

**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Improving Places Select Commission – 18 March 2025

**Report Title**

Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review – Supporting New Tenants

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

**Report Author(s)**

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**Ward(s) Affected.**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel has completed a review of how the Council supports new tenants and if this is improving sustainability of tenancies. A report detailing the Panel's findings, together with recommendations for service improvement is attached as Appendix 1.

This report provides Improving Places Select Commission with a summary of the findings of the review and the associated action plan (Appendix 2) to support delivery of the recommendations.

**Recommendations**

That Improving Places Select Commission:

1. Note the outcome of the Tenant Scrutiny Review, the actions proposed to deal with each recommendation and progress to date.
2. That a further report detailing progress is presented to Improving Places Select Commission in 12 months' time.

**List of Appendices Included**

- **Appendix 1** Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review - Investigation into how the Council supports new tenants.
- **Appendix 2** Tenants Scrutiny Review Action Plan.
- **Appendix 3** Initial Equalities Screening Assessment

**Background Papers**

None

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Tenant Scrutiny Panel reviews have provided an ongoing opportunity for customers to work pro-actively with the Council, to look at various aspects of landlord service delivery, from a customer perspective and to develop recommendations and actions for service improvement
- 1.2 In March 2024 the way the Council supports new tenants was selected by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel for review.
- 1.3 The Tenants Scrutiny Panel identified that there were areas where some improvements could be made following discussions with officers and new tenants. The review looked at several stages of the allocation process and how new tenants are supported:
  - Processes prior to an allocation of a Council tenancy including pre tenancy training, and income and expenditure checks.
  - Allocation of Council accommodation.
  - Furnished Home Scheme.
  - Post-allocation support from the Area Housing Teams.
- 1.4 The review focussed on the support offered by the Council to new tenants with a view to improving the sustainability of tenancies.
- 1.5 The Panel set out the methodology for the review, which is summarised below:
  - Review the customer journey to become a Rotherham Council tenant, including accessing the service, time taken, and the different services involved.
  - Ascertain whether the publicity around the service is available to all tenants, including hard to reach groups.
  - Use mystery shopping and other methods to explore service access routes.
  - Consider the current service policy in terms of accessibility for tenants.
  - Benchmark against other housing providers to identify any learning and good practice from their systems and policies.
- 1.6 In taking forward the review, Tenant Scrutiny Panel members interviewed new tenants and representatives of the relevant services. This included senior managers from the Council's Housing Service.

## **2. Key Issues**

- 2.1 The Panel developed nine recommendations to improve support to new tenants of Council owned properties and these are detailed in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 Good progress has already been made against the recommendations, which demonstrates the value the Council places upon the Tenant Scrutiny Review

framework and ensures that the customers voice is clearly heard in how we shape, deliver and continually improve services.

### **3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 3.1 Progress in delivering the actions from the Tenant Scrutiny Review are detailed within the action plan at Appendix 2.

### **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1 The action plan, associated with this report, Appendix 2, will be monitored by Tenant Scrutiny Panel members at monthly meetings, which are attended by Council officers, Rotherfed and tenant representatives.

### **5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1 The Council's Housing Service along with the nominated lead officers in the action plan have responsibility for implementing the findings of the review and delivering the associated action plan within the designated timescales.
- 5.2 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel will receive regular updates on progress against the recommendations and actions
- 5.3 A further report will be presented to the Improving Places Select Commission in 12 months' time, detailing progress on delivering the action plan.

### **6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

- 6.1 There are potential procurement implications arising from the recommendations regarding virtual viewings; either procuring a contract for virtual viewings and/or delivering an in-house service, as detailed in the action plan.
- 6.2 There are no significant financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report. The majority of the proposed activity will be funded from within existing recourses. A review of the virtual viewings of properties in 2025 may result in more staff time being required to offer in-person viewings. The potential resource requirements of this will be considered during the review.

### **7. Legal Advice and Implications**

- 7.1 There are no substantive legal issues arising from the content of this report.
- 7.2 Implementation of the recommendations will support the Council's commitment to meeting statutory and regulatory requirements arising from the Social Housing Regulator customer standards, in particular the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard.

## **8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

8.1 There are no direct HR implications arising from this report.

## **9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

9.1 Improving how we support new tenants will positively benefit engagement with children, young people, and vulnerable adults.

## **10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

10.1 We will actively engage under-represented groups and use our customer data to ensure services and communications are accessible and meet the diverse needs of our tenants and neighbourhoods by contributing to the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2022-25 through the following

- Understanding, listening, and engaging across all communities.
- Delivering fair, inclusive, and accessible services.
- Empowering people to engage and challenge discrimination and to promote good community relations.

## **11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change**

11.1 Climate change poses a significant threat to environments, individuals, communities, and economies on local, national, and international scales. In recognition of this the Council has aimed to be net carbon neutral as an organisation by 2030, and for Rotherham as a whole to achieve the same position by 2040.

## **12. Implications for Partners**

12.1 The Council has a contract in place with Rother Fed (local Tenant Federation provider) to support the delivery of the work undertaken by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel, as part of the Council's Tenant Engagement Framework.

12.2 The Council will continue to seek out best practice and consider how to continually improve scrutiny and engagement with tenants through its Exemplar Accreditation and membership of national tenant participation advisory service, TPAS.

## **13. Risks and Mitigation**

13.1 The key risk is the failure to engage with the Tenant Scrutiny Panel in Rotherfed and inability to deliver against the recommendations in the action plan. This will be mitigated by ongoing monitoring, scrutiny and evaluation of the recommendations by the Improving Places Select Commission and the Housing Options Management Team

#### **14. Accountable Officers**

James Clark, Assistant Director of Housing

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