Preparing for the new Competence and Conduct Standard

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July 2025 update – the housing sector has taken another significant step towards raising professional standards.

The Labour government has now confirmed that the new Competence and Conduct Standard will come into force in October 2026, with a three-year transition period for large registered providers (over 1,000 units) and a four-year transition period for smaller associations.

This follows the Conservative government's consultation in early 2024 on how to practically implement these requirements. The new standard introduces an outcome-based framework for the competence and conduct of everyone working in social housing in England and sets clear expectations for qualifications, behaviours and organisational culture.

In announcing these changes, the housing minister confirmed that the government will direct the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) this autumn to set new standards for the competence and conduct of employees who work in social housing. This means further detail and guidance will continue to emerge in the coming months. We'll keep all our members updated as more information becomes available to help you plan with confidence.

What's changing?

The standard will require all relevant individuals working in social housing, including employees of service providers acting on a landlord's behalf, to demonstrate that they have the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours needed to deliver good-quality services.

For senior professionals, there will be a requirement to hold, or be working towards, a recognised housing management qualification:

- Senior housing executives: level five qualification
- Senior housing managers: level four qualification
- Relevant individuals delivering housing management services via service providers must also meet these standards.

Importantly, organisations must determine for themselves which roles fall within scope and ensure their people can meet the requirements within the transition timeline.

Why does this matter?

The Competence and Conduct Standard is one of several measures introduced in response to the Grenfell Tower fire and the findings of the Social Housing White Paper. Its purpose is to ensure that customers are listened to, treated with respect and dignity and receive a consistently professional service.

In announcing this, Matthew Pennycook, Minister of State for Housing and Planning, noted that while there's renewed focus on investment in new homes, there's an equal expectation that registered providers step up and deliver a higher standard of professional practice and conduct.

How will this be regulated?

The RSH will take an assurance-based approach, like other consumer standards. This means landlords must be able to demonstrate they meet the standard in practice, not just on paper.

- It's unlikely the RSH will issue a prescriptive list of required skills or behaviours. Organisations will be expected to define what competence and conduct look like for their employees and services
- The Regulator won't necessarily expect to see every certificate of learning. Instead, the focus will be on systems, evidence and outcomes
- Organisations will need to assess their own workforce, understand which roles are in scope and show how they're managing any gaps
- Boards, committees and governance teams will be the first point of contact for the Regulator and so must have the right information to demonstrate compliance.

Examples of evidence the Regulator might expect to see:

- Clear records of training needs, qualifications held and plans to close any gaps
- Evidence of the impact of training and development, not just attendance records – eg, improvements in service delivery over time
- Customer feedback, such as complaints, compliments and satisfaction data showing how service quality is experienced
- Evidence of engaging customers in defining what good conduct and professionalism mean within your organisation
- An embedded code of conduct, with evidence that employees understand and apply it
- Memberships of relevant professional bodies and clear routes for continuing professional development (CPD)

- A clear people strategy covering learning and development, appraisals and performance management
- Records showing how poor performance and conduct are managed.

Key requirements

To comply with the new standard, registered providers must:

- Have an up to date written policy setting out their approach to developing and maintaining the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours of employees in scope
- Ensure this approach is tailored to different roles, with clear learning and development pathways
- Embed an appropriate code of conduct that's understood and consistently applied across the organisation
- Take responsibility for assessing their workforce regularly, including employees of any contractors providing services on their behalf and addressing any competence gaps.

Steps to take now

While the standard won't take effect until October 2026, taking action now means you can build genuine competence and professionalism, not just compliance.

1 **Review your requirements and assess your current state**
   - Map which roles should be defined as 'relevant individuals'
   - Assess your current position: who already holds the right qualifications, skills and experience? Who will need to upskill?
   - Understand and be honest about how well your current culture supports professional conduct, respect and accountability.

2 **Develop a robust action plan**
   - Prioritise budgets and resources to deliver what's needed. Use the transition timeline to plan enrolments onto full courses or top-ups
   - Work with managers to plan study time and maintain service delivery
   - Build governance oversight so progress can be tracked and evidenced
   - Discuss with your senior leadership team how to communicate this news internally and link it to your wider culture ambitions.

3 **Engage your leadership team and employees**

- Make sure your board and executive team are fully briefed and understand their role in assuring compliance
- Connect this work with your broader organisational vision: reinforce how stronger skills and behaviours lead to better outcomes and increased customer trust
- Position professional conduct as everyone's responsibility.

4 **Build strong partnerships with training and development providers**

- Begin conversations now with accredited training providers, professional bodies and local learning partners
- Explore flexible learning options to meet the varied needs of your teams
- Identify and use clear impact measures to show the difference training and development are making.

5 **Assess and enhance your code of conduct**

- Review your existing code of conduct: does it set clear, practical expectations for professional behaviour and respect?
- Consider strengthening it by making your organisation's values explicit in everyday behaviours
- Engage customers in co-designing or updating your code of conduct. This is an opportunity to ask what behaviours they expect. Involve them through focus groups, surveys or customer panels. Co-design can strengthen trust and accountability and lead to better outcomes.

6 **Embed a culture of professionalism, respect and accountability**

- Take a holistic view of learning and development. Go beyond qualifications: encourage coaching, mentoring and reflective practice
- Celebrate and share examples that show how professionalism makes a difference for your customers
- Make sure performance appraisals and management processes reinforce expected standards of competence, conduct and professional behaviour.

The Competence and Conduct Standard is a major shift for the sector, but it's also a real opportunity to raise the bar for customers and communities. By acting now and focusing on culture, systems and evidence, not just certificates, you'll be well placed to show your commitment to professionalism, accountability and high-quality service.

Join our upcoming lunch and learn

As part of our commitment to supporting you, we're hosting a virtual lunch and learn workshop on developing and embedding an effective code of conduct. This will be an interactive discussion and we'll cover practical steps and ideas for meaningful customer involvement. It'll be held of Monday 28 July, 12–2pm. Click here to book your place.

Watch for more competence and conduct sessions over the coming months to help you prepare for October 2026.

If you'd like tailored support with readiness assessments, action planning or workshops for employees, boards or governance teams, please get in touch with us here at HQN.

About the author

Jane Atherton is an experienced organisational development (OD) professional. A Chartered Fellow of the CIPD, she has a proven track record in senior roles delivering strategic OD and HR. She is passionate about all things employee engagement and is proud to have supported businesses to achieve top spots in The Sunday Times best 100 companies to work for, along with National Training Awards and Investors in People.

She became an independent consultant in 2018, runs her own business called Hooga Consulting and is an Associate of HQN.

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