
Subject:	SOCIAL HOUSING MANAGEMENT POLICIES
Date of Decision:	28 September 2020
Decision to be taken by:	Mike Davis, Strategic Director (Corporate Resources)
Report of:	Louise Taylor, Head of Housing
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Derek Murphy, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health
Decision Type:	Key Decision
Delegated authority:	Decision of Cabinet dated 20 February 2020 (CAB 136 (e)) to delegate to the Strategic Director (Corporate Resources), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health, the authority to take such decisions as may be necessary to facilitate the process of bringing the housing service in house.
Classification:	Unrestricted

Purpose of the report: Since 1 April 2011 Council-owned homes in the Dover District have been managed on the Council's behalf by East Kent Housing (EKH), an arms-length management organisation. On 20 February 2020 Cabinet gave authority for officers to end the agreement with EKH and to bring the service in house. On 1 October 2020 the service will return to Dover District Council and the Council is required to have a set of operating policies in place for core housing management functions.

Recommendation:

1. To receive and note the report.
2. Agree adoption of the attached housing management policies.
3. Delegate to the Head of Assets and Building Control and the Head of Housing authority to make minor amendments to policies to support efficient service delivery.

1. Summary

- 1.1 EKH has managed Dover District Council (DDC) housing stock under the terms of a management agreement dated 1 April 2011. On 20 February 2020 Cabinet confirmed its intention to withdraw from the contract with EKH and to bring the housing management service in house.
- 1.2 On 1 October 2020 the housing management service will return to DDC and operating policies need to be in place to underpin the delivery of a raft of core housing management functions. The proposed policies are attached as appendices and have been closely aligned to EKH policies which were widely consulted on with tenants and leaseholders.
- 1.3 The Council's legal service team, finance team, community safety team and environmental team have been consulted on the content of the policies and equality impact assessments completed for each. It is proposed that the attached policies be

adopted now and that when the service returns after 1 October 2020 they be reviewed fully as part of the ongoing management of the housing services policy framework.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 In January 2011, the four councils of Canterbury City Council, Dover District Council, Folkestone & Hythe District Council and Thanet District Council established East Kent Housing Ltd (EKH) and, with effect from 1 April 2011 under section 27 of the Housing Act 1985, delegated the management of their housing stock to EKH.
- 2.2 On 20 February 2020 Cabinet confirmed its intention to withdraw from the contract with EKH and return the housing management service in house.
- 2.3 With effect from 1 October 2020 DDC will be required to have clear, transparent and published policies for a raft of housing management services and this report and appendices contain these.
- 2.4 The Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) has a regulatory framework within which all Social Housing landlords operate. Local Authorities are expected to meet fully the consumer standards of the framework. These require landlords to have clear policies and operating procedures to deal with among other things rent setting and income management, investigating and responding to complaints of anti-social behaviour, customer services, tenancy fraud and repair and maintenance. The following policies require adoption by the Council.

Housing Services Neighbour Nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

As a stock-holding housing authority the Council has a responsibility to ensure that appropriate and effective action is taken in relation to neighbour nuisance and ASB involving Council tenants.

The attached policy clearly sets out the definition of ASB and how residents can report ASB to DDC Housing Services, where the perpetrator is a social housing tenant. The policy explains how reports of ASB are categorized and responded to. The Dover Residents Group have been consulted over the policy and their comments incorporated. Consultation has also taken place with the Community Safety Unit, the Environmental Protection Team and DDC Legal Department. Amendments have been made following consultation with these teams.

Housing Services Customer Alerts Policy

The Customer Alerts policy sets out how Housing Services will deal with tenants who are abusive or threatening to staff or contractors who are carrying out their daily work. It explains how staff can complete an incident form and use the Housing Management system to alert other staff members to someone who could pose a threat if they were due to carry out an office interview or home visit. The policy was consulted on with the Dover Tenants Group by EKH and changes to the policy made following recommendations by the legal department in respect of data protection and GDPR.

Housing Services Tenancy Fraud Policy

The Tenancy Fraud policy shows the different types of fraud that can affect social housing and encourages residents to report fraud that they believe to be taking place. Consultations have taken place with the Dover Tenant Group and DDC legal department.

Housing Services Rent-Setting and Income Recovery Policy

The rent setting and Income Recovery policy sets out how DDC will maximise the collection of income and work with tenants, voluntary organisations and debt advice agencies to coordinate the provision of welfare benefits and provide debt advice in order to help to reduce corporate debts. The Government rent setting policy sets out

the formula for rent setting based on relative property values and relative local earnings and Registered providers must comply in full, with all the requirements and expectations set out in the Regulator of Social Housing's Rent Standard. Consultation has been carried out with the Finance Department and Legal Team at DDC.

Housing Services Rechargeable Works and Services Policy

The Rechargeable Works and Services policy identifies what is considered rechargeable and sets out the circumstances in which DDC will recharge tenants in order to recover costs associated with the tenancy of a property or garage rental. Consultation has been carried out with the Finance and Legal Team at DDC.

Housing Services Debt Write-Off Policy

The Write Off Policy provides clarity and guidance on when it is no longer considered appropriate or cost effective to continue to attempt debt recovery. It provides the banding levels for the amount of debt that can be written off and falls in line with Civica write off threshold. It also states who has delegated authority to agree to the different thresholds for write off. Consultation has been carried out with the Finance and Legal Team at DDC.

Housing Services Pets in Council Accommodation Policy

The Pets Policy gives guidance to staff on how to deal with requests from tenants about keeping a pet. The policy explains that in some cases it will not be possible to have pets in properties where it is not suitable. The policy was written following guidelines from the RSPCA in respect of keeping animals in acceptable environment and surroundings. Consultation was carried out with the Dover Tenants Group and the legal team at DDC

Housing Services Disabled Adaptations Policy

Under section 8 of the Housing Act 1985 local housing authorities have a duty to consider housing conditions in their area and have regard to the particular needs of chronically sick and disabled persons. This includes the adaptation of Council-owned housing to meet the needs of disabled tenants.

Key aim of the policy is to standardise the process of managing disabled adaptations to homes managed by the Council to enable DDC to meet its duty to promote equality and eliminate discrimination by improving the lives of our disabled tenants.

3. Identification of Options

- A. Approve the proposed policies for adoption
- B. Approve the proposed policies with amendments
- C. Reject the proposed policies for adoption

4. Evaluation of Options

- 4.1 Option A: This is the preferred option as DDC needs to have policies in place for 1 October 2020. These policies will provide clarity for customers and officers regarding the appropriate standards and eligibility for services.
- 4.2 Option B: is not recommended as significant changes to the policies will call for further consultation with service users and other internal teams resulting inevitably in delay in the adoption of these policies.
- 4.3 Option C: is not recommended because it will mean the housing management service will be operating without a policy framework to support service delivery.

Resource Implications

- 4.4 It is not anticipated that the policies will have significant resource implications outside

of the HRA budgets already established for these services. While there are sometimes legal costs associated with related enforcement work these can be met from the HRA.

5. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

5.1 The Council's carbon neutral ambition has been taken into consideration and there are no known positive or negative impacts arising from this decision.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Comment from the Director of Finance (linked to the MTFP): The Head of Finance & Investment has been consulted on this report and has no further comment to add.

6.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Head of Governance has been consulted during the preparation of this report and has no further comment to make.

6.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report does not specifically highlight any equality implications, however in discharging their duties members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>

6.4 Other Officers (as appropriate):

7. Background Papers

Appendices

- i. Housing Services Neighbour Nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.
- ii. Housing Services Customer Alerts Policy
- iii. Housing Services Tenancy Fraud Policy
- iv. Housing Services Rent-Setting and Income Recovery Policy
- v. Housing Services Rechargeable Works and Services Policy
- vi. Housing Services Debt Write-Off Policy
- vii. Housing Services Pets in Council Accommodation Policy
- viii. Housing Services Disabled Adaptations Policy

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