XYZ Consulting recommendations, by December 2022 |