

Appendix**Background**

Following on from the Grenfell tragedy in 2017, significant concerns were raised nationally about the competence and conduct of staff working in social housing.

Informed by the recommendations of The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper (2020), the government committed to reviewing training, qualifications and standards for staff across the sector. The review concluded that greater professionalism is needed, emphasising that improving culture, behaviour, attitudes and technical skills were essential for raising service quality. It also found that if qualification requirements were to be introduced, these should be focused on senior managers and executives as they are best placed to drive culture change and are responsible for managing the delivery of high quality, professional services.

As a result of this, the government launched a consultation on the introduction of a Competence and Conduct Standard in February 2024.

Qualifications

The standard expects that certain senior roles must hold, or be working towards, a relevant housing qualification. This is intended to raise professional standards, ensure consistency within the housing sector and give tenants confidence that those leading and managing housing services have the necessary knowledge and expertise.

The standard sets out three different sub-types of roles:

A – general housing management services such as customer service, complaints, anti-social behaviour, lettings or tenant engagement

B – technical housing management services such as repairs and asset management

C – cross tenure roles such as people who may manage both leasehold and social housing tenant properties

For sub-types B and C, the person qualified in a relevant technical or leasehold qualification that is broadly relevant to their role or they can choose to follow the route of subtype A, which is a Level 4 or Level 5 higher management qualification.

Based on the criteria set out in the policy statement from the government, this will affect the following posts:

Level 5 in Housing / Foundation Degree (or equivalent):

- Assistant Director of Housing
- Assistant Director of Asset Management and Development

Level 4 in Housing Management (or equivalent):

- Housing Operations Manager
- Income and Housing Manager
- Housing Repairs and Compliance Manager
- Housing Services and Strategy Manager
- Capital Works Manager.

There will be a transition period of 36 months from the date the standard comes into force to work towards or complete the qualification by the end of the period.

The majority of current postholders already hold a relevant qualification. For those who have completed qualifications previously, they will need to evidence that the course meets the relevant learning outcomes and assessment criteria to meet the standard.

New officers whose role falls within the scope, including temporary employees, will have 12 months to enrol on the necessary qualifications.

If employees have a partially relevant qualification, they will be able to undertake 'top up training' modules to cover unmet criteria.

Having a professional membership, such as with the Chartered Institute of Housing or the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, without undertaking a qualification as part of gaining the membership would not meet the requirements.

If officers fail to be awarded the relevant qualification, they will be required to retake the course or enrol upon another relevant qualification within six months of failing their course. This would be dealt with via existing Council policies.

Officers who are identified as being in scope of the new requirements do not need to hold the relevant qualification on day one. They will be expected to register on an approved course and actively work towards achieving it within the relevant timeframe, with a view to completing the course before the 36-month transition period expires.

Housing Code of Conduct and Competence Policy

The Council will be required to produce a new specific housing code of conduct and a policy that includes how competence and poor performance is managed, and how learning and development is supported. The document will also include information regarding conflicts of interest, such as employees that have family members that are tenants. These will need to be co-produced with tenants and will be brought to a future Cabinet meeting for consideration. There is an expectation that the code of conduct and the new policy will be accessible to tenants and regularly reviewed.

All officers who work within Housing services will be expected to have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience and be able to demonstrate appropriate conduct in their dealings with tenants.

It is not expected that there will be any impact on contractors, as none of the Council's Housing services fall under a service agreement for them to deliver services on our behalf.

For those who the formal qualification requirements do not cover (i.e. the remaining officers working on Housing services, including Democratic Services due to Housing complaints handling), the Council will consider adopting the Chartered Institute of Housing's Professional Standards and introducing a BLZ course.