

# Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review Supporting New Tenants

Improving Places Select Commission  
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# The Tenant Scrutiny Panel

The remit – To consider various aspects of landlord service delivery, from a customer perspective and to develop recommendations and actions for service improvement.

In March 2024, the way the Council supports new tenants was selected by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel for review.

Considered stages of the allocation process and how new tenants are supported, mainly around:

- The 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.

# The methodology for the review

- Reviewed the customer journey to become a Rotherham Council tenant,
- Ascertained whether the publicity around the service is available to all tenants, including hard to reach groups.
- Used mystery shopping and other methods to explore service access routes.
- Benchmarked against other housing providers to identify any learning and good practice from their systems and policies.
- Interviewed new tenants and representatives of the relevant services and senior managers from the Council's Housing Service.

# Nine Recommendations

## (Progress in the Action Plan in Appendix 2)

### Recommendations

- (A) Affordability meeting** - Provide a document to the customer after the affordability meeting with income team colleagues with all the calculations and key information, including how people can decide to pay their rent.

### Progress

- An income and expenditure check is completed via Policy and Practice and the applicant is now provided with a document which shows the affordability. The preferred method of rent payment is recorded.
- If the customer requests to pay by direct debit this is recorded and when sign up takes place a direct debit form is provided for signature by Key Choices

COMPLETE

# Progress

## Recommendations

**(B) Keychoices description** - Manage new tenant's expectations by providing additional information on the Keychoices website:

- That the property is unfurnished and likely to need decorating
- A plan of the layout and room sizes (rather than a list of dimensions)

## Progress

- Issue Frequently Asked Question at pre-tenancy interviews.
- The pre tenancy checklist includes a question re decoration, so applicants are advised that the property is likely to need decorating
- The Lettable Standard has been developed and is available online
- Properties are advertised with room sizes, we acknowledge this is a good suggestion however the housing management system does not facilitate additional plans or room layouts. We will explore the possibility in future upgrades.

COMPLETE

# Progress

## Recommendations

### (C) Virtual viewings re-evaluation

Following expiry of the current contract, plan to re-evaluate the policy of minimising in-person viewings and potentially offering them to ALL new tenants

### Progress

- We acknowledge that in person viewings is a better customer experience we will evaluate our virtual viewing approach considering tenant feedback, this will be shared with IPSC.
- We will carry out a wider survey of tenants to ask if they prefer in person or virtual viewings
- Costing out if virtual viewings make substantial savings when considering the cost of the video contract.

**On Target – April 2025**

# Progress

## Recommendations

### (D) Viewing for Vulnerable tenants

Improve the application form to provide more support to vulnerable tenants by including questions such as:

- Whether the applicant needs to request an in person viewing due to physical or mental health needs
- If they need their support worker to view with them
- Allow more than 48 hours' notice for the viewing if needed to ensure that their support worker is available to attend.

### Progress

- Within Housing Options there are 3 Housing OTs and a dedicated Learning and Disability Housing Officer
- Applicants who receive medical priority, includes a recommendation for an in person viewing with the OT or Learning and Disability Housing Officer. A support worker can also attend.
- The viewing process is flexible, and viewing will be arranged around the availability of the tenant a support worker. Properties will be held up to 1 week when the customer is on holiday

**COMPLETE**

# Progress

## Recommendations

### (E) Welcome Pack

Provide a welcome pack for new tenants at sign up. The pack should include information such as neighbourhood/community's activities, how to report a repair and advice on damp and mould, how to work the boiler, location of the stop tap, and days for bin collections.

### Progress

- The information has been reviewed and a new welcome pack developed. This has been developed into a pdf. Will be launched end of February 2025.
- A customer satisfaction survey is now in place.

**On Target - March 2025**



# Progress

## Recommendations

### (F) Welcome Visit Feedback

- Make sure that feedback from the welcome visits on what could have been better for the tenant is collated and shared with the voids team on a regular basis.

### Progress

- A new digital form for Welcome Visit is being developed. This asks, “Are there any issues with your property?” and “if yes, what are the issues”
- Issues that are fed back on the welcome visit will always be shared with the void team.

**On Target - August 2025**

# Progress

## Recommendations

### (G Provide clarity around the Furnished Scheme)

- Provide more clarity around the scheme by addition of up-to date information on current prices, confirmation that it isn't a lifetime commitment and how the pack can be paid for from housing benefits

### Progress

- The Furnished Homes webpage is now up to date and offers clarity on the scheme, packages that are available and confirms the minimum charge. The website explains that the package is for the duration of the tenancy but if the tenant's financial circumstances change there are options to downgrade and the weekly charge will be adjusted.
- The charge includes any repairs and replacements to all items caused by wear and tear, any damages due to misuse are rechargeable

**COMPLETE**

# Progress

## Recommendations

### (H) Furniture scheme extension

- Proactively extend and publicise the furniture scheme to other tenants (not just new tenants) including people who are struggling to buy new furniture.
- Could the scheme be extended to include small electric items such as irons, vacuum cleaners.

### Progress

- The scheme does allow for current tenants to join the scheme if they are at risk of losing their tenancy.
- The Council is working in partnership with a recycling centre to offer a starter pack of white goods free of charge to tenants who are struggling financially.
- We acknowledge that it is a good suggestion to introduce items like irons/vacuum cleaners but unfortunately it is not feasible to introduce these items as it would increase costs and workloads. The team are not trained in repairing these items, and, as the scheme currently refurbishes items for re-use, these items would not be deemed safe for re-use so this would create an increased costs for replacements and disposal.
- The Furnished Homes Policy is to be developed, and this will include edibility criteria

**On Target - policy October 2025**

# Progress

## Recommendations

### (I) Measuring Sustainability

- Ensure that the length and sustainability of tenancies is monitored and reported such as measuring how many tenants remain in their new homes for 12 months.

### Progress

- There is an existing system report that allows us to measure suitability. We can monitor and report how many tenants remain in their homes for 12 months. Monitoring of this measure is now reported to the Council's Performance and Business Intelligence Service each month via scorecard
- Performance will also be included in the quarterly performance and quality report. It is produced by the performance team and is published on the website.

**COMPLETE**



**Questions?**

