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**Subject:** **TENANT ENGAGEMENT EXPENSES AND INCENTIVES POLICY**

**Meeting and Date:** **Cabinet – 2 December 2024**

**Report of:** **Rachel Collins, Head of Housing**

**Portfolio Holder:** **Councillor Pamela Brivio, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Skills and Education**

**Decision Type:** **Executive Key Decision**

**Classification:** **Unrestricted**

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**Purpose of the report:** To provide detail in relation to the proposed Tenant Engagement Expenses and Incentive Policy (“the Policy”) and seek Cabinet approval for the Policy to be adopted.

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**Recommendation:** That Cabinet:

1. Approves and adopts the proposed Policy.
  2. Delegates authority to the Strategic Director (Finance and Housing), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Education and Skills, to make minor amendments to the Policy as required.
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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 Registered Providers of Social Housing (“Registered Providers”) are required to be open with tenants, treating them with fairness and respect so that they can access services, raise complaints, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account.
- 1.2 Dover District Council (“the Council”) values the time and contribution of residents (tenants and leaseholders) who wish to participate in activities with the Housing Management Service. The Council is committed to providing residents with a clear and accessible way of claiming eligible expenses and understanding of what is covered in the context of participating in housing management activities.
- 1.3 This report was deferred by Cabinet on 4 November in order to make the following recommended changes:
  - Care expenses have been edited to reflect the Members allowance (paragraphs 7.11 - 7.14 replace paragraphs 7.11 and 7.12).
  - The EIA has been edited to acknowledge the impact to gender.

In addition to this, the following has also been changed:

- The appendices have been removed and instead a link to our website containing the relevant forms has replaced where an appendix was previously referenced (paragraph 7.18 and 7.26).
- Further detail has been added to the EIA in consultation with the Equalities Officer.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 An Expenses Policy was used by East Kent Housing which has been referenced throughout this Policy however, the Council does not have a Tenant Engagement Expenses and Incentive Policy (“the Policy”) which has been approved by Cabinet.
- 2.2 This report proposes that Cabinet approves this policy to ensure that as a responsible landlord we are (1) adhering to our legal and regulatory duties and (2) setting out how it will reimburse and incentivise residents to engage with housing management activities. An established Policy will ensure a consistent approach by housing staff when reimbursing or incentivising tenant engagement.
- 2.3 It is important that residents do not suffer a financial loss as a result of volunteering to improve housing services for tenants, prospective tenants and leaseholders in the district.
- 2.4 We hold tenant engagement activities, for example the Dover District Tenant Consultative Group, to take residents’ views into account and to uphold fairness, we must reimburse residents for their eligible expenses associated with participation. The Policy considers their diverse needs by covering a variety of travel options and care costs.
- 2.5 An eligible expense includes (but is not limited to) travel costs or expenses associated with care arrangements to attend activities approved by the Housing Management Service.
- 2.6 In addition to expenses, Tenant Engagement services may offer an incentive for engagement, such as entry into a prize draw.

## **3. Legal and Regulatory Duties**

- 3.1 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 amended the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 providing the Regulator of Social Housing (“the Regulator”) increased powers and the ability to impose tighter regulations on social housing providers.
- 3.2 On 1 April 2024, the Regulator published its new consumer standards. The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard replaced the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard. The new Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard stipulates that social housing landlords treat tenants with fairness and respect (clause 1.1.1), take action to deliver fair and equitable outcomes (clause 1.2.1) and take tenants’ views into account in their decision making about how landlord services are delivered and communicate how tenants’ views have been considered (clause 1.3.1).

## **4. The Policy**

- 4.1 The aims of the policy are:
- 1) To provide guidance to staff and residents of what an eligible expense is in the context of engaging in housing management activities.

- 2) To provide residents with a clear and accessible way of claiming expenses and set out when they can expect reimbursement.
  - 3) To stipulate where incentives might be offered to residents who engage with Housing Services activities and the nature of these.
  - 4) As Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) members, we endeavour to meet their [National Tenant Engagement Standards](#)
- 4.2 The Policy has been informed by the guidance published by Tpas (tenant engagement experts) and developed in line with legislative and regulatory requirements.
- 4.3 The Policy makes clear that resident engagement is vital and extremely valued to improve housing service and although the Council will not be offering payment (as participation is voluntary), it is important that residents are not out of pocket as a result of engagement. This Policy will be promoted amongst Dover District Tenancy Consultative Group (DDTCG) to encourage expense claims, DDTCG are one of the groups who will be consulted on regarding this Policy.
- 4.4 This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:
- Tenancy Strategy 2021 - 2026
  - Tenant Management Policy
  - Equality Policy
5. **Consultation**
- 5.1 The following teams and groups were also consulted on the proposed policy:
- 1) Dover District Tenants Consultative Group (DDTCG)
  - 2) Housing Services
  - 3) Legal Team
  - 4) Finance and Accounts
  - 5) Corporate Services (complaints and equality)
6. **Monitoring and Implementation**
- 6.1 Formal reviews of the Policy will be conducted every 3 years or where changes to legislation and / or regulations require an immediate review. If the Policy is approved for use, the next expected review date will be in 2027.
- 6.2 Staff will be provided with guidance and processes to ensure that they can (1) comply with the Policy and (2) provide residents with guidance when claiming expenses.
- 6.3 A copy of the Policy will be provided online via our website for residents to access. Alternative forms of communication can be provided where requested.
7. **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**
- 7.1 In accordance with our Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010), a full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) (Appendix 2) has been completed for the proposed policy and has identified potential negative impacts to individuals with protected characteristics. Mitigative actions have been documented on the EIA where a potential negative impact has been identified, the overall impact for each characteristic is deemed to be neutral.

## 8. Identification of Options

- 8.1 Option A: Cabinet agrees to the recommendations of this report.
- 8.2 Option B: Cabinet does not agree to the recommendations of this report.

## 9. Evaluation of Options

- 9.1 Option A is the preferred option for the following reasons:
  - 1) The Policy will provide a consistent approach followed by housing staff when reimbursing or incentivising resident engagement.
  - 2) The Council will have an up to date and published Policy which informs residents (who engage in housing management activities) of what is classified as an expense, how they can claim expenses, and understand examples of incentives.
  - 3) The Council will be supporting its regulatory duty as stated in 3.1, demonstrating its commitment to tenant engagement.
- 9.2 Option B is not the preferred option since it would be counterproductive to the points raised in 9.1.

## 10. Resource Implications

### Financial Implications

- 10.1 The Policy will raise awareness among residents of the expenses they should be claiming, therefore there could be an increase in claims having financial implications for the Council, albeit relatively minor in the context of the council's expenditure. In addition, there is an amendment to procedures whereby we offer a light meal if a meeting is expected to exceed 4 hours, whereas previously this was 5 hours, again this is relatively minor, and meetings do not often last that long.

### Operational Implications (including staff resources)

- 10.2 The Policy does not make significant changes to current operations since it updates an existing Policy, following almost the same procedure, and we have a dedicated Tenancy Engagement and Scrutiny Officer to oversee operations. Raising awareness of procedures could lead to an increase in workload for the Officer and Finance if residents claim more often, however the Policy encourages residents to claim multiple expenses at one time to reduce this impact.

### Policy/Legislative Implications

- 10.3 The Policy will need to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard within the new consumer standards.
- 10.4 Non-compliance with the new consumer standards could lead to a potentially unlimited fine and/or the Council being 'named and shamed' through published reports and findings, as introduced via the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 which aims to increase social landlords' accountability. Thus, it is important that tenants are effectively engaged as supported by this Policy.

## 11. **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

- 11.1 No implications or impacts have been identified in the preparation of this report or the development of the proposed Policy to climate change or the environment.

## 12. **Corporate Implications**

- 12.1 Comment from the Director of Finance (linked to the MTFP): Accountancy have been consulted in the writing of this report and have no further comments to add (AC)
- 12.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Principal Lawyer – Litigation & Regulatory has been consulted during the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.
- 12.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report seeking to approve the adoption of the Tenant Engagement and Expenses Policy does not specifically highlight any equality implications, as noted at paragraph 7.1. 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>

## 13. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Tenant Engagement Expenses and Incentives Policy

Appendix 2 – EIA

### **Background papers**

- 14.1 [Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
- 14.2 [Travel — mileage and fuel rates and allowances - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)
- 14.3 [Equality Act 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](http://www.legislation.gov.uk)

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