

POLICY SCRUTINY GROUP – 13TH NOVEMBER 2018

Report of the Head of Landlord Services Cabinet Lead Member – Councillor Mercer

ITEM 7 TENANCY SUPPORT POLICY 2019 – 2022

Purpose of Report

To enable the Group to review the draft Tenancy Support Policy 2019-2022.

Action requested

To consider the proposed Tenancy Support Policy 2019-2022, which is appended to the report.

Reason

To scrutinise the Policy in a timely manner in accordance with the Group's work programme.

Background

This Policy sets out the Council's approach to supporting tenants to manage and sustain their Council tenancies and live independently and safely in their homes.

Vulnerability and support needs are identified at various stages throughout a tenancy. The first assessment is carried out at the point an applicant is offered a tenancy. Some tenants may require assistance at the start of their tenancy to set up their utilities, obtain grants for furniture and to ensure that the correct benefit applications are made.

During the life of a tenancy, a tenant may need to be supported if they begin to get into arrears with their rent or face eviction, struggle with their behaviour or with maintaining acceptable home conditions.

Vulnerable tenants may need on-going support or occasional help to maintain their tenancy at a time of crisis.

Providing support to its tenants is an integral part of the Council's commitment to help tenants sustain their tenancies. It helps to ensure that tenants receive advice and assistance in relation to benefits which in turn means they can meet their obligation to pay rent and prevent eviction where possible. This is particularly important for tenants claiming Universal Credit.

Whilst the Council has an Anti-Social Behaviour Team to deal with reports of anti-social behaviour, the Tenancy Support Team can help vulnerable tenants understand how their behaviour is affecting other residents and the consequences should their behaviour continue. There have been occasions where the perpetrator

has failed to engage with the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer but will continue speaking to the Tenancy Support Officer which can provide the best chance of the case being resolved without the need for legal intervention.

The Tenancy Support Team has also provided assistance with hoarding cases or unsanitary properties. The work of the Tenancy Support Team has ensured that where it is appropriate tenants are referred to Adult Social Care to ensure that tenants receive appropriate help and support from other services to deal with the issue.

By providing tenants with support when it is needed and preventing eviction (where possible) it ensures that tenancies are sustained. The sustainment of tenancies means that the Council does not have the additional cost of carrying out an eviction, putting a property through the void process and the loss of rental income whilst the property remains empty. It also means that tenants can live independently and thrive in their own home and can provide stability to vulnerable tenants.

The Policy has been considered and endorsed by the Housing Management Advisory Board.

Background papers: None

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Tenancy Support Policy 2019 – 2022

September 2018
Review date September 2022

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1. Foreword

- 1.1 The Council is committed to helping its tenants to sustain their tenancies. It is recognised that vulnerable tenants may need additional support and advice to help them live independently and safely.
- 1.2 Some tenants need help to set up a new tenancy or to begin living independently for the first time. Vulnerable tenants may also need on-going or occasional help to maintain their tenancies. This could be because of, for example, mental health problems, alcohol and drug dependency, debt or difficulties making benefit claims.
- 1.3 This Policy sets out how support needs are identified and met.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Vulnerability and support needs are identified at various stages throughout a tenancy. The first assessment being carried out at the point an applicant is offered a tenancy. Support needs may be identified during subsequent routine contacts with tenants or when tenants begin to get into arrears with their rent, struggle with their behaviour or with maintaining acceptable home conditions.
- 2.2 In addition to direct support from housing staff in Landlord Services, tenants benefit from support from external agencies such as Social Services, health providers, and the voluntary sector. Staff in Landlord Services aim to work with partners to maximise the support available to tenants.

3. Aims and Objectives

- 3.1 The objectives of the Tenancy Support Policy are to:
 - support and empower tenants to sustain tenancies;
 - help tenants deal with any problems or issues that arise during their tenancy such as rent arrears or problems with welfare benefits;
 - provide direct support through Tenancy Support Officers and Financial Inclusion Officers;
 - refer tenants to partner agencies for more specialist or long term advice and support when needed;
 - liaise with other statutory agencies, and make representations on tenants' behalf;
 - create safer and more stable communities;
 - reduce the economic and social effect of failed tenancies;
 - reduce rent arrears, and the associated costs of legal action;
 - maximise tenants' incomes;
 - help tenants to maintain their independence;
 - prevent and reduce homelessness and the associated costs.
- 3.2 These objectives are delivered by:
 - identifying tenants at risk of vulnerability or support at the beginning of and

- during their tenancies;
- providing support either in-house or by accessing support from partner agencies;
- encouraging and promoting partnerships with external agencies to maximise support for our tenants;
- developing and following robust safeguarding procedures that will help to keep children and vulnerable adults safe from abuse;
- continually seeking to improve the information we hold about the needs and vulnerability of our tenants in order to best direct resources into meeting the needs of vulnerable households.

4. Defining Vulnerability

4.1 Examples of people who may be vulnerable or who may need support (this is not an exhaustive list) include:

- 16-17 year olds;
- Young people who have not held a tenancy before;
- Young people 'moving on' from supported housing into an independent tenancy for the first time;
- Care leavers;
- People with drug / alcohol misuse issues;
- People with an offending history;
- People with poor mental health;
- People with behaviour problems or personality disorders;
- People with learning difficulties;
- People with physical disabilities;
- Frail older people;
- Families whose children have behavioural / emotional / mental health issues that affect parents' ability to comply with tenancy conditions;
- Families with 'children in need of services' or 'children in need of protection' where the children's problems affect their parents' / carers' ability to cope with maintaining their tenancy;
- Households with a history of tenancy failure;
- Households with significant debts / financial difficulties;
- People from abroad or who do not have English as a first language;
- Teenage parents;
- People who have suffered domestic abuse.

5. Identifying who needs help

5.1 Landlord Services assesses the vulnerability and support needs of all prospective tenants at the point an applicant is offered a tenancy.

5.2 A Tenancy and Estate Management Officer visits all new tenants within the first 4 weeks of their tenancies and uses this as an opportunity to check if all support needs have been identified and that any support needs are met. If a support need has been identified and is unmet, the officer will make a referral to the Tenancy Support Team.

- 5.3 When the Tenancy and Estate Management Officer visits, they ask the tenant to complete a form called 'Knowing You' which asks for information about gender, sexuality, disability, age and vulnerability. This form is also completed during routine tenancy visits. The information gained from completed 'Knowing You' forms is used to record levels of vulnerability. This helps us to ensure that support is directed to the most vulnerable tenants, and also shape our services to meet the needs of vulnerable people.
- 5.4 Officers check for vulnerability and support needs whenever a significant problem occurs with a tenancy i.e. tenancy breach, anti-social behaviour or rent arrears. A vulnerability risk assessment is carried out on all complainants of anti-social behaviour, with linked support where necessary.
- 5.5 Known vulnerabilities and disabilities are recorded on Landlord Services' integrated Housing Management System (QL).
- 5.6 Information held on QL about vulnerability is used to alert all staff to the needs of that tenant.

6. The Tenancy Support Service

- 6.1 Landlord Services employ a Tenancy Support Team Leader and three Tenancy Support Officers to deliver the in-house Tenancy Support Service.
- 6.2 The Tenancy Support Service provides advice and assistance to vulnerable tenants to help them sustain their tenancies. Help can be given in the following areas:
- Housing Benefit and Universal Credit;
 - Other welfare benefits;
 - Making referrals for debt and financial advice;
 - Budgeting;
 - Moving in and setting up utilities;
 - Acquiring furniture;
 - Making referrals for help with health issues, education / training, parenting;
 - Household routines;
 - Maintaining properties and gardens to an acceptable standard;
 - Keeping safe;
 - Managing behaviour;
 - Applying for re-housing / transfer.
- 6.3 The Tenancy Support Service concentrates on helping new vulnerable tenants set-up and establish their tenancies as well as assisting existing vulnerable tenants who have encountered a crisis in their tenancy. For example, they may be threatened with legal action because of rent arrears or anti-social behaviour, they may have fallen into serious debt affecting their ability to pay essential bills, they may have allowed their home conditions to deteriorate to an extent that poses a risk to themselves or others, (including hoarding and self-neglect), or they may be suffering a health problem that is affecting their ability to cope with everyday life. Tenancy Support Officers will

offer assistance in the initial stages of a tenancy or in the event of a crisis, and will where necessary try to refer the tenant to an external tenancy support agency who will be able to offer longer term, more structured or specialist support or to another service such as Social Care or Health.

- 6.4 The Tenancy Support Service also offers ad-hoc tenancy support for vulnerable people who do not engage well with other agencies or whose needs are too substantial or long-term for other tenancy support agencies to meet.

7. Financial Inclusion

- 7.1 There are two Financial Inclusion Officers based in the Income team who provide support to tenants on:

- how to maximise income and apply for welfare and housing benefits and Universal Credit;
- how to minimise household expenditure;
- advice on budgeting;
- where to get more in depth advice and debt management advice if necessary.

- 7.2 The Income Team also has five Housing Income Officers who have a role to play in advising tenants in relation to rent arrears, helping them resolve housing benefit and universal credit issues, and helping them to pay their rent by negotiating agreements to pay by instalments. There is also a Former Tenant Arrears Officer attached to the Income Team.

8. Universal Credit

- 8.1 Universal Credit started to affect working age tenants in Charnwood from June 2018. This will be introduced gradually to working age tenants receiving existing income related benefits. By 2022, most working age people in need of benefits to help them with their income and housing costs will be claiming this new benefit. Universal Credit represents a significant change in how benefits are claimed and paid, and it is anticipated that many tenants will need help and support in making and maintaining claims.

- 8.2 Landlord Services has appointed a Universal Credit Officer, part of whose role will be to assist tenants to apply for and maintain claims for Universal Credit and to ensure that their housing costs are paid. Tenancy Support Officers and Financial Inclusion Officers will also provide this support but will focus on the needs of the most vulnerable and financially disadvantaged.

9. Warden and Lifeline Services

- 9.1 Landlord Services has a Warden allocated to each sheltered scheme and this is also available to tenants in properties designated for older people.

- 9.2 In sheltered housing and other properties designated for the elderly, tenants receive help and support through an individual support plan tailored to their needs. Wardens visit tenants on a regular basis as part of implementing the support plan.
- 9.3 The Lifeline service is available for anyone who needs it who lives in Charnwood regardless of age and regardless of whether they live in a Council property. Service users are able to use their alarm 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to ask for assistance.
- 9.4 Warden and Lifeline services have an important role to play in delivering the Council's policy for the protection of adults in need of Safeguarding. Potential risk is identified, referred to other agencies where necessary, and monitored with a key focus on prevention and maintaining people safely in their own homes.

10. Partnership Working

- 10.1 Landlord Services recognises the importance of working in partnership to help tenants sustain their tenancies.
- 10.2 Landlord Services also works closely with other external agencies such as the Police, DWP, Social Care, GPs, mental health professionals, Turning Point, Probation, Youth Offending and Living Without Abuse in order to maximise support and successful outcomes for vulnerable tenants. Referrals are also made to Housing Matters (Leicestershire-based Floating Support Service) which provides more long term and structured support than can be provided by Landlord Services.
- 10.3 Tenancy Support Officers can advise and assist tenants with disabilities on aids and adaptations to their home by making referrals to Leicestershire County Council, who will advise on and recommend the scope and type of support needed. These officers are trained experts in this area. Any adaptations carried out to a Council property will make it safe for continued occupation. This can both improve the quality of life of tenants but also avoid the tenant having to move to other accommodation or into residential care. The majority of work carried out is the provision of ramps, rails, showers and stair lifts.
- 10.4 Officers in Landlord Services make referrals to Leicestershire County Council's Early Help service to secure additional support for children and/or their carers who are encountering difficulties with issues such as behaviour, school attendance and effective parenting.
- 10.5 The Tenancy Support Team refers tenants who are exhibiting signs of self-neglect and/or hoarding behaviours to Adult Social Care and to health professionals for further assessment and support. Tenancy Support Officers work closely with these agencies to try and improve living conditions for tenants in these circumstances and also attend relevant Safeguarding and Vulnerable Adult Risk Meetings (VARMS).

11. Dealing with anti-social behaviour

- 11.1 When anti-social behaviour is reported, a risk assessment of the complainant is carried out. Vulnerabilities and support needs are identified at the earliest opportunity for both complainants and perpetrators. Support is provided, where necessary, to both parties in order to resolve the situation. It is recognised that alleged perpetrators may be vulnerable and in need of help, however for those where legal action is required, the additional support outlined below is provided prior to court proceedings.

12. Additional support prior to legal action

- 12.1 Where it is identified that it is necessary to take legal action (for rent arrears or anti-social behaviour), a multi-agency meeting takes place to review the circumstances of the case, to identify what support is required, and to check that it has been provided. This ensures that no support opportunities have been missed.

13. Safeguarding

- 13.1 Every effort is made to ensure that vulnerable adults and children are kept safe from harm and abuse. Landlord Services follows Charnwood Borough Council's Safeguarding Policies for Children and Adults. These have been jointly developed by all Leicestershire District Councils. The adults policy reflects the principles of 'No Secrets' and the Care Act 2014.
- 13.2 Within Landlord Services, there are five Designated Safeguarding Officers (DSOs) who are trained to deal with safeguarding incidents for both children and vulnerable adults. This includes the Tenancy Support Team Leader and the Principal Officer – Tenancy and Income Management.
- 13.3 All front line staff working with vulnerable adults and/or children receive safeguarding training in relation to child protection matters and support for vulnerable adults. This equips officers with the skills to identify potential risk and support issues, as well as making sure that officers know how to refer to appropriate agencies. This training is ongoing and is updated every three years either by attending a training session or completing on- line training.
- 13.4 Officers work closely with other DSOs in the Council in relation to safeguarding. A summary of all safeguarding incidents and the action taken by DSOs is recorded on Charnwood Borough Council's central safeguarding database. This allows Landlord Services and Charnwood Borough Council to identify patterns or frequent incidents relating to a particular child or vulnerable adult as well as providing a secure record of action taken on each incident. DSO's also attend quarterly liaison meetings.

14. Links to Other Policies

14.1 Landlord Services seeks to consider the needs of vulnerable tenants in other relevant housing management policies such as those surrounding harassment, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse.

14.2 The following Landlord Services and Charnwood Borough Council policies along with the Care Act 2014 have relevance for the Tenancy Support Policy:

- Charnwood Borough Council Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedures including domestic abuse, hate incidents, harassment;
- Charnwood Borough Council Housing Income and Financial Inclusion Policy 2018-21;
- Charnwood Community Safety Partnership Plan 2017-20;
- Charnwood Borough Council Homelessness Strategy 2018-20;
- Charnwood Borough Council Equality and Diversity Strategy 2016-20;
- Charnwood Borough Council Customer Services Strategy 2016-20;
- Hoarding Procedure
- Care Act 2014 (Hoarding, self-neglect and safeguarding are included in this Act)
- Leicestershire District and Borough Councils' Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.