

## **REGULATORY COMPLIANCE SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR 2021-22**

### **LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS**

#### **Contents:**

##### **Economic Standards**

- Rent Standard

##### **Consumer Standards**

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
  - Customer Service, Choice and Complaints
  - Involvement and Empowerment
  - Understanding and Responding to Diverse Needs
- Home Standard
  - Quality of Accommodation
  - Repairs and Maintenance
- Tenancy Standard
  - Allocations and Mutual Exchange
  - Tenure
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
  - Neighbourhood Management
  - Local Area Co-operation
  - Anti-Social Behaviour

## RENT STANDARD

### Required Outcomes:

Registered providers must set rents from 1 April 2020 in accordance with the Government's Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing 2018 (hereafter Rent Policy Statement)

### Is SHG compliant? **YES**

#### SHG Statement of Compliance:

Stockport Homes (as a Registered Provider) is required to comply with the Rent Standard. This is the Standard through which the Regulator controls the levels of rents which are set by Registered Providers, and how these are increased over time. From April 2020, the Rent Standard also applies to local authorities and hence Stockport Council's social housing rents, which are managed by SHG. Both SHG and the Council are committed to ensuring compliance with the Rent Standard.

#### Approach to Compliance

The Rent Standard applies to 'low cost rental' accommodation, as defined by Section 69 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, and contains a number of exceptions, including (but not limited to):

- Shared ownership low cost rental accommodation
- Intermediate rent accommodation
- Specialised supported housing
- Relevant local authority accommodation
- Temporary social housing

It is therefore critical that SHG fully understand the classification of the various property types and rents in place to ensure the Rent Standard is being correctly applied to each.

The strategic considerations of how these various aspects of rent setting are applied within SHG and the Council, and in compliance with the Rent Standard, are contained within the Stockport Homes Rent Strategy 2020-25 and the HRA Rent Strategy 2020-25, which have been approved the SHG Board and the Council respectively.

A detailed procedure is in place within the Corporate Finance team which covers all SHG and Council rents and is designed to ensure operational compliance with the Rent Standard. It is aligned with the SHG and HRA Rent Strategies. This procedure includes all of the various rental type classifications in place and for each classification, the respective requirements of the Rent Standard, e.g. setting new rents, annual increases, re-lets, and how these are applied operationally. Roles and responsibilities are also included, with delegated authorities for the various aspects included within the Financial Scheme of Delegation.

Each SHG and Council property is contained within the company's housing management system. Within this system, each property is set up with a "Rental Type" which is used to classify the rent charged at each property in line with the classifications of the Rent Standard. These "Rental Types" are then used to determine how the various aspects of the Rent Standard are applied to each rent, e.g. setting the initial rent, annual increases, how the rent is changed upon re-let. Rents for all new properties are assessed against the Rent Standard and set accordingly.

As part of the annual rent increase process, the proposed changes to be applied to rents are presented to the SHG Board and Council for approval (as appropriate). These proposals include how they are aligned and hence comply with the Rent Standard, in order to provide assurance that rents have been set correctly.

Within the Corporate Finance Team, there are a range of checks in place which ensure rents are set and amended correctly. There is a segregation of duties in place with changes needing to be approved by the Assistant Director – Corporate Finance before they are enacted. When data is loaded into the housing management system, further checks are performed to verify accuracy.

In December 2020, PwC undertook an internal audit of rent setting. This was a very positive report and no findings were raised. Several areas of good practice were identified.

**SHG Evidence:**

- SHG Rent Strategy
- HRA Rent Strategy
- Rent Setting Procedures
- Financial Scheme of Delegation
- Internal Audit Report – Rent Setting (2020)
- Rent Setting Report for Stockport Homes Owned Properties (Annual)

## TENANT INVOLVEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT STANDARD

### Customer Service, Choice and Complaints

#### Required Outcomes:

Registered providers shall

- a. provide choices, information and communication that is appropriate to the diverse needs of their tenants in the delivery of all standards
- b. have an approach to complaints that is clear, simple and accessible that ensures that complaints are resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

Is SHG compliant? **YES**

#### SHG Statement of Compliance:

##### Customer Choice and Access

SHG has a Customer Access Strategy in place which outlines the range of ways in which customers can access high quality SHG's services including in person, online and via the telephone. The vision for the Customer Access Strategy is "to provide excellent access for all Stockport Homes' customers, balancing the needs of individuals, providing choice, responding to changing demands and providing value for money".

Some key achievements to note include setting up a One Number contact centre, opening a new, modern reception area in Cornerstone (Head Office), implementing a CRM system, implementing a chatbot and enabling customers to report repairs online. The Digital Strategy will build upon digital outcomes to date and provide more opportunities for customers to engage with the company in more digital, customer focussed ways.

SHG operates a One Number contact centre which can deal with enquiries about rent collection, rehousing, repairs and tenancy management issues. Enquiries can also be raised via the website and email inbox. In addition, customers can now access services via webchat and utilise social media to engage with SHG.

Stockport Homes works with customers to help them get online and improve their digital skills. This will enable them to access services online, at a time convenient for them. This is part of SHG's wider Digital Transformation work. For those customers that do not have access online, Stockport Homes will continue to offer a range of ways to contact the organisation and access services.

A Customer Handbook provides information about the services which are delivered and how they can be accessed. Furthermore, the responsibilities of SHG and customers are set out in the tenancy agreement, which is explained in the sign-up process.

## **Service Standards and Policies**

SHG has a set of Service Standards that reflect the things that customers feel are most important to them. The Standards are updated periodically with the Customer Scrutiny Panel conducting a review of the service standards framework during 2018-19 with the Service Standards being reviewed in full in 2019-20, in conjunction with customers.

The Standards are published on the Stockport Homes website and performance against them is reported annually via the website and newsletter and to Board as part of the Tenant Experience Report.

A range of SHG Policies are available on SHG's website for customers to access. These will provide information in relation to repair timescales, how to leave a property at the end of a tenancy, what to do if a customer is experiencing ASB, for example. This enables customers to seek out information and understand the services delivered by Stockport Homes.

SHG has held the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) award for 13 consecutive years, which demonstrates SHG's commitment to meeting government approved standards on customer service.

## **Appropriate Information and Communication**

The customer newsletter and Annual Report to Customers provides information on services, including how to access services and how those services are performing. These publications focus on 'good news' stories and promoting the range of initiatives SHG has in place which customers can access and participate in.

In addition, the Stockport Homes website provides a range of information for customers on how they can access services, get in touch with the company and obtain more information about policies and procedures. The website is fully accessible and available on a range of devices. In addition to this, there are a range of related websites available to customers for example the Carecall website, the Viaduct website for shared ownership.

SHG also has an active presence on a range of social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. This enables SHG to communicate, inform and interact with a range of stakeholders via these modern communication channels.

## **Complaints Process**

SHG has an open and transparent two-stage Customer Feedback process with a Policy and Procedure in place which outlines how this works. There are clear timelines outlined as to when customers will receive responses by, and performance against these timescales is monitored. All complaints are managed via the CRM system in place to ensure effective management, oversight and reporting.

The Customer Feedback process allows for expressions of dissatisfaction to be treated as a complaint and be investigated and responded to. SHG has a two stage process, with Stage 1 being for an Investigating Officer to look into the complaint and communicate their findings to the customers. Stage 2, if escalated to this level, allows for other SHG customers to be involved in reviewing the complaint.

Response letters clearly outline the detail of the investigation and whether there has been a service failure, or not. Responses will also inform the customer of the next stage available to them in the Policy, including how to contact the Housing Ombudsman as required.

The process is publicised to customers through leaflets, interactions with customers, the newsletter and Stockport Homes' website. Customers are provided with information on complaint processes through the Annual Report to Customers, which includes examples of lessons learnt, numbers of complaints and the services to which they relate.

SHG welcomes all customer feedback, including complaints, as an opportunity to learn and further improve services based on customer voice. Customer feedback data is extracted and analysed to understand lessons learnt and opportunities to improve services. A Customer Feedback Report is presented to Wider Leadership Team on a quarterly basis, to the Operations Committee on a six-monthly basis and information is also reported back to customers so they can see the influence they have had on service design and delivery. The Council also receive reports and information about customer feedback received by SHG.

Stockport Homes' Customer Feedback Policy and Procedure encourages the use of advocates so that customers are supported in raising complaints and it provides a range of ways for customers to raise complaints, such as via elected member or support service.

In 2021, SHG reviewed the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code of Practice and used this to identify how the Policy and Procedure would need to be amended to continue to reflect best practice. A report was provided to SHG Board to outline how SHG performed against this Code and what changes would be implemented moving forwards.

### **Getting Involved**

The Customer Voice and Influence Strategy 2020-23 outlines the diverse range of ways customers can get involved with SHG and shape and influence service delivery. More information is provided below.

SHG has an accredited Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) that provides customers with the opportunity to shape services and to hold Stockport Homes to account. The CSP works with an independent mentor and reports back to the Operations Committee when a piece of scrutiny work is complete. This is then shared with customers via the newsletter and website.

### **SHG Evidence:**

- Customer Access Strategy
- Digital Strategy
- Service Standards
- Customer Scrutiny Review of service standards framework
- Tenant Experience Annual Report
- Annual Report to Customers
- Customer Scrutiny Panel Annual Review Report
- Customer Feedback Policy 2021-24 approval report
- Customer Feedback Policy 2021-24
- Customer Feedback Procedure
- Customer Voice and Influence Strategy and Action Plan Progress Report

## **Involvement and Empowerment**

### **Required Outcomes:**

Registered providers shall ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in:

- a. the formulation of their landlord's housing-related policies and strategic priorities
- b. the making of decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
- c. the scrutiny of their landlord's performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved
- d. the management of their homes, where applicable
- e. the management of repair and maintenance services, such as commissioning and undertaking a range of repair tasks, as agreed with landlords, and the sharing in savings made, and
- f. agreeing local offers for service delivery.

**Is SHG compliant? YES**

### **SHG Statement of Compliance:**

#### **Customer Voice and Influence Strategy**

SHG has a Customer Voice and Influence Strategy in place which was approved by Board in September 2020. A review of progress against the Action Plan was presented to Board in December 2021. The Strategy strengthens Stockport Homes' established engagement structures and strong community foundations through developing opportunities to capture the customer voice across the broadest cross section of SHG's customer base. It outlines how SHG will embrace flexible approaches, utilise technology and use customer insight to influence service design and delivery. Insight from interactions with customers during day-to-day service delivery is

also used as a valuable tool to identify concerns or patterns of service use. This information is then used to improve and develop services to meet customer needs and expectations.

Stockport Homes provides a broad range of ways for customers to get involved, have their voice heard and influence services, including:

- Consulting and engaging customers in service delivery and design via meetings, online forums and surveys
- Having three customer Board Members who are at the heart of strategic decision-making
- Having an accredited Customer Scrutiny Panel who review services from a customer's perspective and identify improvements to be implemented
- Neighbourhood based initiatives such as estate inspections and area-based projects through to more traditional approaches

Details of how customers can get involved are provided on the Stockport Homes website and are promoted via local information, social media and newsletters. Wider community engagement activities will also enable harder to reach groups to get involved. In addition, particular work around customer engagement in Building Safety is also ongoing, with a specific Engagement Strategy being developed.

### **Reporting Back to Customers**

Customer are provided with performance information through the Annual Report to Customers, the website, social media and newsletters. Customers are involved in selecting indicators that are reported to all customers through the 'super six'. This list is reviewed in consultation with customers each year and included in the customer newsletter, which is available on the website.

The Annual Report to Customers contains cost, efficiencies and performance information and is developed in consultation with customers each year. The most recent Annual Report has been converted to a digital format, in consultation with customers, with hard copies being provided on request. This is part of SHG's digital transformation and enables content to be shared in a modern and engaging format.

Customers are involved in scrutinising services through customer Board Members and the Customer Scrutiny Panel, the latter of which reviews and comments on performance and financial information ahead of certain reports being presented to the Council. The Customer Scrutiny Panel meets regularly to undertake detailed review of services and develop recommendations for improvements, with the report from each review shared with customers in the newsletter, via social media and on the website, along with the CSP's own annual report.

Findings and outcomes from consultation activities are reported as 'You Said We Did' feedback to participating customers and shared more widely on social media and the SHG website along with quarterly updates on learning from complaints.



## Getting Involved

Stockport Homes offers learning opportunities and support to customers to improve their skills through a range of customer training opportunities, the provision of employment support and bespoke sector-based training with guaranteed job interviews. back to work programmes.

Stockport Homes reviews the 'local offers' (known as Service Standards) on a periodic basis. The most recent review was completed in 2019-20 and performance is reported to the Operations Committee on an annual basis as part of the Tenant Experience Report.

In 2018/19 an exercise has been carried out to canvass customers' views in relation to customer involvement in the Board and the Customer Scrutiny Panel. The exercise was publicised via the website, social media and through face-to-face discussions at customer events. The exercise showed that customers strongly support involvement through the Board and Customer Scrutiny Panel and that they agree that it is the best way of involving them in governance and scrutiny. This exercise will be undertaken again in 2022 in line with the three-yearly requirement.

### SHG Evidence:

- Customer Voice and Influence Strategy and Action Plan Progress Report
- Annual Report to Customers
- Customer Newsletter example
- Customer Scrutiny Panel Annual Report
- Service Standards document
- Customer Experience Report

## Understanding and Responding to Diverse Needs

### Required Outcomes:

Registered providers shall:

- a. treat all tenants with fairness and respect
- b. demonstrate that they understand the different needs of their tenants, including in relation to the equality strands and tenants with additional support needs.

Is SHG compliant? **YES**

### SHG Statement of Compliance:

**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy**

Stockport Homes' Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2021-24 outlines SHG's commitment to EDI.

The current Strategy includes the following objectives:

- Embed equality, diversity and inclusion into the culture
- Create an inclusive and representative business
- Understand the diverse needs of customers
- Support independent living and safe, engaged and inclusive communities

A dedicated Officer within SHG supports managers and colleagues to consider equality, diversity and inclusion with their service delivery models and to undertake Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) when changes are being proposed and new strategies / Business Plans are being developed. This approach uses customer insight data to understand potential adverse implications and enables actions to be developed to ensure services remain inclusive to all. Board is provided with copies of the EIAs to gain assurance that equality and diversity needs have been considered when designing services. The role of the Customer Voice and Influence Strategy is also important here.

A new EDI Graduate role was established in 2021 to support the development of an EDI culture at SHG. It has a direct impact on customers through its work with customer groups such as Houseproud and Rainbow Roofs. It also has an indirect impact on tenants through its work to understand the workforce profile and develop the culture around EDI, which aims to make SHG more representative of the communities it serves.

There are a range of colleague groups in place to support and enhance a culture of inclusivity and identify ways in which SHG can further improve and ensure accessibility and inclusivity for all. There is also a plethora of training available ensuring SHG provide accessible services and supporting the creation of an inclusive organisation which is available to all staff. Particularly, all managers attend an EDI focussed training session to increase inclusivity awareness within SHG.

There is an SLA in place for translation services to enable communication with customers that do not have English as a first language or use British Sign Language. Interpretation services can be offered on phone calls or face to face appointments.

### **Reporting and Oversight**

A report on the EDI Strategy is provided to Board on an annual basis as part of a combined workforce and equality and diversity report. This provides data and insight about customers and colleagues and what actions should be implemented to ensure inclusivity for all.

The Policy and Strategy review process ensures that all new strategies, policies and Business Plans consider their potential impact on equality and diversity to ensure that they meet the needs of all colleagues / customers (as appropriate). Customers are involved in any

customer-facing policy reviews that take place, so that new processes, services and procedures reflect the needs of customers and this can be coordinate by the Customer Engagement Officers to support managers to obtain this crucial feedback.

Where appropriate, key decisions taken by the Board are subject to Equality Impact Assessments to ensure the Board is aware of equality considerations prior to making decisions.

**SHG Evidence:**

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report
- Policy and Strategy Review Guidance
- Equality Impact Assessment templates

## HOME STANDARD

### Quality Of Accommodation

#### Required Outcomes:

Registered providers shall:

- (a) ensure that tenants' homes meet the standard set out in section five of the Government's Decent Homes Guidance and continue to maintain their homes to at least this standard;
- (b) meet the standards of design and quality that applied when the home was built, and were required as a condition of publicly funded financial assistance, if these standards are higher than the Decent Homes Standard;
- (c) in agreeing a local offer, ensure that it is set at a level not less than these standards and have regard to section six of the Government's Decent Homes Guidance.

### Is SHG compliant? **YES**

#### SHG Statement of Compliance:

##### Asset Management Strategy

SHG has an Asset Management Strategy in place to ensure the long-term stock investment needs of the properties it owns and manages can be met. SHG goes beyond the basic levels contained within the current Decent Homes Standard to deliver a 'Decent Homes Plus' standard. This includes providing items that are not contained within the basic requirement such as: the provision of showers; floor and wall tiling; full decoration; smoke alarms; secure-by-design doors; double-glazed windows; bathroom insulation; and where possible a choice of components for items such as floor and wall tiles, bath panels, toilet seats, worktops, and taps. SHG also incorporates renewable technologies (where applicable) such as solar PV panels. These additions to the current Decent Homes Standards are provided through a planned programme of capital works that is in place to maintain the decency and sustainability of stock.

During 2022, this Strategy will be renewed and will also consider how SHG can meet the requirements of new Building Safety and Zero Carbon initiatives whilst ensuring customers' homes and any communal areas are well maintained.

##### New Build

SHG builds a range of new build properties and these are constructed in line with the New Build Design Guide which ensures they meet modern standards for living accommodation. Properties built include apartments, houses, bungalows, extra care schemes and supported housing. The Development Strategy outlines ambitions to further improve the new build homes by incorporating things like more digital equipment.

**SHG Evidence:**

- Asset Management Strategy
- Local Authority Housing Statistics return, section F
- Development Strategy
- New Build Design Guide

**Repairs and Maintenance****Required Outcomes:**

Registered providers shall:

- (a) provide a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service to homes and communal areas that responds to the needs of, and offers choices to, tenants, and has the objective of completing repairs and improvements right first time
- (b) meet all applicable statutory requirements that provide for the health and safety of the occupants in their homes.

**Is SHG compliant? YES****SHG Statement of Compliance:****Responsive Repairs**

In 2021, SHG's repairs and maintenance service transferred into Three Sixty to become Three Sixty Maintenance and create a "One Team" approach alongside M&E and construction services being delivered within the subsidiary. This led to the Repair 1<sup>st</sup> brand being retired and the new Three Sixty Maintenance brand being promoted. All vans, uniform and stationery have been updated and a stakeholder communication plan was put into place.

The Responsive Repairs Policy has an aim to 'optimise the amount spent between responsive repairs and cyclical/planned expenditure to maximise economies of scale savings'. Repairs are categorised into urgent, routine, planned and programmed repairs. Performance information relating to repairs is reported to the Operations Directorate Management Team to ensure oversight of repairs spend, delivery and value for money.

There are a range of ways in which customers can raise repairs, including online, and the service will endeavour to offer appointments that best suit the customers' availability. Budgets are monitored closely to identify and address any areas of concern. Data is analysed to understand any emerging themes which may be better dealt with through planned maintenance approaches.

In-house repairs staff deliver this service unless it is a specialist area for which a sub-contractor is used and managed by Three Sixty.

## **Capital Programme**

The Asst Management Strategy drives the annual Capital Programme that is developed and approved by SHG Board. Works are identified based upon component life cycles and referrals from both staff and customers. These are then verified by surveys and inspections. Customers are involved in determining priorities for Capital Programme works through consultation.

Proposed programmes are costed out to ensure they are affordable and once work is complete, the asset management system is updated with the information about the new components, which feeds into future asset management planning. This enables Stockport Homes to maintain the right balance between planned and responsive repairs.

Information about the annual Capital Programme is provided on the website and customers are contacted, and supported, by a Customer Liaison Officer before and during the works. Much of the programme is delivered by SHG's in-house construction company: Three Sixty and external contractors are used for more specialist works, for example lift replacements.

## **Customer Safety**

A range of Customer Safety policies, procedures, strategies and management plans are in place detailing how SHG ensure buildings are managed safely and in line with statutory obligations, including gas, electrical and fire safety and asbestos and legionella management. SHG also manages a number of lifts in blocks across the Borough and has working procedures in place for the management of those.

Performance across the six core customer safety areas of building compliance is monitored through monthly operational performance data and corporate KPIs that are reported to Senior Leadership Team monthly and Board quarterly. A Customer Safety Annual Compliance Report is also presented to Audit & Risk Committee for their assurance.

Each year, there is an internal audit of at least one customer safety area to provide independent assurance over processes and controls in operation. This is reported to Audit & Risk Committee.

## **Empty Property Management**

SHG seeks to reduce the time that properties remain vacant as empty / void residential properties can have a detrimental effect on neighbourhoods, have a negative impact on the financial position of the organisation through lost rent, and can prevent or delay customers from being suitably housed. The Empty Property Management Policy outlines the processes to be followed when a property becomes void, up to re-letting this to a new customer. This includes the Lettable Standard with works being identified during a property inspection to ensure all necessary repairs and works are undertaken for the next customer. Where possible, this inspection is

undertaken in the termination period to expedite the repairs process. SHG has an 11-day target from void to reallocation and achievement of this requires close working between a number of SHG teams.

### **Damp, Mould and Condensation**

SHG have a Dampness and Condensation Policy and Procedure which sets out how the organisation responds to reports of dampness, condensation or mould. In addition, SHG have officers trained in building pathology and recognising dampness and associated building defects. Officers use a range of surveying techniques and specialist equipment to aid in the diagnosis of dampness, its cause and recognised remedial practices. Further support is offered by SHG in the form of available literature and wider supportive services such as Energy Advisors and Money Advisors.

### **Climate Change Strategy**

SHG has a Climate Change Strategy in place which will ensure energy efficiency works are undertaken to provide safe and warm homes, reduce fuel poverty and contribute to the achievement of the zero-carbon target in 2038. Works undertaken include improvements such as biomass district heating systems, solar panels, heat source pumps and external wall insulation systems. Work is ongoing to explore how removal of gas appliances could be undertaken and how an electric fleet could be introduced and used by the business.

### **Adaptations**

Stockport Homes works with the Social Care Service at Stockport Council to deliver an adaptations service to install physical alterations to customer's home to allow them to live as independently as possible. These can be either minor or major adaptations. Examples of minor adaptations undertaken include grab rails and half steps and major adaptations can include ramps, wet rooms and stair lifts. An Adaptations Policy is in place that sets out the approach for considering property adaptations. The Policy is supported by an Adaptations Procedure that sets out how customers can apply for an adaptation. There are timescales in place for the installation of adaptations, depending on whether this is urgent or not. SHG delivers adaptations funded via the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) on behalf of Stockport Council.

#### **SHG Evidence:**

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|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Building Safety Strategy</li><li>• Asset Management Strategy</li><li>• Climate Change Strategy</li><li>• Responsive Repairs Policy</li><li>• Empty Property Management Policy</li><li>• Adaptations Policy and Procedure</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gas Safety Policy and Procedure</li><li>• Electrical Fixed Wire Testing Policy and Procedure</li><li>• Asbestos Management Policy and Procedure</li><li>• Legionella Management Policy and Procedure</li><li>• M&amp;E Planned Preventative Maintenance Policy and Procedure (incorporating Lift Safety)</li></ul> |
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## TENANCY STANDARD

### Allocations and Mutual Exchange

#### Required Outcomes:

Registered providers shall let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way.

They shall take into account the housing needs and aspirations of tenants and potential tenants. They shall demonstrate how their lettings:

- (a) make the best use of available housing
- (b) are compatible with the purpose of the housing
- (c) contribute to local authorities' strategic housing function and sustainable communities

There should be clear application, decision-making and appeals processes.

Registered providers shall enable their tenants to gain access to opportunities to exchange their tenancy with that of another tenant, by way of internet-based mutual exchange services.

Is SHG compliant? **YES**

#### SHG Statement of Compliance:

##### Allocations Policy

SHG works closely with the strategic housing function at Stockport Council to ensure housing need in the Borough can be addressed appropriately. SHG delivers the allocations and homelessness service on behalf of the Council. Properties are allocated through Stockport Council's Allocations Policy - which meets the criteria outlined in Part 7 of the 1996 Housing Act and includes priority for overcrowded and under-occupying tenants. It aims to give choice to customers. It contains a review process for all allocation related decisions and is available alongside a robust complaints process. The Allocations Policy also documents those reasons why someone may be excluded from the register.

SHG manages the housing register and operates a choice-based lettings system where customers register for housing, are awarded points and then can bid on suitable properties. These are advertised via the Homechoice Service. This enables customers to bid on properties / locations that best suit their needs. Lettings and sales are all recorded on the CORE system.



## **Housing Options**

SHG provides a housing options service which helps and supports customers to find appropriate housing, either with SHG, another local registered provider, in the private rented sector or by accessing home ownership options such as shared ownership. The Housing Options service also works to prevent homelessness and supports customers making a homeless presentation.

Customers have access to an interpreter service as needed and information can be provided in different languages too. In addition, support is available to those customers who do not have access to the internet or are not able to place bids etc for themselves.

SHG encourages customers to downsize to properties that better suit their needs, freeing up larger family accommodation for those in need. Customers facing financial hardship linked to rent charges for a property which is larger than they require, will be offered support through the Money Advice Team and Housing Services with the aim to support the customer to downsize to a more manageable property.

There is also a Housing Options for Older People scheme called 'HOOP' which specifically looks at how older people's housing needs can best be met. Whilst SHG has a number of specialist accommodation schemes for older people across the borough, people can also be supported to live independently at their current home.

## **Mutual Exchange**

SHG has a mutual exchange service which operates and connects customers wishing to exchange their tenancy with another social housing tenant in order to better meet their housing needs, for example, to address under or overcrowding. Properties are advertised online and on social media in order to encourage positive outcomes. Stockport Homes is also signed up to the House Exchange scheme enabling customers to search for a mutual exchange nationally

A Mutual Exchange Policy is in place and dedicated Mutual Exchange Officers are employed to support the process, identify possible matches for customers where support is required and help progress matches. Proactive work is undertaken to work with customers to find matches and the Mutual Exchange Team can also liaise between tenants if they don't feel confident to approach another tenant initially. At times, a mutual exchange can involve a three or even four way exchange which enables a number of people to move to more suitable accommodation.

The team support tenants throughout the mutual exchange process. Telephone support on the actual process and the matching service provides a valuable support stream to customers who may not be confident in using the service. The use of a dedicated Facebook page provides customers the direct opportunity to comment on any property offered for mutual exchange with customers looking to exchange having the option to manage this process directly and respond to any interested parties or to have all contacts managed through the Mutual Exchange team. This gives customers real ownership of the process when desired.

## **Homelessness Strategy**

SHG delivers the Council's Homelessness Strategy and statutory duties around homelessness. There are three Temporary Accommodations Schemes in the borough which are managed by SHG. SHG is also involved in Greater Manchester (GM) wide initiatives to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping including the 'A Bed Every Night' scheme. SHG is also part of the Rough Sleepers Initiative and the GM Housing First project which enables people with multiple and complex needs to begin recovery and move away from homelessness.

SHG is working with GM partners through the Ethical Lettings Agency (Let Us) to improve access to and the quality and affordability of accommodation in the private rented sector. This initiative improves the housing options for those facing homelessness when social housing can't meet the demand, offering quality private rented accommodation at Local Housing Allowance rent levels.

## **Empty Property Management**

SHG has robust policies and procedures in place to manage and minimise the period of time between a property becoming empty and being relet. These are documented in the Empty Property Management Policy. The target for void relet time is 11 days and SHG are one of the best performers in the country in this regard.

Steps taken to minimise void periods include advertising properties that are due to have a tenancy ending at the earliest opportunity and enabling prospective tenants to view properties whilst they are still under repair. All viewings take place with a Voids Officer enabling the Officer to meet the prospective tenant, check all known housing information is still correct and also talk to the prospective tenant about the property, any repairs still outstanding and answer any questions regarding the property and the area. Operating a choice-based lettings system enables applicants to bid for properties which meet their needs, minimising any refusals. All applicants are given 48 hours to refuse or accept offers if a decision is not immediate; additional time will be given in specific extenuating circumstances.

## **SHG Evidence:**

- Allocations Policy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Empty Property Management Policy
- Mutual Exchange Policy
- Interpreter SLA
- CORE returns

## Tenure

### Required Outcomes:

Registered providers shall offer tenancies or terms of occupation which are compatible with the purpose of the accommodation, the needs of individual households, the sustainability of the community, and the efficient use of their housing stock.

They shall meet all applicable statutory and legal requirements in relation to the form and use of tenancy agreements or terms of occupation.

### Is SHG compliant? **YES**

#### SHG Statement of Compliance:

##### Tenancies

Stockport Council and Stockport Homes favour using the longest possible tenancies, an approach that is set out in the Tenancy Policy. This ensures that the terms of occupation of a property are compatible with the customers housing need. Fixed term tenancies are not used.

Stockport Homes has a number of tenancy agreements in place including: Assured Shorthold (starter); Assured; Equitable Tenancy; and a standard Introductory and Secure Council Tenancy Agreement. These are granted depending on the property ownership (SHG or the Council).

Introductory (or Starter) Tenancies are of 12 months duration and move to Secure (or Assured Shorthold) if the initial 12 months have been successful. During this period, a range of visits are undertaken to verify the tenant is complying with the Tenancy Agreement in place, e.g. paying rent and keeping the property in good condition. In addition, these checks also ensure housing fraud is not taking place and the property is being properly occupied.

There is a robust review process in place before the end of the 12-month period. Security of tenure is maintained in line with relevant guidance and legislation, including during major works decants. SHG sought legal advice in Autumn 2020 to ensure the Tenancy Agreement was up to date and that process confirmed there were no changes required.

Licenses are used in Temporary Accommodation for the letting of rooms and properties within those schemes.

In addition to this, SHG has a Rent to Buy Scheme which will allow customers to rent properties from SHG with the option to buy at the end of a five-year period. This offers another route into home ownership for customers.

## Managing Tenancies

Tenants are proactively contacted by their Neighbourhood Housing Officer, either as a home visit or a telephone call. By using a targeted approach, SHG can ensure that customers are provided with any support / advice they may need. When visits are undertaken, any property condition issues that are identified can then be addressed in a timely manner, with repairs being raised as needed or customers being referred to support services if appropriate.

A Managing Tenancy Breaches Policy and an Anti-Social Behaviour policy are in place to outline the action that can be taken on tenancy breaches. In addition, there are Income Collection Policies in place and a Money Advice Service to ensure customers are able to maintain regular rent payments. SHG also has a Tenancy Fraud Policy in place and a dedicated officer who investigates both proactive and reactive cases where there are suspicions of subletting or other tenancy fraud. There is an Abandonment Policy in place to deal with tenancies where the customers is found to have left the property and not followed the termination process.

SHG has a Tenancy Changes Policy in place to deal with successions to / assignment of tenancies to eligible family members. The Policy also deals with other changes that can impact on the tenancy including relationship breakdowns, name changes and transitioning customers

## Tenancy Support

SHG has a range of support initiatives in place to help support customers to manage and maintain their tenancies. This starts before tenancies are granted through the work of the Tenancy Ready team who provide bespoke support to customers who are highly likely to receive an offer of accommodation imminently, where there has previously been a failed tenancy, or the customer has acknowledged issues which could result in a tenancy not being sustainable. The Tenancy Ready Team works with customers right through to the tenancy sign up process ensuring the tenancy starts successfully and will then engage further support for the customer through the Housing Support service or other specialist support providers should there be an ongoing requirement. Further examples of tenancy support include:

- Money Advice Team to help with benefit and debt situations
- Employment Support Team to assist customers to find work, training or volunteering
- Housing Support Service to work with vulnerable customers struggling to maintain their tenancies and assist them in accessing other support services
- Positive Engagement Team who work with offenders of ASB to tackle issues and reduce instances of ASB
- Furniture Recycling and Furnished Tenancies Schemes

### SHG Evidence:

- Allocations Policy

- Managing Tenancy Breaches Policy
- ASB Policy

- Tenancy Policy
- Assured shorthold tenancy
- Assured tenancy
- Equitable tenancy
- Standard tenancy agreement
- Tenancy Ready Policy

- Income Collection Policy
- Decant Policy
- Tenancy Changes Policy
- Tenancy Fraud Policy
- Abandonment Policy

## NEIGHBOURHOOD AND COMMUNITY STANDARD

### Neighbourhood Management

#### Required Outcomes:

Registered providers shall keep the neighbourhood and communal areas associated with the homes that they own clean and safe. They shall work in partnership with their tenants and other providers and public bodies where it is effective to do so.

#### Is SHG compliant? **YES**

#### SHG Statement of Compliance:

SHG has a range of policies and procedures in place to manage neighbourhoods and communities so that they are attractive and thriving place to live.

#### Estate Inspections

The Estate Inspections & Customer Walkabouts Policy details the approach Stockport Homes takes when managing neighbourhoods including communal areas. This policy describes the role of partners and tenants in the estate inspection process. Customers were involved in the most recent review of the approach to estate inspections. By having an effective estate inspection process in place, SHG is ensuring that issues are identified early on, are addressed appropriately and that the neighbourhoods where SHG manage / own stock are attractive places to live.

Stockport Homes has an Eyes Wide Open Statement which sets the guidelines for all employees in maintaining neighbourhoods and reporting any repairs or concerns associated with neighbourhoods or customers.

#### Management of Blocks

SHG manages a range of different blocks within the Borough, each being visited by a number of different teams to ensure a comprehensive approach to management. Each multi storey block is visited monthly by a Neighbourhood Housing Officer for a block

inspection to take place and be recorded. This will identify any issues which need resolving, including any repairs that may be needed. In addition, The Environmental Services team deliver caretaking services across the blocks, the frequency differs subject to type of block, all tasks completed on site and any issues which are recorded using Sweep Up and share with Housing Services.

In terms of managing fire risk, SHG works in partnership with Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS). SHG has in place a Low-Rise Fire Safety Procedure, Multi-Storey Fire Safety Procedure and Sheltered Scheme Fire Procedure in place. These procedures detail SHG's approach to managing internal communal areas in relation to managing fire risk and keeping areas clean and sterile. There is also an associated Storage of Mobility Scooter Policy. Analysis is undertaken of any fires which occur to derive learning and further improve the approach to fire safety. Key fire safety messages are shared with customers via the newsletter, website and social media.

Communal areas within blocks also form part of SHG's Asset Management Strategy to ensure they are well maintained over time and subject to planned work including decorating, improvement and upgrading as required.

There is wider work ongoing to ensure SHG's approach to Building Safety is robust and customers are engaged with the requirements that are forthcoming. The Building Safety Team work to ensure multi storey blocks are managed in a way which meets the requirements of the new Building Safety Regulator and ensures close working with other teams that provide services to multi storey blocks. A pilot approach was introduced in 2021 and SHG's longer term approach will be agreed in 2022-23.

### **Caretaking**

SHG delivers a caretaking service to customers living in multi storey, mid-rise, low-rise accommodation and independent living schemes, services vary from daily to weekly tasks specific to each location but includes health and safety tasks. The service is resourced and managed through a bespoke IT system 'Sweep Up'.

For blocks which receive a caretaking service, customers can expect to receive services in line with the caretaking service standards. The type of caretaking, cleaning services and frequency differ across blocks, will include health and safety checks, and for specific blocks will include cleaning of internal and external of communal areas, removal of bulky waste, fly tipping. This is a valuable service which enables SHG to maintain clean and safe communal areas and have a robust approach to identifying and addressing issues which may arise.

### **Grounds Maintenance**

SHG's Greenspace Strategy and Action Plan sets out strategic vision and delivery of Greenspace Services across Stockport. This includes management and maintenance of communal gardens, open spaces, trees, playgrounds. The management is overseen by the SHG Greenspace Team, via external contracts for which there are specific service level agreements and/or contracts in

place. Further support and information is available for customers on Stockport Homes web site and access to a link portal provide by the contractor on schedules of work for customers receiving the grounds maintenance service.

Service Standards are in place and have been agreed with customers. Tasks include grass cutting, flower bed, shrub and hedge maintenance, weed and litter control, hard surface maintenance and tree management. SHG works closely with the external grounds maintenance contractor, and Stockport Council, to ensure greenspaces remain neat and attractive all year round.

### **Concierge CCTV Service**

At SHG's head office is a state-of-the-art CCTV control room which monitors a number of CCTV cameras within the neighbourhoods that SHG manages. They also manage the concierge service and door entry systems. The control room is staffed 24/7/365 in order to ensure the safety and security of all residents and visitors within the blocks.

During 2021-22 the team made arrangements for some additional CCTV monitoring services to be moved into SHG's remit and from 1 April 2022, SHG will monitor public space cameras on behalf of the Council.

#### **SHG Evidence:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Estate Inspections &amp; Customer Walkabouts Policy</li><li>• CCTV and Noise monitoring code of practice</li><li>• Concierge and CCTV operating procedure</li><li>• Caretaking Service Standards</li><li>• Building Safety Strategy</li><li>• Greenspace Strategy and Action Plan</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Low-rise fire safety procedure</li><li>• Multi-storey Fire safety Procedure</li><li>• Sheltered Scheme Fire Procedure</li><li>• Eyes Wide Open Policy Statement</li><li>• Customer Handbook</li><li>• Tenancy Agreements</li><li>• Sign Up Policy for new tenants</li></ul> |
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### **Local Co-Operation**

#### **Required Outcomes:**

Registered providers shall co-operate with relevant partners to help promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in the areas where they own properties

#### **Is SHG compliant? YES**

#### **SHG Statement of Compliance:**

The SHG website contains a wide range of information about the services offered by SHG to customers. Newsletters, social media campaigns and advertisements in local areas (e.g. on notice boards in blocks) enable messages to be conveyed to customers about activities, events and services on offer. For example, information about the Community Fund is promoted to encourage applicants to apply for funding for local initiatives.

## **Local Area Co-operation**

SHG has a range of initiatives in place which promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing of neighbourhoods. Some examples include: food pantries, employment initiatives, customer training programmes, work placements, community fund, community development work and identifying funding opportunities for local groups that make a difference.

Customer events are held in the neighbourhoods within which Stockport Homes has stock and they are made available to all customers within those neighbourhoods (not solely Stockport Homes tenants). This forms part of the wider community development approach.

Neighbourhood Action Plans are in place across the Borough and are published in the Customer Newsletter to highlight key activities benefitting all areas and specific information for each of the neighbourhoods managed to keep customers updated and informed.

Furthermore, SHG's charitable subsidiary Foundations undertakes a wide range of activities aimed at improving the lives of those that live in SHG properties and communities. This includes working with local schools to deliver sessions in school and holiday activities.

## **Partnership Working**

SHG is a member of the Stockport Housing Partnership, which is a group of housing providers across Stockport that aim to ensure a consistent approach to, and the resolution of, key issues (e.g. anti-social behaviour, tackling domestic violence and meeting housing need).

SHG also sits on and attends meetings of the Safer Stockport Partnership (<http://www.saferstockport.org.uk/>), the local statutory Community Safety Partnership, through which public sector partners work together and alongside community and voluntary organisations to reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and re-offending and substance misuse.

Partnership working with other agencies is key to delivering outcomes. SHG is part of the Place Based Integration model that operates within the Borough. This multi-agency model involves regular meetings between partner agencies that are designed to engage residents at an early stage to prevent issues escalating to high cost, reactive statutory services. This is achieved through short and timely interventions that engage residents in service provision. The meetings enable a wide range of agencies (Stockport Homes, Police, Stockport Family, Adult Social Care, NHS) to share information, identify issues, and collectively agree the most appropriate interventions. The Place Based Integration model originally commenced in one area, but its success means it has been expanded to other areas of the borough where Stockport Homes has significant stock numbers.

SHG attends regular meetings with Service Managers from Stockport Council, including strategic housing, to ensure that any services provided by them are fulfilling the needs of the neighbourhoods (e.g. street cleansing, refuse removal). Customers are made aware of



their responsibilities in maintaining their home, keeping properties in good condition and keeping communal areas clean through the tenancy agreement. This is also re-iterated in the customer handbook.

SHG is an active member of the Greater Manchester Housing Providers Group (GMHP), with SHG's Chief Executive the vice-chair of the group. The GMHP is made up of 24 housing providers working across GM and promotes partnership working, sharing of good practice and opportunities to collaborate to develop new services and secure external funding across a range of different areas. SHG's Assistant Chief Executive is the chair of the Employment and Skills group and Officers play a key role in a range of other groups including Supported Housing, Health, HR & OD, Building Safety and Older Persons Services.

SHG is a member of the Athena group, a company limited by guarantee with membership drawn from many of the major housing providers within the region. Athena takes a collaborative, partnership approach to a range of areas of work which benefit both organisation and tenants including procurement activity and more recently has been used as a vehicle to bid for contracts and funding. Through Athena, Stockport Homes has secured funding for employability initiatives including Skills for Employment and the Motiv8 programme, which benefits local residents by providing a range of bespoke employment and support programmes.

Positive Engagement Officers are employed to provide intensive support to perpetrators of anti-social behaviour. The officers help these customers to sustain tenancies by challenging and reducing offending behaviour.

Stockport Homes operates a number of community centres on behalf of the Council in areas where it manages stock. The centres have been developed to provide facilities for local residents and they are used for classes and course that promote exercise, healthy eating, employment and community interaction.

**SHG Evidence:**

- Customer Influence and Voice Strategy
- Positive Engagement Policy
- Community Centres information
- Employment Support information
- Your Local Pantry information
- Safer Stockport Partnership agreement

**Anti-Social Behaviour**

**Required Outcomes:**

Registered providers shall work in partnership with other agencies to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhoods where they own homes.

**Is SHG compliant? YES**

**SHG Statement of Compliance:**

**Strategic Approach**

SHG has a strong track record of dealing successfully with ASB including addressing the root cause of the behaviour, supporting victims and witnesses and using a range of legal powers to effectively deal with issues. It is important that customers feel safe in their living environments and able to report ASB, knowing that it will be tackled. Some issues are dealt with in a multi-agency manner including working with our partners in Safer Stockport Partnership. During the Covid pandemic, there has been increased demand on the ASB Service as people have spent more time at home.

Stockport Homes has an Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Service that has been assessed through the Resolve Anti-Social Behaviour Quality Assurance Framework. The ASB Strategy and Policy sets out how Stockport Homes will tackle anti-social behaviour with partners. The Strategy was reviewed and renewed in February 2022.

As part of pre-tenancy checks for rehousing, a risk assessment is carried out with all applicants to identify any issues that may negatively affect their tenancy. These are addressed as appropriate before the tenancy starts with appropriate support, advice and referrals to other agencies etc. Customers are made aware of their responsibilities as a tenant through the customer handbook and the sign-up process, in terms of the requirements of the tenancy agreement. The SHG website provides more information for customers on their responsibilities on anti-social behaviour and the action that can be taken to address it, should it occur.

**Partnership Working**

Stockport Homes recognises that it cannot tackle ASB in isolation. SHG is a key member of the Safer Stockport Partnership (SSP) which includes partners such as the Police, Local Authority, and Probation etc. SHG works with the SSP, both at a strategic level and locally through the Partnership Delivery Group. SHG work closely with partner agencies through formal processes such as MAPPA (multi-agency public protection arrangements) for high-risk offenders and MARAC (multi-agency risk assessment conferences) for domestic violence cases to ensure victims are protected and the risk of reoffending and ASB minimised for offenders.

In addition, we have a dedicated worker who engages at early stage with those leaving prison or on probation with housing issues to help minimise re-offending. Attendance at Threat Risk and Harm meetings with police and other agencies provide Stockport Homes with opportunity to share information and problem solve neighbourhood's issues as a collective. In addition, there is a robust information sharing protocol in place which allows the police to respond to requests about criminal convictions to support legal action.

## **Managing ASB Cases**

ASB can be reported through any channel, including at reception, via One Number and directly to the ASB Team. There is also an online reporting tool on the Stockport Homes website. Cases are managed in a specific, secure case management system which tracks actions and interventions undertaken and contact with each party.

The ASB Policy and Procedure set out the approach to case management including timescales to be met and service standards to be delivered. There are a range of legal powers available to SHG to be used, however, officers will try and resolve issues outside of court wherever possible. This may be through the use of behaviour contracts to mediation.

SHG will install CCTV cameras or noise monitoring equipment to record instances of ASB, where possible, in order to strengthen cases of legal action and obtain reliable evidence for court. SHG also offers customers an App so they can easily report ASB incidents via a smartphone or tablet and easily provide video and audio evidence that is captured on devices.

## **Positive Engagement**

The Positive Engagement Team works with perpetrators of ASB to identify the issues causing the unacceptable behaviour. This could be for example identifying drug / alcohol dependencies or mental health issues. Perpetrators are then provided with intensive support to sustain tenancies independently by challenging and reducing offending behaviour.

## **Support**

There are a range of ways in which victims and witnesses can be supported. Additional security measures can be added to homes including cameras, fireproof letter boxes and additional locks. There is also a victim support process in place to customers to ensure victims are supported in bringing their case forward. In addition, there is a mediation service to resolve conflict amicably and for the victim and perpetrator to discuss issues in a safe environment.

## **Dealing with Domestic Abuse / Hate Incidents**

Domestic abuse can occur in a number of ways and can happen in the family, household or between partners. We take this very seriously and our staff are trained to deal with issues sensitively. Victims of domestic abuse are supported by the ASB Team and the local organisation: Stockport Without Abuse. SHG will ensure that services are delivered to meet the requirements of the Domestic Abuse Bill. SHG is also exploring the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance accreditation.

SHG has a Hate Policy in place which details how SHG will work with customers to ensure no one is living in fear of hate incidents. Action will be taken when hate incidents are reported and SHG will work in partnership with local agencies to tackle issues and keep customers and communities safe.

### **Reporting Performance**

The Corporate Performance Report contains details of indicators and measures that demonstrate the action taken on anti-social behaviour to SLT and Board. The Operations Directorate Management Team will also review more detailed information about case load, successes and legal action taken.

### **Resolve ASB**

SHG has been involved in the development of the new Resolve Standard for ASB which has involved working with other providers and community safety organisations (including police forces) to develop the new Standards. SHG will be one of the first organisations to go through the process of being awarded the Standard, which will involve an onsite peer review during 2022.

### **SHG Evidence:**

- ASB Strategy
- ASB Policy
- ASB Policy Private Rented Sector
- Noise Monitoring Code of Practice
- Hate Policy
- Domestic Abuse Policy
- Positive Engagement Policy
- ASB Resolve Quality Assured Assessment Report
- Corporate Performance Report and appendix (annual)
- Guide to tackling ASB for customers which includes information on witness support