

Tenancy Strategy 2023

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The aim of this strategy is to set out Huntingdonshire’s vision for the way social housing providers in the local authority area should let their properties to meet the needs of residents.
- 1.2. Huntingdonshire transferred its affordable housing stock in 2000, to Huntingdon Housing Partnership (HHP) through a Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT), HHP then became Luminus who more recently became Chorus (now Places for People). It is therefore important for us to hold a Tenancy Strategy that is up to date to inform Registered Provider (RP) practices in the area
- 1.3. The Tenancy Strategy relates to lettings of all social and affordable rented properties, including general needs, adapted, sheltered and extra-care housing. It does not cover lettings to hostels, transitional accommodation or other forms of supported housing and does not apply to low cost home ownership residents.
- 1.4. All RP’s with housing stock in Huntingdonshire are required to have regard to this Tenancy Strategy. We ask that RPs in Huntingdonshire review their own Tenancy Policies in light of this strategy to ensure that, wherever possible, their policies work to complement, and do not contradict, our Tenancy Strategy.

Huntingdonshire Social Housing

- 1.5. The Council’s Corporate Plan states that:

“we want everyone to live in a safe, high quality home regardless of health, stage of life, family structure, income and tenure type. Homes should be energy efficient and allow people to live healthy and prosperous lives, New homes should be zero carbon ready and encourage sustainable travel”.
- 1.6. Social housing plays an important part in delivering this vision. Sufficient flexible and affordable homes that meet local needs contributes to strong and happy communities where people can prosper.
- 1.7. The principles that underpin this strategy are:
 - A social home for those in housing need,

- Making best use of stock,
- A fairer system, that promotes social mobility and aspiration,
- Helping people to have a choice to move to other housing options.

Background

- 1.8. Our first Tenancy Strategy, published in September 2012, introduced a new housing offer for local people through the use of flexible, fixed term tenancies. The aim of introducing five year fixed term tenancies was to make more efficient use of housing stock, more effectively focus provision on those in most need and to promote social mobility.
- 1.9. Fixed term tenancies were introduced through changes to legislation, however, they did not deliver the intended benefit due to the limitations of legal processes and the time and resources spent on maintaining the tenancy review process.

Legal and regulatory context

- 1.10. The Localism Act 2011 placed a duty on local housing authorities to develop and publish a tenancy strategy setting out how social housing in its area is let and managed including:
- the kinds of tenancies they grant,
 - the circumstances in which they will grant a tenancy of a particular kind,
 - where they grant tenancies for a term certain, the lengths of the terms, and
 - the circumstances in which they will grant a further tenancy on the coming to an end of an existing tenancy.
- 1.11. RPs, must have due regard to this Tenancy Strategy when developing tenancy policies.
- 1.12. The Council, when reviewing this strategy, has had regard to the Huntingdonshire Lettings Policy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.
- 1.13. The relevant legislation and codes of guidance have also been considered, these include:
- Housing Act 1985 (as amended)
 - The Housing Act 1996 (as amended)
 - Homelessness Act 2002
 - Housing Act 2004
 - Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006 (as amended)
 - Localism Act 2011 (as amended)
 - The Housing and Planning Act 2016
 - The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
 - The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
 - The Housing (Assessment of Accommodation Needs) (Meaning of Gypsies and Travellers) (England) Regulations 2006 (Statutory Instrument: 2006 No. 3190)
 - The Equality Act 2010
 - Human Rights Act 1998

- Housing & Regeneration Act 2008
 - Secure Tenancies (Victims of Domestic Abuse) Act 2018
- 1.14. The Regulator of Social Housing's Tenancy Standard requires that RPs let their homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way. 'RPs shall offer tenancies or terms of occupation which are compatible with the purpose of the accommodation, the needs of individual households, the sustainability of the community, and the efficient use of their housing stock'.
- 1.15. RPs should develop their tenancy policies in line with the relevant legislation and regulator's expectations as set out in the Tenancy Standard.

2. Tenancy Types

- 2.1. Tenancy types will vary depending on whether the landlord is a RP or a landlord within the private rented sector. Tenancy types include:
- Introductory/probationary/starter tenancies
 - Secure/Assured tenancies (Lifetime Tenancies)
 - Secure/Assured Flexible tenancies (fixed term tenancies)
 - Non-secure tenancies (periodic tenancies for temporary accommodation provided under homelessness legislation (part 7 of the Housing Act 1996))
 - Assured Shorthold tenancies
 - Shared ownership tenancies
 - Other tenancy types as allowed by law.
- 2.2. The Council will support the use of introductory tenancies for new tenants moving into social housing for the first time. Following this, it is expected that the vast majority of tenants will become secure lifetime tenants. Where a tenancy is not managed properly by the tenant during the introductory period the RP may seek to end it during that term or to extend the period of the introductory tenancy.
- 2.3. Where an introductory tenancy isn't used there is an expectation that RPs offer appropriate support to assist with establishing and sustaining the tenancy.
- 2.4. The Council considers that secure, lifetime tenancies will provide the best environment for families to thrive and become part of a sustainable community. We encourage RPs to use the most secure form of tenancy available to them wherever possible in order to create settled homes for families to live in. However, we do recognise that in some special circumstances the use of fixed term (flexible) tenancies might be appropriate for a RP to make best use of stock and meet the individual needs of residents.
- 2.5. The Council would expect RP's in the establishment of all new tenancies to support tenants for the first twelve months of occupation in the sustainment of their tenancy.
- 2.6. The Council would expect RP's to ensure that residents live in high quality, well maintained and safe homes and that tenants are empowered and listened to in relation to their tenancies and services provided to them.

3. Circumstances to consider when granting a tenancy

Fixed term tenancies

- 3.1. Where fixed term tenancies are used by RPs, the tenancy must be granted for a minimum fixed term of five years, or exceptionally, a tenancy for a minimum fixed term of no less than two years, in addition to any probationary tenancy period.
- 3.2. The choice of tenancy term should be based on both individual needs and the characteristics of particular housing schemes. We would expect RPs to take into account the needs of those households who are vulnerable by reason of age, disability or illness, and households with children. Factors such as schooling, training, employment, regeneration, family stability and community sustainability should also be considered.
- 3.3. Towards the end of the tenancy term, we expect RPs to provide or signpost tenants to information and advice about housing options and help tenants secure alternative housing should their tenancy end following the review.
- 3.4. We expect that the majority of fixed term tenancies will be renewed by RPs at the review stage/end of the initial agreement period. Where fixed term tenancies are used, RPs are encouraged to consider housing need when deciding whether to review a tenancy. Similarly, we would expect them to consider using criteria intended to increase their ability to make best use of stock.

Transfers

- 3.5. RPs should act in line with legislation to ensure that eligible social housing tenants choosing to move to another social rented home with the same or another landlord are granted a tenancy with no less security.
- 3.6. RPs should also protect the tenure rights of victims of domestic abuse when social housing tenants are relocated to another social rented home as set out in 3.9.

Local lettings policies

- 3.7. The use of local lettings policies are a key feature of the council's Housing Allocation Scheme and are a useful tool when dealing with large development sites, in delivering successful mixed new communities, tackling anti-social behaviour and where local connections are required in rural exception sites. These local lettings policies apply a set of specific objectives or intents to a specific property, properties or to a specific type of development, where the qualification and priority criteria may be varied.
- 3.8. If a Local Lettings policy is being used this will be noted on the advert on Home-Link scheme to show that there are additional restrictions as to who can be offered these properties. Sensitive lets differ from a local lettings policy as the sensitive let criteria may be applied to a single property rather than a group of properties in an area.

Victims/survivors of domestic abuse

- 3.9. It is important to protect the tenure rights of victims of domestic abuse. RPs should act in line with current legislation¹ in relation to accommodating victims of domestic abuse and ensure that, when re-housing a tenant with an existing secure tenure who needs to move or has recently moved from their social home to escape domestic abuse, an equivalent tenancy is granted for their new home. This will ensure that victims will not

¹ Part 4 of the Housing Act 1985 (secure tenancies and rights of secure tenants) as amended by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and Secure Tenancies (Victims of Domestic Abuse) Act 2018.

fear losing security of tenure and will provide stability and security in their new home. RPs are encouraged to review and amend their existing policies and procedures to incorporate this requirement if they have not already done so.

Succession rights

- 3.10. The Localism Act limited succession to spouses or civil partners of the deceased tenant. The need to make best use of existing social housing stock was the driver for this. However, landlords are able to grant additional succession rights under the terms of the Tenancy Agreement. We expect RPs to make their policy on succession for all tenancy types and the granting of any additional rights clear and take account of the needs of vulnerable household members.
- 3.11. RPs should include in their tenancy policy, a position on managing successions and assignments that has due regard to legal requirements and which focuses on securing an outcome that secures the best use of accommodation and prevents homelessness.

Affordable Rent and other affordable housing options

- 3.12. The council encourages RPs and developers to consider a range of affordable housing options including Affordable Rent and shared ownership. Affordable housing includes social rented and intermediate housing, provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.
- 3.13. Affordable housing should:
 - Meet the needs of eligible households including availability at a cost low enough for them to afford, determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices.
 - Include provision for the home to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or, if these restrictions are lifted, for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.
- 3.14. Affordable Housing includes properties let under the 'Affordable Rent' model, at up to 80% of market rent. The council will ensure that Homes England processes are complied with when building new affordable homes and will expect any RP offering Affordable Rent properties in the area to comply with relevant guidance and legislation.
- 3.15. The council encourages Social Rent as a default position but will also expect RP's to make use of Affordable Rent and other Affordable Housing options including Shared Ownership to ensure that housing applicants and existing social housing tenants have access to a wider range of models and tenures to meet a range of needs.
- 3.16. The council will expect RPs developing new housing schemes that are using Affordable Rent to demonstrate consideration of the affordability of the homes in the scheme for local residents and use Local Housing Allowance rates and affordability.
- 3.17. The use and numbers of Affordable Rent and shared ownership properties should be made in alignment with the council's Local Plan.

4. Governance

- 4.1. Each RP is responsible for its own individual tenancy policies, as well as arrangements for Review and Appeals.

5. Review

- 5.1. This document will be reviewed after ten years, or earlier if required by changes to local need and/ or national legislation.

6. Consultation

Registered Providers Consulted on the Strategy

- Accent
- BPHA
- Catalyst
- CHS
- CKH
- Clarion
- Guinness
- Hastoe
- Havebury
- Home Group
- Housing 21
- HHS
- Hyde Housing
- Longhurst
- MTV
- Muir
- Orbit
- Places for People (Chorus)
- Sage
- Sanctuary
- Stonewater