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Surrey Borough fails social housing tenants

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Guildford Borough Council (GBC) has failed to meet new rules on social housing a judgement has rules.

The report published by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) said the social landlord for around 5,200 homes is “failing”on a number of legal health and safety requirements.

Around 1,700 homes have been left without an up-to-date electrical condition report and another 1,000 with unsatisfactory certificates, according to the RSH’s report. GBC told the RSH it does not have evidence of a current electrical condition report for more than 100 communal blocks, and it could not provide evidence it had completed around 1,300 fire safety actions.

Introduced on April 1 this year, the new consumer standards intended to drive landlords to deliver long term improvements for tenants. In the first bunch of regulatory judgements RSH gave Guildford a ‘C3’ grading, which means there are serious failings and it needs to make significant improvements.

Reports by the RSH, published July 9, said: “The information provided by Guildford BC to us during our engagement with it demonstrates that Guildford BC is failing to ensure that it meets a number of legal requirements in relation to health and safety”.

Findings from the report also showed GBC had not collected Tenant Satisfaction Measures from tenants, which all social landlords are required to do. RSH judgement report said: “Guildford BC has been unable to explain the reasons for its failure to collect this data, and as a result, tenants are not supported to effectively scrutinise Guildford BC’s performance in delivering landlord services.”

In December 2023, GBC said it identified some areas of concern within its landlord housing function included potentially unnecessary repairs being carried out to tenants’ homes. Referring itself to the government’s Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), GBC has since identified other concerns relating to its legal landlord health and safety compliance.

Commenting on the Regulator’s report, Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing, Cllr Julia McShane responded: “Everyone living in a council property deserves to have a safe and secure home. Since December 2023, we’ve taken urgent action to improve our service. We can evidence progress across all areas of compliance and building safety which includes a real time compliance dashboard, recruitment of expert officers and procurement of building safety contracts.

The leader of the Liberal Democrat-run council said it has reviewed all electrical information data to confirm an accurate position of where it is. GBC has also procured two short term contractors to complete the certification work by July 2025.

McShane said a fire risk validation exercise has confirmed there are no outstanding high-risk actions. She added that a new contractor is now revisiting the low to medium risk properties to validate them, arrange any works required and update the council’s position.

“Our engagement with the Regulator will be ongoing and plays an integral and intensive part of our improvement plan as we work to resolve all of the issues identified and achieve full compliance for our residents,” McShane added.

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