

<b>Title of Report</b>	<b>HOUSING POLICIES</b>	
<b>Presented by</b>	Jane Rochelle Head of Housing	
<b>Background Papers</b>	None	<b>Public Report:</b> Yes
<b>Financial Implications</b>	The income management policy sets out the proposed approach to rent setting and income collection for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). There are however no direct costs associated with implementation. All other policies are expected to be delivered within existing resources	
	<b>Signed off by the Section 151 Officer:</b> Yes	
<b>Legal Implications</b>	The Damp Mould and Condensation Policy has been developed in response to requirements under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 to respond appropriately to hazards in dwellings The Domestic Abuse Policy has been developed in response to the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.	
	<b>Signed off by the Monitoring Officer:</b> Yes	
<b>Staffing and Corporate Implications</b>	There are no direct staffing or corporate implications.	
	<b>Signed off by the Head of Paid Service:</b> Yes	
<b>Reason Agenda Item Submitted to Scrutiny Committee</b>	For a number of new and revised housing policies to be considered by Community Scrutiny and seek comments, prior to consideration by Cabinet in March 2025.	
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p><b>THAT COMMUNITY SCRUTINY PROVIDE COMMENTS ON THE FOLLOWING POLICIES AHEAD OF CONSIDERATION BY CABINET ON 25 MARCH:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• INCOME MANAGEMENT POLICY</li> <li>• DAMP MOULD AND CONDENSATION POLICY</li> <li>• TENANCY POLICY</li> <li>• DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY</li> </ul>	

## 1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 There have been recent changes to the regulatory regime for housing and this has resulted in a number of workstreams within the Housing Service. One of

these has been to review key policies to ensure they are effective and fit for purpose in light of the new consumer standards.

- 1.2 Furthermore, 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. Following on from the Damp and Mould Task and Finish Group last year a Damp, Mould and Condensation policy has been developed.

## **2.0 POLICIES UNDER REVIEW**

- 2.1 There are four policies in the current phase of the policy review.
- Income Management Policy (appendix one)
  - Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy (appendix two)
  - Domestic Abuse Policy (appendix three)
  - Tenancy Policy (appendix four)
- 2.2 A summary of the policies and the reasons for review are set out in the sections below.

## **3.0 INCOME MANAGEMENT POLICY**

- 3.1 The income management policy sets out how the service set rents and charges as well as the approach to collection and recovery of debt. The rents function is subject to an annual audit inspection and in recent years a number of recommendations in relation to policies have been identified.
- 3.2 The Policy consolidates a number of separate related policies to ensure that they are consistent and coherent. The policy covers a wide range of aspects of income management from setting rents on newbuild to writing off former tenant debt and has an overall aim of managing and maximising our income streams effectively to support investment in our homes and communities.
- 3.3 As well as updating existing policies to reflect up to date best practice, the policy also proposes to take a more flexible approach to rent setting within the allowed parameters to support the Council's newbuild ambitions.

## **4.0 DAMP, MOULD AND CONDENSATION POLICY**

- 4.1 The Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy was developed as a direct response to the outcomes of the Damp and Mould Task and Finish Group which met between August and December 2023, as well as ensuring that the Council's position is compliant with legislation.
- 4.2 As a social housing landlord, the Council has a responsibility to its residents to ensure that its properties meet the Decent Homes Standard and the provisions in the Homes (Fit for Human Habitation) Act 2018. In addition, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, in particular Awaab's Law, aims to protect tenants from damp and mould hazards, and amends legislation to require

landlords to investigate and repair reported hazards within a specified timeframe. It is, therefore, important that the Council has a dedicated policy which focuses on how and what will be done in damp and mould cases, and who is responsible.

- 4.3 The aim of the policy is to take reasonable action to identify, remedy and provide advice on damp and mould in social housing properties in order to ensure a safe, healthy and comfortable environment for Council tenants, as well as to protect the structure and quality of the Council's properties.

## **5.0 DOMESTIC ABUSE**

- 5.1 The Council believes that all forms of Domestic abuse are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Domestic abuse often has consequences for the housing of victims and their families. The policy aims to ensure that all staff, partner agencies and contractors understand domestic abuse and give a consistent service when offering guidance and support.
- 5.2 The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 provides further protections to those who experience domestic abuse, as well as strengthen measures to tackle perpetrators. It creates a statutory definition of domestic abuse and ensures that when local authorities rehouse victims of domestic abuse, they do not lose a secure lifetime or assured tenancy. As well as this, it provides that all eligible homeless victims of domestic abuse automatically have 'priority need' for homelessness assistance and places a legal duty on councils to fund support for survivors in 'safe accommodation'.
- 5.3 Whilst Domestic abuse impacts across the full range of Council services this new policy sets out how the Council will respond as a landlord to incidents within the housing stock.

## **6.0 TENANCY POLICY**

- 6.1 The Tenancy Policy explains the approach the Council will take to ensure efficient use of its housing stock, by issuing tenancies which are compatible with the purpose of the accommodation, the needs of individual households and the sustainability of the community.
- 6.2 The requirement to develop a Tenancy Policy was set out in the Localism Act 2011. This update reflects a number of changes to the Council's approach since the policy was first developed, in particular around successions to tenancies.
- 6.3 The aims of the tenancy policy are to:
- Ensure best use of our housing stock
  - Ensure that statutory and regulatory responsibilities are met
  - Ensure the Council's approach is consistent, clear and fair

- Ensure customers are provided with appropriate support, particularly those who are vulnerable or at times of personal grief

## 7.0 ENGAGEMENT TO DATE

- 7.1 An officer workshop took place bringing colleagues together from the Housing Service alongside Finance and Internal Audit teams to discuss areas where existing policies could be clarified or refined. This workshop also identified options it was felt tenants should be offered choice in relating to income management.
- 7.2 These choices informed a survey relating to income management that was sent to all Council tenants for whom an email address or mobile phone number was recorded. The survey identified key areas where there were opportunities to review the current approach.
- 7.3 Responses were received from 249 individuals and a summary of responses is attached as an appendix to this report. These responses informed the development of the policy. A summary of survey responses is attached at appendix five.
- 7.4 The Damp, Mould and Condensation (DMC) policy was shared with all 19 involved residents who form part of the Landlord Services Working Group. It was also shared with 439 tenants who have reported DMC within the last six months along with a digital survey and the opportunity to attend the next Working Group meeting to provide comments and feedback. All feedback was in support of the policy. It was also shared with respiratory leads at Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust. They also approved it and are happy with the policy.
- 7.5 The Tenancy Policy and the Domestic Abuse Policy will be taken to Landlord Services Working Group for consideration on 4 February 2025.
- 7.6 A member workshop took place on 21 January 2025 and feedback from the session has been considered as part of the policy development process.
- 7.7 Community Scrutiny is now being asked to provide feedback on the draft policies and provide any comments prior to consideration by Cabinet.

<b>Policies and other considerations, as appropriate</b>	
Council Priorities:	- Communities and housing
Policy Considerations:	This suite of policies will replace those currently in operation.
Safeguarding:	The Domestic Abuse policy is concerned with behaviours where safeguarding may be a cause for concern. The policy sets out the actions that will be taken where safeguarding concerns are identified.
Equalities/Diversity:	Final versions of the policies will be subject to an

	equalities impact assessment prior to considerations by Cabinet.
Customer Impact:	These policies have all been developed to ensure consistency and transparency in terms of the approach to service delivery. As such they are expected to improve the customer experience.
Economic and Social Impact:	No direct impact identified.
Environment, Climate Change and zero carbon:	No direct impact identified.
Consultation/Community Engagement:	Tenants have been engaged in the development of all policies. Post scrutiny final drafts will be shared with interested tenants for further comments.
Risks:	No direct risks identified.
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