



Title	Refresh of Housing Landlord Services Policies
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Melissa Wise – Executive Director for Communities & Adult Social Care
Report author	Natalie Waters – Director for Housing Landlord Services
Lead Councillor	Councillor Matt Yeo – Lead Councillor for Housing
Corporate priority	Thriving Communities
Recommendations	1. For the Housing, Neighbourhood and Leisure Committee to approve and endorse changes to the following policies for publication: • Rent Recovery Policy – This has been separated out from the corporate debt recovery policy to provide clarity for tenants. • The Tenancy Policy – This has been updated to reflect the types of tenancies the Council offers.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report outlines and seeks agreement for the minor amendments to existing policies, that are required under the Regulator of Social Housing Standards, and their expectations of Landlords. The policies are based on best practice examples and propose no changes to the current service offered to tenants. However, the published policies ensure the Council as a Landlord is clearly setting out their obligations to tenants, managing the expectation of tenants, and improving ease of access of information for tenants.

2. Policy Context

2.1. Regulatory Context of these Policies

- 2.2. The policies presented form a fundamental component of the Council's role as a social landlord, underpinning its tenancy and property management responsibilities and obligations to tenants.
- 2.3. In April 2024, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) introduced a revised set of Consumer Standards that all registered providers of social housing must comply with. This sets out clear expectations for how tenancies and properties are

managed and maintained. The Consumer Standards relevant to these amended policies are set out in Appendix 3.

- 2.4. The Housing and Communities Service aims to tailor services to meet the individual needs of the tenants, and provide homes that are safe, whilst aligning this with our corporate parenting responsibilities. This approach allows all tenants moving into Council stock, including those leaving child or adult social care housing provisions, to have the specific support they need to sustain their tenancies and thrive.

2.5. **Purpose of the Revised Policies**

The proposed recommendation ensures documented compliance with the updated regulatory framework and statutory obligations for social housing landlords, and to meet the expectation, as landlords, to have clear, concise policies.

These policies reflect best practice in tenancy and property/estate management, including proactive support for tenants at risk of losing their homes.

They also support the Council's broader strategic objectives, including:

- Tenancy sustainment - helping residents maintain stable housing
- Community safety - ensuring tenancies are managed in a way that promotes safe and cohesive neighbourhoods
- Housing standards - ensuring that tenancies are aligned with the Council's commitment to quality, well-managed homes.

3. The Proposal

- 3.1. It is proposed that the following policies are amended to reflect best practice standards, and ensure the Council meet the requirements of the standards as set out by the Regulator of Social Housing (Appendix 3), whilst continuing to meet all current legal requirements.

- 3.2. All policies are designed to protect tenants, uphold community safety, and provide the Council with appropriate mechanisms to respond to evolving challenges. The updated policies place more responsibility on the Council as a Landlord with minimal requirements placed on tenants – all requirements on the tenant are existing.

- 3.3. The proposed changes are summarised as follows:

3.3.1 The Rent Recovery Policy (Appendix 1) has been taken out of the larger Corporate Debt Policy (2020) to form a standalone policy. This is required to reflect the detailed ways in which the Council collects rent, recovers arrears and sets out the ways in which tenants are supported early on to prevent enforcement action and help tenants to repay their rent arrears. There are no proposed changes to the way the Council will collect rent and recover arrears, but this standalone policy makes it easier for tenants to access the information.

3.3.2 The Tenancy Policy (Appendix 2) has been updated. The Council's current Tenancy Policy set out the types of tenancies offered when the Policy was written. This included fixed term tenancies and demoted tenancies which have been removed in the proposed updated version, as we no longer have

any tenants on these types of tenancies and these are no longer offered. Instead, the policy clarifies that introductory and secure tenancies are the default and this is in line with best practices. The policy also sets out how the Council manages succession, which has been updated to include assignment. Assignment is a legal process by which a tenancy is transferred to someone else, who must meet the eligibility criteria. Social housing landlords must have this in place so the inclusion of this in this policy ensures the Council aligns with its legal obligations as a landlord.

- 3.4 Once agreed the policies will be made accessible via the Council's website, under the strategies, plans and corporate policies page as well as on the Housing, council tenant web page to ensure transparency and easy access, for tenants. These policies will also be proactively advertised with tenants and shared with the teams that deliver these services or work closely with Landlord Services.
- 3.5 The policies will be reviewed every 2 years, or sooner if triggered by legislative changes, changes to consumer standards or the identification of further best practice.

4 Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1 Implementing these new policies will contribute to the vision and priorities outlined in the Reading Council Plan 2025–2028, particularly under the priority to '*Secure Reading's Economic and Cultural Success*' ensuring high-quality, affordable housing, which contributes to a stable, inclusive community and a thriving local economy.
- 4.2 The publication of transparent policies adheres to Housing and Communities common purpose of 'Supporting the life that matters to you' for tenants and contributes to the objective to improve tenant satisfaction with social housing by clearly defining tenant rights, responsibilities, and service standards, fostering transparency and stronger relationships between tenants and the Council.

5 Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1 Adopting these policies will not have any environmental or climate impact or implications as they propose no change to current service delivery.

6 Community Engagement

- 6.1 These policies reflect existing practice and do not propose any changes to current service delivery. The Tenant Sounding Board have been asked to consider these policies and make suggestions in relation to the tone and language used. Suggestions received will be incorporated into the final versions for Committee approval.
- 6.2 The policies are being introduced to clearly define the Council's obligations as a Landlord and ensure transparency to tenants. They set out the ways in which we deliver services within legal parameters, the obligations we have as a Landlord, and the expectations we set out for tenants based on their tenancy agreement.

7 Equality Implications

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.

- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7.2 There are no proposed changes to services, and no impact on the way people access and experience services, therefore there is no requirement for an Equality Impact Assessment for the purposes of this report.

8 Other Relevant Considerations

8.1 There are no other relevant considerations.

9 Legal Implications

9.1 The Regulator for Social Housing has set out its requirements for Safety and Quality, Transparency, Influence and Accountability, Tenancy and Neighbourhood and Community Standards. These policies cover the Council's requirements to meet these standards.

The Policies must also align with a range of statutory frameworks, and these are all listed within each policy. The main legislation relevant to these policies is highlighted below:

- **The Housing Act 1985** and **Housing Act 1996**, which govern the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords in the social housing sector.
- **The Equality Act 2010**, ensuring that tenancy policies and practices do not discriminate and promote equality of opportunity.
- **The Rent Standard**, which regulates rent-setting to ensure affordability and fairness.
- **Decent Homes Standard 2006**, sets the minimum standard that social housing homes must meet.
- **Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018**, requires landlords to ensure that rented properties are safe, healthy, and free from hazards, with tenants able to take legal action if their home is unfit.

9.2 The Council's Senior Solicitor; Jack Biddle has reviewed the policies and provided commentary relating to the Rent Recovery Policy. These have been considered and amendments to the policies made where applicable.

10. Financial Implications

10.1 All known costs associated with the implementation of these policies are accounted for within the existing Housing Revenue Account budget as the proposals are in line with current service delivery.

11. Timetable for Implementation

11.1 Once approved, these policies will be made accessible via the Council's website, under the Strategies, plans and corporate policies section, as well as on the Housing, council tenant web page and distributed to all relevant stakeholders.

12. Background Papers

12.1 There are none.

Appendices

- 1. Rent Recovery Policy**
- 2. Tenancy Policy**
- 3. Regulator of Social Housing Standards**