

Brighton & Hove City Council

Cabinet

Agenda Item 46

Subject: Raising Professional Standards in Housing

Date of meeting: 17 September 2026

Report of: Cabinet Member for Housing

Lead Officer: Corporate Director Homes & Adult Social Care

Contact Officer: Laura Stanbridge
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Ward(s) affected: All

Key Decision: Yes

Reason(s) Key: Is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral divisions (wards).

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval of the new Housing Learning and Development Policy and Landlord Services Professional Standards. Together, these documents establish a clear framework for the competence, conduct and professional development of staff and contractors delivering landlord services on behalf of the Council. The Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards Consumer Standards, introduced through powers under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 place a clear expectation on landlords to deliver safe, high-quality, and tenant-focused services. The Competence and Conduct Standard reinforces this by requiring housing professionals to demonstrate the skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviours necessary to meet these standards and achieve positive outcomes for residents
- 1.2 They have been developed in response to the requirements of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act, tenant feedback regarding service delivery, communication and professionalism, and the Council's commitment to becoming a Great Landlord.
- 1.3 The development of these policies reflect the Council Plan 2023-2027 outcome to deliver 'A responsive and learning council with well run services'

and the Housing Strategy 2024-2029 priority 5 'providing resident focused housing services'.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Approve the Housing Learning and Development Policy as set out at Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Approve the Landlord Services Professional Standards as set out at Appendix 2.
- 2.3 Notes that the documents will be reviewed periodically to ensure ongoing compliance with regulatory requirements and alignment with service priorities.

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 places a requirement on registered providers to ensure staff delivering housing services have the appropriate skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours, supported by a clear approach to learning and development. In response, Housing have developed a Housing Learning and Development Policy and Landlord Services Professional Standards to strengthen expectations around professional conduct, customer experience, competence and continuous improvement. The standards build on the Council's existing Code of Conduct and Behaviour Framework by setting out specific expectations for staff and contractors delivering landlord services, ensuring professionalism, accountability and resident-focused service delivery remain at the heart of Landlord Services.
- 3.2 The development of these documents has been informed by evidence from housing complaints, resident feedback and engagement activity. Housing staff met directly with tenants to understand their experiences and expectations of landlord services, with particular focus on communication, behaviour and professionalism. This feedback informed the initial drafts, which were subsequently subject to consultation with tenants, staff and stakeholders to further refine the proposed standards and learning priorities. The final documents therefore reflect both regulatory requirements and the issues that matter most to residents, while providing a clear framework for supporting, developing and holding staff accountable to the standards expected by the Council.
- 3.3 Approval of these documents will provide a consistent and transparent approach for setting expectations about professional behaviour, customer service, learning and development, accountability and continuous

improvement across Housing services. The proposed framework will support compliance with regulatory requirements, strengthen assurance around workforce competence and conduct, and demonstrate the Council's commitment to improving resident experience and service outcomes through a culture of learning, professionalism and continuous improvement.

- 3.4 The Competence and Conduct Standard comes into force on 1 October 2026 and is designed to strengthen professionalism, accountability and tenant experience across the social housing sector. The standard requires registered providers to ensure that staff and contractors delivering housing services have the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours needed to provide high-quality services, and that senior housing managers and executives hold, or are working towards, recognised housing qualifications. It also requires landlords to have a clear learning and development policy, a code of conduct for staff, robust arrangements for performance management, and meaningful opportunities for tenants to influence and scrutinise these arrangements. The standard reflects lessons learned from Grenfell and aims to ensure that residents are treated with respect, listened to, and receive safe, fair and accountable services from competent and professional housing staff

Existing Corporate Frameworks

- 3.5 As a local authority landlord, the council has a range of frameworks which support staff learning and conduct. The proposed Learning and Development Policy and Landlord Services Professional Standards have been designed to align with and build upon existing Council commitments and frameworks, including:

- Code of Conduct
- Behaviour Framework
- Customer Promise
- Learning Organisation Framework
- Anti-Racism Strategy
- Equality and Inclusion commitments
- Safeguarding responsibilities

- 3.6 The proposed documents incorporate these existing organisational principles into practical expectations relevant to Housing and Landlord Services, which have been shaped by residents.

Policy Development

- 3.7 The development of both the Learning and Development Policy and the Landlord Professional Standards was based on a series of in person

workshops with residents. The workshops were designed around the requirements of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act and adopted a collaborative, trauma-informed approach that encouraged participants to share their experiences and expectations in a safe and supportive environment. Tenants were provided with an overview of the new regulatory requirements before being invited to discuss what good landlord services look and feel like from a resident perspective. Through facilitated discussions, residents identified key themes including communication, respect, professionalism, accountability, listening and follow-through.

- 3.8 The key themes highlighted in the workshops with regards to professional standards were around improving our communication with tenants including keeping them informed; building relationships with tenants by positively demonstrating understanding and care and following up agreed actions promptly. Residents highlighted the importance of active listening, easy to understand communication and being treated with respect.
- 3.9 Other themes highlighted by residents in the workshops with regards to learning and development were to ensure staff had the correct qualifications and technical skills and knowledge to confidently and successfully carry out their roles. Residents highlighted the importance of providing staff with a range of opportunities for learning, particularly around understanding lived experience of residents, and considering how residents can contribute directly to staff learning.
- 3.10 Building on these themes, participants took part in co-production activities to help shape both the Professional Standards and the Learning and Development Policy. Residents explored the behaviours they would expect staff to demonstrate, identified areas where additional skills, knowledge or training could improve services, and highlighted priorities for workforce development. The outputs provided a valuable tenant-led evidence base that directly informed the development of the final policy and standards, ensuring resident expectations and experiences were embedded within the proposals.
- 3.11 Detailed analysis was undertaken of complaints made regarding staff conduct over a two year period and used this to build upon the feedback received at the in-person workshops. This analysis showed similar themes in customer experience, communication quality, professionalism, and inconsistent outcomes for residents. It highlighted the need for further training, improved oversight, more consistency, improvement contractor management and improving our internal communication. This analysis, together with the direct feedback from workshops was used to form the first drafts of the policies.

Consultation

- 3.12 The draft Learning and Development Policy and Landlord Professional Standards were put to public and staff consultation in June 2026 for four weeks.
- 3.13 The tenant consultation generated a significant level of engagement and provided valuable insight into residents' expectations of landlord services, staff conduct and professional development. While a number of respondents considered the proposed standards to be comprehensive, the majority used the opportunity to identify areas where service delivery could be strengthened. The strongest themes related to honest and transparent communication, responsive and accessible services, respectful treatment, accountability, better coordination between teams, and greater confidence that commitments made to residents would be followed through. Respondents also highlighted the importance of fairness, impartiality, effective record keeping, appropriate support for disabled and vulnerable residents, and clear standards for staff and contractors working in residents' homes. A consistent message throughout the responses was that policies should move beyond broad values and set out clear, observable behaviours and expectations that can be monitored and held accountable.
- 3.14 The staff consultation showed strong support for both the proposed Professional Standards and Learning and Development Policy, with respondents agreeing that the expectations reflected the professionalism, behaviours and values that should underpin housing services. Staff welcomed the focus on accountability, communication, safeguarding, equality and inclusion, and strongly supported a culture of learning, reflection and continuous improvement, including learning from complaints, tenant feedback and lived experience.
- 3.15 Alongside this support, staff highlighted the importance of ensuring the framework reflects the realities of housing work. Feedback emphasised that service delivery is influenced not only by individual behaviour but also by wider organisational factors such as workload pressures, staffing capacity, systems, processes and dependencies on other teams and agencies. Staff advocated for a supportive, learning-focused approach that promotes coaching, development and psychological safety, rather than an overly punitive response to concerns. Respondents also emphasised the need to more clearly align the framework with existing corporate commitments. Additionally, staff identified cross-team working, conflict management, safeguarding, mental health awareness, resilience and staff wellbeing as important priorities for future learning and development. Overall, the consultation provided strong endorsement of the proposed approach while helping to strengthen the framework by ensuring it reflects organisational

realities, promotes fairness and supports a culture of continuous improvement

Final Policy Content

- 3.16 The final Housing Learning and Development Policy has been significantly strengthened through the engagement and consultation process and now provides a more comprehensive and balanced framework for workforce development. In response to feedback, the policy has been expanded to place greater emphasis on communication skills, professional boundaries, de-escalation, mediation, coaching approaches, safeguarding, trauma-informed practice, equality, diversity and inclusion, and supporting residents with complex and diverse needs. The policy also now includes a stronger focus on staff wellbeing, psychological safety and reflective practice, recognising the challenging nature of housing work and the importance of supporting colleagues to learn, develop and perform effectively.
- 3.17 Feedback from both tenants and staff also influenced the inclusion of greater learning from complaints, service failures, tenant feedback and lived experience as formal drivers for learning and professional development. The policy places increased emphasis on cross-service working, understanding wider council services and partner agencies, and promoting a One Council approach to service delivery. Tenant involvement has been strengthened throughout the learning offer, with commitments to co-produced learning, community-based learning opportunities and direct engagement with residents as part of staff development.
- 3.18 The final policy also reflects feedback that learning and development should be viewed as a continuous improvement tool rather than solely a compliance requirement. Consequently, the policy aligns learning activity more closely with service improvement, skills audits, performance frameworks, regulatory requirements and organisational priorities. The resulting policy provides a broader, more resident-focused and learning-centred approach that supports workforce competence, professional growth and improved outcomes for tenants, while ensuring compliance with the Competence and Conduct Standard.
- 3.19 The final Landlord Services Professional Standards have been strengthened through consultation with tenants and staff and now provide a clearer framework for the behaviours expected of staff and contractors delivering landlord services. The standards place a strong emphasis on professionalism, respect, communication, accountability, accessibility and equality, while also aligning with existing corporate frameworks, including the Council's Code of Conduct, Behaviour Framework, Customer Promise, Anti-Racism Strategy and safeguarding principles. Feedback from tenants helped strengthen expectations around honesty, communication, reasonable

adjustments, follow-through on actions, accurate record keeping and joined-up working across services.

- 3.20 Staff feedback also influenced significant changes to the final document. The standards now place greater emphasis on learning, reflection and professional development, rather than a purely punitive approach, and explicitly recognise the complexity of housing work, the need for professional judgement and the influence of wider organisational factors on service delivery. Additional changes include the use of more positive, role-modelling language, stronger recognition of equality, diversity and inclusion, and clearer expectations relating to vulnerability, trauma-informed practice, managing conflict, collaborative working and leadership responsibility. The resulting standards provide a balanced framework that reflects both resident expectations and the realities of delivering housing services, while supporting continuous improvement and high-quality services.

Implementation and Monitoring

- 3.21 The Learning and Development policy will be implemented from 1 October 2026.
- 3.22 The Learning and Development Policy is clear that competence includes how staff treat tenants, and that the standards set out that unprofessional behaviour is addressed through management and HR processes. The new standards strengthen the expectation that the council can demonstrate this clearly in practice, showing not just that issues are dealt with, but how we learn from them and improve outcomes for residents.
- 3.23 The Housing's Learning and Development Forum will monitor the effectiveness implementing the policy and the impact for staff and tenants, and review periodic skills assessments of roles within landlord services.
- 3.24 There is a dedicated budget for learning and development of staff, as well as a bursary scheme for professional development, which we will utilise to support achieving the outcomes of the policy.
- 3.25 The policy and standards will be reviewed every 3 years or in the event of new legislation or significant change.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 Landlords are required by the Social Housing Regulation Act to develop both policies in collaboration with tenants, and failure to deliver both the Learning and Development Policy and Professional Standards would amount to non-

compliance with this regulation. Therefore not delivering this work is not considered an alternative option.

5. Community engagement and consultation

- 5.1 We conducted a series of in person workshops with tenants to explore key themes around learning, development and staff behaviours, inviting open discussion and an opportunity to co-produce the policies. We then did a public consultation for 4 weeks on the platform Yourvoice, receiving 195 responses from tenants, and 30 from staff. We also received multiple responses directly from staff teams within the council.
- 5.2 We have consulted colleagues in Human Resources, Learning and Development and Trade Unions on the draft policies.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The current annual revenue budget for staff training across the HRA is £0.079m which will be utilised to support the policy, as well as making use of existing training materials and internal opportunities for shadowing and learning in the community.

Name of finance officer consulted: Michael Bentley Date consulted 27 July 2026

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The regulator requires professional standards to be applied as set out in legislation and by guidance. Legal Services has reviewed the Learning and Development Policy and the Professional Standards for Landlord Services and does not consider that either document presents any legal issues. Whilst the Professional Standards set out the behaviours and expectations for staff within Landlord Services, they do not create a separate conduct framework. Any concerns or issues relating to employee conduct will continue to be managed through the Council's existing policies and procedures. Qualification and maintenance of qualification is an ongoing liability and needs to be routinely checked, to meet the standards.

Name of lawyer consulted: Simon Court Date consulted 14 August 2026

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1 The Learning and Development Policy and Landlord Services Professional Standards within the framework of the new Competence and Conduct Standard. This presents a significant opportunity to strengthen equality, diversity and inclusion across social housing by ensuring staff have the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed to deliver respectful, high quality

services to all tenants. The standard places greater emphasis on understanding and responding to the diverse needs of residents, tackling stigma and discrimination, improving engagement with underrepresented groups, and ensuring tenants have meaningful influence over service standards and organisational culture.

- 8.2 While new qualification requirements may present challenges for some employees, these can be mitigated through targeted support and development. Overall, the standard should help drive a more inclusive, tenant-focused culture that improves both workforce capability and outcomes for diverse communities
- 8.3 A staff Equalities Impact Assessment was completed when the policies were drafted.

9. Sustainability implications

- 9.1 There are no significant direct environmental sustainability implications arising from the adoption of the Housing Learning and Development Policy or the Landlord Services Professional Standards. The policies primarily relate to workforce development, professional conduct and service delivery.
- 9.2 Where possible, learning and development activity will continue to make use of existing digital learning platforms, virtual meetings and online resources, reducing the need for travel and supporting the council's wider objectives to minimise carbon emissions associated with business activity. The policies are therefore expected to have a neutral to modestly positive impact on environmental sustainability.

10. Health and wellbeing implications

- 10.1 The proposed Housing Learning and Development Policy and Landlord Services Professional Standards are expected to have positive health and wellbeing benefits for both residents and staff. For tenants, the policies promote respectful, professional and trauma-informed services, strengthen awareness of vulnerability and diverse needs, and support improved communication and resident experience.
- 10.2 For staff, the policies place greater emphasis on wellbeing, psychological safety, reflective practice and continuous professional development. They support a culture of learning, coaching and improvement, helping staff to manage the challenges of housing work while building confidence, resilience and professional competence. Overall, the policies are intended to contribute to positive wellbeing outcomes by fostering respectful relationships, supportive working practices and a culture of continuous improvement.

Other Implications

11. Procurement implications

- 11.1 The proposed policies have limited procurement implications. Implementation of the Learning and Development Policy may require the use of external training providers, accredited qualifications or specialist learning programmes, subject to available budgets and service requirements. In addition, the Professional Standards apply to contractors delivering landlord services on behalf of the council and may need to be reflected in relevant procurement, contract management and supplier arrangements.

12. Crime & disorder implications:

- 12.1 The proposed policies are expected to make a positive contribution to community safety by strengthening staff knowledge and professional practice in areas such as safeguarding, conflict management, vulnerability and partnership working. The policies support staff to identify risks, respond appropriately to anti-social behaviour and safeguarding concerns, and work effectively with relevant agencies to protect residents and communities

13. Conclusion

- 13.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the Housing Learning and Development Policy and Landlord Services Professional Standards to ensure the Council meets the requirements of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act and the Competence and Conduct Standard. These documents are important because they provide a clear and consistent framework for the skills, knowledge, behaviours and professional standards expected of staff and contractors delivering landlord services. Developed in collaboration with tenants and informed by feedback from tenants, complaints analysis and staff consultation, they will help strengthen professionalism, accountability and resident experience, while supporting the Council's ambition to be a Great Landlord and deliver high quality, resident focused housing services.

Supporting Documentation

Appendices

Appendix 1 Housing Learning and Development Policy

Appendix 2 Housing Professional Standards