

NORTH WEST LEICESTERSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET – TUESDAY, 23 APRIL 2024



Title of Report	HOUSING POLICIES	
Presented by	Councillor Andrew Woodman Housing, Property and Customer Services Portfolio Holder PH Briefed <input type="checkbox"/> Yes	
Background Papers	Agenda Pack, Community Scrutiny Committee, 4 April 2024	Public Report: Yes
	Minutes of the Community Scrutiny Committee, 4 April 2024. Current versions of Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, Repairs Policy, Decant Policy, Compensation Policy and Rechargeable Repairs Policy	Key Decision: Yes
Financial Implications	The proposed recharging of repairs is designed to recover costs. 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	Legal Services has reviewed the draft policies.	
	Signed off by the Monitoring Officer: Yes/No	
Staffing and Corporate Implications	None directly	
	Signed off by the Head of Paid Service: Yes	
Purpose of Report	To seek Cabinet approval for the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, Compensation Policy, Decant Policy and Repairs Policy as well as the deletion of the Rechargeable Repairs Policy. To agree related changes to fees and charges.	
Reason for Decision	To agree amendments to the Council's policies as set out above.	

Recommendations	<p>THAT CABINET:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. APPROVES THE FOLLOWING POLICES <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. THE REVISED ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY ii. THE REVISED COMPENSATION POLICY iii. THE REVISED DECANT POLICY iv. THE REVISED REPAIRS POLICY v. THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE RECHARGABLE REPAIRS POLICY 2. APPROVES THE CHANGES TO THE FEES AND CHARGES SCHEDULE OF £40 ON TOP OF THE PREVAILING SCHEDULE OF RATES IN USE AT THE TIME OF THE REPAIR 3. DELEGATES AUTHORITY TO THE HEAD OF HOUSING IN CONSULTATION WITH THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER TO MAKE MINOR AMENDMENTS TO THE POLICIES AS REQUIRED TO ADDRESS CHANGES IN NATIONAL POLICY AND LOCAL PRIORITIES.
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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, new national consumer standards for social housing were introduced by Government? and the Council is embarking on a new partnership to deliver its responsive repairs programme with its appointed contractor, the Wates Group. The Housing Service has taken the opportunity to begin reviewing key policies to ensure the Council is best placed to provide services to its 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

3.0 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY

- 3.1 The Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) 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 applied 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 will take 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 with 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. This is to cover actual costs and not to make a profit.
- Clarifying how the Council will deal with reports of hazards under the housing health and safety rating system to ensure that the Council's 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.
- Reviewing the lettable standard and tenants' responsibilities for repairs.

- 4.2 Alongside the changes to the Repairs Policy, it is necessary to update the Fees and Charges schedule.

- 4.3 Cabinet is asked to approve the inclusion of an administration fee of £40 on top of the prevailing schedule of rates in use at the time of the repair to be included to the Fees and Charges schedule in relation to rechargeable 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 .
- 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 detail exactly how compensation amounts have been calculated 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 have an email address or mobile phone number. 395 responses were received. The survey focussed on the Repairs Policy and Compensation Policy and both a copy of the questions and a summary of responses are included with this report can be found in the background papers with the Community Scrutiny agenda pack.

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) did not 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 in the table 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 considered the policies on 4 April 2024. Some minor changes to wording of the Decant Policy, ASB Policy and Compensation Policy have been made as a result of comments and these are captured in the version control of the respective policies. Minutes of the Community Scrutiny Committee are included in the background papers.
- 7.9 The scrutiny draft versions of the Policies were shared on the landlord consultation page of the Council’s website. Engaged tenants and those who had responded to the consultation survey were sent a link to the page and asked to make any additional comments they wished. Only one comment was received regarding a specific element of the lettable standard. The wording has been reviewed to ensure that the issue raised is addressed.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The proposals are not expected to have a net impact on budgets although service expenditure will be kept under review and any amendments required incorporated into future years’ budgets.

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:	Equality Impact Assessments have been undertaken for each policy. No adverse impacts were identified.
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/Tenant 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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