

CABINET
22 JUNE 2022

HOUSING MANAGEMENT POLICY

Responsible Cabinet Member
Councillor Kevin Nicholson, Health and Housing Portfolio

Responsible Director
Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To approve the Housing Management Policy 2022-2026.

Summary

2. Darlington Borough Council provides over 5,300 high quality homes for local residents. To enable us to manage these properties effectively, we need to maximise rental and service charge income from Council tenants to ensure we are able to provide them with a comprehensive range of good quality housing management and support services.
3. The Housing Management Policy 2022-2026 at **Appendix 1** sets out how we will do this and is divided into 2 main sections:
 - (a) Income Management – how we collect rent and service charges and how we will recover arrears and debts from current and former Council tenants.
 - (b) Tenancy Management – how we manage our properties and how we make decisions across a range of issues such as, garage tenancies, mutual exchanges, abandoned properties, lodgers and sub-letting, disability adaptations and mobility scooters.
4. The Tenants Panel has been consulted on the draft policy and the outcome of this consultation is given at paragraph 12. However, the proposals have received overwhelming support.
5. This report was considered by Health and Housing Scrutiny on 27 April 2022, who agreed its onward submission for approval by Cabinet.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - (a) Consider the contents of this report.

- (b) Approve the Housing Management Policy 2022-2026.

Reasons

- 7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) The Social Housing Regulator’s Consumer Standards places a duty on social housing landlords to provide their tenants with quality, cost-effective accommodation.
 - (b) The adoption of a formal Housing Management Policy is one of the ways to demonstrate how we will achieve this.

Elizabeth Davison
Group Director of Operations

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

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| S17 Crime and Disorder | There is no impact on the Council’s Crime and Disorder responsibilities as a result of this report |
| Health and Wellbeing | Well managed Council homes will have a positive impact on the health and well-being of Council tenants |
| Carbon Impact and Climate Change | There are no implications on Carbon Impact and Climate Change as a result of this report |
| Diversity | This policy supports the promotion of diversity |
| Wards Affected | All wards with Council housing |
| Groups Affected | Council tenants and leaseholders |
| Budget and Policy Framework | This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework |
| Key Decision | This is not a key decision |
| Urgent Decision | This is not an urgent decision |
| Council Plan | This report supports the Council plan to maximise rental and service charge income from Council tenants to ensure we are able to provide them with a comprehensive range of good quality housing management and support services |
| Efficiency | There are no implications |
| Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers | This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers |

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. Darlington Borough Council provides over 5,300 high quality homes for local residents. To enable us to manage these properties effectively, we need to maximise rental and service charge income from Council tenants to ensure we are able to provide them with a comprehensive range of good quality housing management and support services.
9. The Housing Management Policy 2022-2026 at Appendix 1 sets out how we will do this and is divided into 2 main sections.

Income Management

10. This section covers how we collect rent and service charges and how we will recover arrears and debts from current and former Council tenants, including:
 - (a) The payment options available to Council tenants, garage tenants and leaseholders to pay their rent and service charges.
 - (b) The support available to tenants and leaseholders to pay their rent and service charges and to apply for welfare benefits, through our Tenancy Sustainment Team.
 - (c) The recovery and management of rent arrears and debts, up to including legal action and, where appropriate, seeking possession of the property.
 - (d) The processes for the write-off of unrecoverable debt and the refund of credits.
 - (e) The circumstances where the Council will consider paying compensation, including mandatory compensation through law, quantifiable loss payments and discretionary compensation payments. Details of the amounts payable are given at appendix 1 of the policy.

Tenancy Management

11. This section covers how we manage our properties and how we make decisions across a range of issues, including:
 - (a) How we apply a local lettings policy in certain circumstances, to ensure we make the best use of our housing and improve communities.
 - (b) The processes for the letting and management of our garage tenancies.
 - (c) Our approach and processes in relation to tenancy fraud, hoarding, lodgers and sub-letting.
 - (d) The criteria and processes for mutual exchanges, successions of tenancies and assignment of tenancies.

- (e) The processes for the removal or addition of person(s) to a tenancy, overcrowding and under-occupation, ending a tenancy and the death of a tenant.
- (f) The processes for identifying and dealing with abandoned properties.
- (g) Our approach and processes in relation to responsive repairs, dealing with damp and condensation, and undertaking home visits and property inspections.
- (h) Our approach and processes to a tenant's request to keep pets in their home.
- (i) Our approach and processes in relation to tenants undertaking home improvements, the decoration of properties, requests for aids and adaptations to a property to meet disability needs, the storage and charging of mobility scooters and the availability of the garden tidy scheme.
- (j) Details of our Housing Plus service, which provides intensive housing management to help tenants who may otherwise struggle to maintain their tenancy.
- (k) The processes for dealing with void properties to ensure they are promptly inspected, repaired to an agreed standard and re-let as soon as possible.

Outcome of Consultation

12. The Tenants Panel were consulted in March 2022 and overall, the Panel supported the proposed Housing Management Policy. Examples of the Panel's comments were as follows:

- (a) "I think, although it is a large document, the level of details that has gone into is needed and it explains everything perfectly. Naturally I looked for things that would affect me the most, which is what I think most tenants will do rather than read the whole document. Everything is concise and makes sense to a casual reader. I like that it is all together rather than split over a number of documents and I think that will be preferred."
- (b) "I believe that the document was a little long-winded in place. I understand the need to explain everything but I feel that people would lose interest with such a big document."
- (c) "In general, I thought the document was quite an enjoyable read. Although the document was lengthy, I believe that it was necessary. It may put a few people off because of the size but once the final version has been published, I think it will be a lot more attractive."
- (d) "Although I found it easy to read, there may be people that don't. As this will be a legal document it is completely understandable in the way that it is read but would there be an option for a 'dumber down simple version' that could be posted on social media / website? All in all, I think it is a well thought out, explanatory document."