

Title of Report	HOUSING POLICIES	
Presented by	Jane Rochelle Head of Housing	
Background Papers	Current versions of Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, Repairs Policy, Decant Policy, Compensation Policy and Rechargeable Repairs Policy appended to this report	Public Report: Yes
Financial Implications	The proposed recharging of repairs charge will require Cabinet approval of the charge and the amount or basis of the charge for 2024/25. There are no other direct financial implications arising from the review of the policies, however, any indirect financial implications will need to be monitored and considered as part of the budget setting process.	
	Signed off by the Section 151 Officer: Yes	
Legal Implications	The legal service has reviewed the draft policies.	
	Signed off by the Monitoring Officer: Yes	
Staffing and Corporate Implications	None directly	
	Signed off by the Head of Paid Service: Yes	
Reason Agenda Item Submitted to Scrutiny Committee	To introduce a number of revised and updated housing policies to Community Scrutiny Committee and to seek its comments.	
Recommendations	THAT COMMUNITY SCRUTINY PROVIDE COMMENTS ON THE FOLLOWING POLICIES AHEAD OF THEIR CONSIDERATION BY CABINET ON 23 APRIL 2024: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY • REPAIRS POLICY • DECANT POLICY • COMPENSATION POLICY 	

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The social housing sector is in a period of significant change and the Council's housing service is responding accordingly. On 1 April 2024 a new national customer standards for social housing will be introduced and the Council is embarking on a new

partnership to deliver its responsive repairs programme with the Wates Group. The housing service has taken the opportunity to begin reviewing key policies to ensure it is best placed to provide services to Council tenants, in line with the new consumer standards.

- 1.2 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (Clause 42 'Social housing leases: remedying hazards') also introduced Awaab's Law to ensure that social landlords responded appropriately to hazards in social housing such as damp and mould. This has been reflected in the revised policy documents.

2.0 POLICIES UNDER REVIEW

- 2.1 There are four policies that form the first phase of this review, although work has begun on others that have interdependencies to ensure consistency of service. A summary of the policies and changes is set out below:

- Anti-social behaviour Policy
- Repairs Policy
- Decant Policy
- Compensation Policy

- 2.2 A new corporate policy template is due to be launched between Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. The intention is that the policies will be updated to reflect the corporate policy template once approved and ahead of approval by Cabinet.

3.0 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY

- 3.1 The Anti-Social Behaviour Policy sets out how the Council addresses reports of anti-social behaviour across the district. This is a single policy shared with community safety and applies to all residents regardless of tenure.
- 3.2 The Policy is being refreshed to ensure that terminology is aligned to changes to legislation (such as removal of references to the community trigger which has now had its name changed to an ASB case review.) At the same time the Council is taking the opportunity to refresh outdated partner details. The Council has also reviewed the service standards to complement the new tenant satisfaction measures introduced by the housing regulator.

4.0 REPAIRS POLICY

- 4.1 The Repairs Policy sets out how the Council prioritises and carries out its day-to-day repairs. Several changes are proposed as well as the consolidation of other policies. Key changes include:
 - Updating the repairs response time and, at the same time, increasing the proportion of jobs which will be given an appointment at the time of reporting.
 - Clarifying how the Council will manage jobs that need to be inspected prior to repairs being raised.
 - Consolidating the approach to recharging into one single document; removing the need for a separate rechargeable repairs policy. Necessary amendments to the fees and charges register will form part of the Cabinet report.

- It is proposed that an admin fee of £40 will be charged on top of the prevailing schedule of rates in use at the time of the repair.
- Clarifying how the Council will manage reports of hazards under the housing health and safety rating system to ensure that its response is compatible with The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. Including the circumstances in which tenants with repairs issues will be decanted to include where there is an identified serious hazard in the property as well as where repair work is being carried out.
- Review of the lettable standard and tenants' responsibilities for repairs.

5.0 DECANT POLICY

5.1 Minor changes are proposed to the Decant Policy so that the Policy focusses on how a decant will be facilitated rather than when it is necessary. The latter is covered in the Repairs Policy above.

6.0 COMPENSATION POLICY

6.1 The Compensation Policy has been reviewed to ensure it is compatible with the direction being set by the Housing Ombudsman.

6.2 Particular regard has been given to the following key areas as directed by the ombudsman:

- Recognising **stress and inconvenience**.
- Ensuring the **impact** on the customer is recognised.
- Taking full account of the customer's **personal circumstances**.
- The Policy does not stipulate monetary values.
- Each case is **unique** and is assessed on its merits.
- Publishing amounts can set **false expectations** for customers, although the Council will, of course, detail exactly how it has calculated compensation amounts when making payments.
- Levels of compensation will be affected by **external factors**, such as energy prices. Flexibility is needed when calculating payments.

7.0 ENGAGEMENT TO DATE

7.1 A discussion about the policy reviews was held at the Tenant and Leaseholder Consultation Forum in February 2024? and a survey was produced and promoted to all tenants for whom the Council has an email address or mobile phone number. To date, over 380 responses have been received. The survey focussed on the Repairs Policy and Compensation policy and both a copy of the questions (Appendix One) and a summary of responses (Appendix Two) are included with this report.

7.2 The Council was particularly interested to understand tenants' views on tenants' responsibility for repairs and the current lettable standard which underpin the Repairs Policy and are therefore now included as appendices of the repairs policy itself. Whilst the majority of respondents agreed with the current tenant responsibilities, there were a small number of comments suggesting the Council ought to take into account the ability of the tenant to carry out such works due to age or other vulnerabilities. The Policy has been amended to reflect the circumstances where a reasonable adjustment may be necessary to meet the Council's Equalities Act responsibilities, such as waiving a recharge that would otherwise be due.

- 7.3 In terms of the lettable standard, tenants seemed to broadly support the current standard. The comments suggested that a small number of respondents (four in total) didn't consider properties always met the published standard rather than the standard was deficient.
- 7.4 A specific question was asked around the approach to decorating in the property and the possibility of moving away from paint packs in favour of decorating prior to relet. Survey responses can be seen below.

Continue to provide decorating packs where needed	44.65%
Ensure that the kitchen, bathroom and living room are painted magnolia and white	47.06%
Other	8.29%

- 7.5 Of the respondents who chose "other," a number of comments related to the need for walls to be in a sufficient condition to paint and others of the need to decorate throughout where necessary. As a result of all engagement, the standard has been amended to "The decoration will be in good order throughout. Where this is not the case basic painting will be carried out."
- 7.6 A second specific question was asked about the provision of rotary dryers in private gardens where space allowed. This was supported by over 70% of respondents and is proposed to be incorporated into the lettable standard. It is felt this will support tenants to reduce unnecessary condensation in their homes.
- 7.7 A member workshop was carried out on 14 March 2024? where an overview of the policies and proposed changes was presented. As a result of the workshop, a number of further proposed amendments to the lettable standard and tenant responsibilities have been tabled including the provision of washing machine plumbing wherever possible and the fact that tenants are expected to maintain their gardens to the standard at which they were handed over.
- 7.8 Community Scrutiny Committee is now being asked to provide feedback on the draft policies and identify any areas of concern prior to consideration by Cabinet.

Policies and other considerations, as appropriate	
Council Priorities:	- Communities and housing
Policy Considerations:	This suite of policies will replace those currently in operation.
Safeguarding:	The Anti-Social Behaviour Policy recognises the likelihood of safeguarding issues being identified as a result of investigations and enforcement activities and recognises the need to report these accordingly in line with the Council's safeguarding procedures.
Equalities/Diversity:	The final version of each policy will be subject to an equalities impact assessment prior to consideration by Cabinet to allow for any necessary comments from Scrutiny to be reflected.

Customer Impact:	These policies are all intended to improve the customer experience and ensure certainty and consistency in terms of how customers are dealt with.
Economic and Social Impact:	None.
Environment, Climate Change and zero carbon:	No direct impacts.
Consultation/Community Engagement:	Tenants have been surveyed on key elements of the policies under consideration. A Member workshop took place to explore the proposed changes. Outcomes of these activities have informed the final version of these policies.
Risks:	No direct risks identified.
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