

## Newark & Sherwood District Council - Landlord Strategy 2022-27

### PICTURE

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This strategy establishes our vision for Council-owned social housing within Newark & Sherwood and the contribution that it will make to achieve the ambitions of the Community Plan 2020-23 and beyond.
- 1.2 Through the Community Plan we want to improve residents' quality of life and enable those who live, work and invest in Newark & Sherwood to prosper and fulfil their potential.
- 1.3 Social housing plays an invaluable role in providing homes which are affordable for local people and which enable them to establish and sustain roots within communities throughout the district.
- 1.4 However, social housing is a scarce resource which must be fairly allocated to people in housing need. It can provide a strong foundation from which local residents can flourish and fulfil their potential.
- 1.5 As a landlord, the Council has significant responsibilities to ensure that homes and the surrounding areas are well maintained, healthy and safe. This includes addressing the significant carbon emissions arising from social housing use.
- 1.6 The Council also has significant responsibilities to ensure that tenants are given a wide range of opportunities to influence and be involved in decisions affecting the services they receive and the quality of their homes.
- 1.7 Having brought the management of social housing back under the Council's direct control in 2020, this strategy sets out our ambitions for the next five years.

## 2 Our role as a Landlord

We want our tenants to be proud of being a tenant of Newark and Sherwood District Council, and they tell we listen and are responsive to their views as well as ensuring they are part of the decision making process for services that they receive and creating new ones.

We aim to have modern services that tenants can access in the way they wish with well-resourced teams to ensure our homes and communities are well kept, safe and secure.

At the end of this strategy, we aspire to have:

- Customer Satisfaction Levels over 90% against our performance standards underpinned by strong set of performance standards that exceed our regulatory requirements
- A positive relationship with our tenants through proactive engagement opportunities and our annual visits process enabling us to know our customers
- A multi-channel engagement structure so tenants can get involved at a level they want, understand how we are performing and have opportunities to take part in scrutinising and improving our services
- Sound data across 100% of our housing stock which drives our investment in our homes and ensures we know our homes

- An understanding of the scale and costs to decarbonise our homes, having worked alongside our tenants to ensure there is clarity on what our approach and methods and how together we will achieve the targets
- Clear information on our assets such as community centres which are a hive of activity and a community hub
- Completed a further development programme following successful completion of our existing programme
- Completed the regeneration of Yorke Drive and other regeneration activities that involve our homes
- Have clear finances in place to service the activities set out in this Strategy through robust management of the 30 year HRA Business Plan through setting appropriate rent levels and acting commercially

### 3 Community Plan 2020-23

3.1 This strategy contributes towards achieving the following Community Plan objectives:

- Creating vibrant and self-sufficient local communities where residents look out for each other and actively contribute to their local area
- Creating more and better quality homes through our roles as landlord, developer and planning authority
- Continuing to maintain the high standard of cleanliness and appearance of the local environment
- Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and increasing feelings of safety in our communities
- Improving the health and wellbeing of local residents

### 4 Contribution to other Council strategies

4.1 This strategy contributes towards achieving the following Council strategies, which also contribute to achieving the landlord strategy:

- Housing strategy
- Climate change strategy
- Customer strategy
- Community engagement strategy
- Crime and disorder strategy (CSP)
- Digital strategy

### 5 Context

5.1 The time of writing, the Council owns 5,576\* homes, of which 2,576 are designated for older people. This includes our housing with care schemes at Gladstone House, Vale View and The Broadleaves.

5.2 These are a mixture of houses, bungalows and accommodation located within 337 blocks (including bedsits, flats and maisonettes). None of the blocks are 'high rise residential multi-occupied buildings', with the maximum height under 16 metres

- 5.3 In addition, the Council is responsible for 39 homes for temporary use (which are occupied by homeless households) and it has 159 leaseholders, who own their homes which are located within the 337 blocks. There are also 31 community centres located amongst Council homes.
- 5.4 Council homes are located throughout the district, in the principal settlements of Newark, Southwell, Boughton, Bilsthorpe, Edwinstowe and Collingham, as well as more rural areas.
- 5.5 Throughout the life of this strategy, the number of homes in ownership and management will vary as a result of additional social housing being developed by the Council, the regeneration of the Yorke Drive estate (and other projects), homes purchased through the Right to Buy and, potentially, through active asset management.

## **6 Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**

- 6.1 The Council is legally required to maintain an HRA. This is a ring-fenced fund which records expenditure and income (mainly from rents) related to the Council's homes and closely related services or facilities.
- 6.2 The landlord strategy provides the overarching direction for how the resources and assets held within the HRA are to be used. To accompany the strategy, the Council has established an HRA Business Plan which ensures that the Council's homes are well managed and maintained over the long term, social housing-related goals (such as our carbon reduction ambitions) are achieved and also enables new social housing to be developed within the district.

## **7 Operating environment**

- 7.1 The principal external factors which were impacting upon social housing as this strategy was developed and which are expected to play a significant influence during the period 2022-27 are:
  - High demand for and an acute shortage of social housing and within Newark and Sherwood district, a shortage of private rented accommodation.
  - The continued social and economic implications arising from the Covid-19 global pandemic and the impact of this on service delivery models and hybrid services
  - Meeting the existing standards of the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) which includes expectations relating to rents, tenant involvement and empowerment, neighbourhoods and communities, tenancies and tenants' homes (including property health & safety)
  - The Social Housing White Paper, which focuses on realigning the relationship between the tenant and social landlords, with a major focus on transparency and accountability. Within the life of this strategy, the RSH is expected to significantly strengthen its regulation of the Council with a focus on tenant safety, service quality, tenant influence and the quality of homes and neighbourhoods
  - An increasingly assertive Housing Ombudsman which has significantly raised expectations of social landlords for how tenants' complaints are addressed
  - Legislation relating to building and fire safety which will place more stringent requirement and cost implications on landlords around understanding our stock and implementing any works identified to meet new requirements.
  - Changes to the way in which tenants want to receive housing-related services and their expectations for customer service, reflecting wider societal changes, including greater

digital self-service for most transactions and more personalised solutions for more complex or sensitive issues.

- The climate emergency, including reaching the Council’s target of being carbon neutral by 2035 (excluding our housing stock).
- 7.2 Specifically, the Council has a responsibility to ensure that tenants are given opportunities to influence the:
- formulation of their landlord’s housing-related policies and strategic priorities
  - making of decisions about how housing-related services are delivered, including the setting of service standards
  - the scrutiny of their landlord’s performance and the making of recommendations to their landlord about how performance might be improved
  - management of their homes (in some circumstances)
- 7.3 The combined impact of these factors is expected to redefine the relationship between the Council, as landlord, and its tenants and this is reflected in the direction and ambitions which are set out in this strategy. Our approach to tenant influence and accountability is set out in our Community Engagement Strategy.

## 8 Obtaining a Council home

- 8.1 The Council is the largest source of social housing within the district and typically 400 homes are let each year.
- 8.2 All of the Council’s homes are let in accordance with the Allocations Scheme [\[insert link\]](#), which the Council administers on behalf of all social landlords which operate in the district through the use of a Housing Register.
- 8.3 Consistently, demand for social housing significantly exceeds the available homes and the Allocations Scheme establishes priorities based on applicants’ housing need including ‘reasonable preference’ for specified groups. Additional priority is also given to people with an armed forces connection and those who have a right to move. Anyone aged 16 years or over can apply to go on the Housing Register if they have a local connection and are not subject to immigration control.
- 8.4 The Allocations Scheme also explains how existing NSDC tenants may apply for a transfer to another property and specifies the circumstances in which a person may not be eligible to be allocated a Council home.

## 9 Tenure

- 9.1 The Council’s objective is to provide homes which offer long-term security of tenure. This provides a strong foundation from which tenants and members of their household can flourish and fulfil their potential. It also contributes to the creation of vibrant and self-sufficient local communities where residents look out for each other and actively contribute to their local area.
- 9.2 Initially, Council tenants are offered an Introductory Tenancy which is for 12 months (extendable to 18 months) and enables them to demonstrate that they are able to sustain their tenancy. Upon successful completion, it converts to become a Secure Tenancy, which enables them (with some exceptions) to remain in their home for as long as they want to.

- 9.3 The Council reserves the right to apply to a Court to demote a Secure Tenancy to an Introductory Tenancy in certain circumstances where a tenant has been unable to sustain their tenancy.
- 9.4 The Council provides a small amount of accommodation which is occupied for a limited period of time. Due to their temporary nature, these homes are let on a license agreement.

## **10 Tenant and Leaseholder Engagement**

- 10.1 The Housing White Paper and Consumer Standards set out how the Council needs to build on its engagement with tenants and leaseholders, regularly and in a meaningful way. Two Tenant Engagement Officers have already been recruited to ensure the resource is in place to service our engagement structure.
- 10.2 The Council is moving to a new Governance structure enabling the creation of the Tenant Engagement Board (TEB) to ensure tenants are central to the governance and scrutiny of landlord services.
- 10.3 The Council is consulting with tenants on the mechanisms to get involved in a way that suits their time commitments and level of involvement and will link these methods to the TEB.

## **11 Tenancy management**

- 11.1 Whilst occupying their home, a broad range of tenancy management issues arise, ranging from a tenants' request to make improvements to their home or a desire to create a tenancy in joint or sole names through to a failure to look after their home or garden, issues relating to a relationship breakdown or what happens when they want to move home.
- 11.2 The Council's ambition is to ensure that tenants have clear information about their rights and responsibilities, where we may exercise discretion, the services they can expect to receive from us and the way in which we will respond when there are problems.
- 11.3 During the life of this strategy we will develop our existing self-service portal to make it easy for tenants to undertake most transactions online themselves, without the need to speak to a member of staff. This will enable increasing focus of our staffing resources on customer interactions which are complex or sensitive, requiring high levels of empathy or specialist knowledge. Accompanying this, we will procure a new housing management system and work to ensure systems talk to each other to provide a better customer experience.

## **12 Tenancy sustainment**

- 12.1 The Council provides homes for a wide range of people, some of whom may find it challenging to sustain their tenancy.
- 12.2 During the life of this strategy, through our 'Starting Well' pre-tenancy approach, we will ensure that prospective tenants who may require additional intervention are identified and supported so that they understand what their responsibilities would be if they were offered a Council home and are likely to be able to sustain a tenancy with us.

- 12.3 Once an offer of accommodation has been made, our 'Start Well' approach would then ensure they are supported so that the likelihood of their Introductory Tenancy being converted to a Secure Tenancy is maximised.
- 12.4 The Council recognises that some tenants will experience difficulties during the course of their tenancy. During the life of this strategy we will be getting to know our customers better, through a range of means including home visits and enhanced customer insight capabilities.
- 12.5 Where required, we will continue to provide or signpost the necessary support and advice to maximise the likelihood of tenancy success.

### **13 Leasehold management**

- 13.1 The Council provides services to leaseholders on the terms specified in their lease agreement. In general, these relate to ensuring the areas surrounding their homes are healthy, safe and well maintained (for example, undertaking grounds maintenance or providing fire safety equipment), insuring the building and maintaining the fabric and structure of the building in which their home is located (for example, replacing roofs or other significant building components).
- 13.2 The Council will ensure that costs are fair and transparent, ensuring that it meets legal and contractual obligations for consulting leaseholders so that costs can be recovered in full in accordance with the lease agreement.
- 13.3 Some leaseholders let their property and retain full responsibility for their tenants. The Council's relationship remains with the leaseholder.

### **14 Anti-social behaviour (ASB)**

- 14.1 The Council's aim is to enable tenants and leaseholders, their visitors, staff, people working on our behalf and other members of the local community including businesses to undertake their lawful activities without harm to the individual, their community, home, business or to their environment.
- 14.2 ASB can include harassment, hate crimes and domestic abuse. It can be perpetrated by a tenant, leaseholder, a member of their household, a visitor or any other person. When ASB occurs we will take prompt action to help resolve the situation. Our response will focus on prevention, enforcement and/or support depending on the circumstances.
- 14.3 We are committed to taking action and using the statutory powers available to us as a Council in addition to the contractual clauses contained within occupancy agreements, where we consider they can provide an effective solution.

### **15 Rents and service charges**

- 15.1 To ensure they are affordable, tenants' rents set at levels which are below the levels charged in the private rented sector for comparable properties. The Council is required to comply with strict regulatory requirements and government direction in terms of their initial calculation, maximum level and the application of any increases or decreases.
- 15.2 Most tenants' rents are inclusive of the costs of services which relate to the area surrounding their homes such as grounds maintenance and building-related health & safety. Tenants who live in newer homes are charged separately for these items through a service charge.

- 15.3 During the life of this strategy, we will be reviewing the basis on which rents and service charges are set to ensure that they are fair and equitable, enable the provision of high quality services which meet tenant and leaseholder expectations and to ensure that the Council is able to ensure that homes and buildings remain healthy, safe and well maintained in the long term, whilst reducing carbon emissions.

## **16 Income management**

- 16.1 Income received from tenants, leaseholders and other customers enables us to deliver this strategy as set out in the HRA Business Plan.
- 16.2 We will continue to maintain a rigorous approach to income collection, providing customers with a range of payment options which reflect their circumstances and preferences. This includes rents, service charges, Careline charges and one-off charges such as for building maintenance costs (leaseholders) and rechargeable repair costs (for tenants). We will also ensure they are able to understand the basis of their charges and have access to a statement of account.
- 16.3 Whilst tenants are not required to pay a deposit, we expect them to pay their rent in advance, in accordance with the terms of their tenancy agreement. Our 'Rent First' approach prioritises the payment of rent over other outgoings. For new tenants, this is a key element of our 'Starting Well' approach which will be embedded through the life of this strategy.
- 16.4 We recognise that customers' financial circumstances may vary over time and we will continue to provide support and guidance so that any welfare benefits are maximised and there is access to financial advice and assistance.
- 16.5 Where a customer does not pay their rent or other charges and reasonable avenues for recovery have been pursued, we reserve the right to recover any sums, together with our costs, through legal means.

## **17 Tenancy and lease enforcement**

- 17.1 The Council has a responsibility to ensure that all tenants and leaseholders adhere to the terms of their occupancy agreement.
- 17.2 Where we have taken reasonable steps to inform a tenant or leaseholder of a breach of their agreement with us, explained what action is required of them and they have failed to rectify the situation in a way which is acceptable to us, the Council reserves the right to apply to a Court to enforce the terms of their tenancy or lease. This could result in the loss of their home.
- 17.3 Our approach will be firm but fair and we also reserve the right to recover any sums owed to use, together with our costs. In the case of the recovery of a tenancy, eviction will be a last resort.

## **18 Housing with care and for older people**

- 18.1 The Council provides specialist accommodation which enables people to live independently as they get older or if they have certain medical requirements. There are four housing with care (or extra care) schemes located throughout the district. These provide a self-contained apartment with additional communal facilities, a range of social activities and personal care available (and delivered by third-party providers).



- 18.2 In addition, the Council provides a range of homes which are restricted to people aged 55 and over, including bungalows and former sheltered housing schemes. These tenants benefit from our Careline service.
- 18.3 During the next five years we will consider whether there are opportunities for the Council to develop further housing with care facilities within Newark & Sherwood and the success of our existing schemes. This will be undertaken in conjunction with our key stakeholders including Nottinghamshire County Council.
- 18.4 We will also continue to monitor the suitability of age restrictions on existing homes in respect of demand and community impact and, subject to consultation with tenants, redesignate homes as appropriate.

## 19 Careline

- 19.1 Careline is a service run for residents of Newark & Sherwood district. Also known as a lifeline service, it provides 24/7/365 contact with staff who can provide peace of mind for the resident and their family and friends.
- 19.2 Tenants who live in our age-restricted housing and our housing with care schemes automatically receive our Careline service, often through the provision of a fixed system which is installed in their homes, though increasingly through the use of mobile technology. Careline is also available to other Council tenants and all residents in the district.
- 19.3 Our ambition is to grow access to Careline facilities during the next five years as we believe there are many people within the district who would already benefit from the service and due to the aging population within the district. We also believe it can play an important role in overcoming some of the health and social care challenges we face.
- 19.4 Technological advances also mean that we expect the way in which customers receive the service to change in the coming years and the potential to access technology to help tenants remain independent for longer.

## 20 Right to Buy (RTB) and home ownership opportunities

- 20.1 Secure Tenants who live in many of our homes have the legal right to buy their home at a discount from its market value providing they meet legally-defined criteria and our own right RTB policy. The value of the discounts and any conditions associated with receiving the discounts are set by the government.
- 20.2 One of the outcomes of RTB is that it results in the loss of social housing in the district for future generations. We do, however, recognise the benefits to the individual arising from home ownership and for this reason we will seek opportunities to develop new homes which replace those lost through the RTB. We will also consider opportunities to help people into home ownership through the provision of new shared ownership homes (and similar tenures).

## 21 Strategic asset management

- 21.1 The Council is legally required to ensure that tenants' homes meet, as a minimum, the Decent Homes Standard (DHS). At the point of developing this Strategy, the DHS was being reviewed by the government.
- 21.2 During the next five years, we will develop our approach to strategic asset management so that it enables the Council to better respond to the changing operating environment

- (for example, the climate emergency and revisions to the DHS) and customer needs and expectations for their homes. We refer to this as active asset management and this will ensure that we sustain a long term and viable HRA Business Plan and are able to support the long term aims of the Community Plan.
- 21.3 This approach to active asset management will allow careful targeting of resources, informed investment decisions and identify areas for potential remodelling or growth that will maximise value for money and enable the Council to offer the highest quality homes and customer service.
  - 21.4 In order to ensure that we have accurate knowledge about our homes, a new externally-conducted stock condition survey of 50% of the housing portfolio is being undertaken in 2022 and further in-house surveys will take place over the following four years to achieve 100% stock condition information by 2025. We will use this information to reformulate the HRA Business Plan and to reconfigure our programmes of investment in tenants' homes.
  - 21.5 In addition, we will continue to invest in energy efficiency measures and initiatives that will reduce incidences of fuel poverty and the carbon created by our homes.
  - 21.6 We will develop knowledge and skills around carbon reduction measures to enable the Council to attract external funding to move away from fossil fuels but maintain affordability for our customers.

## **22 Building health and safety compliance**

- 22.1 The Council recognises its responsibilities and obligations for building health and safety compliance and considers this a business-critical function, necessary to safeguard the well-being of tenants and leaseholders, their visitors, staff, people working on our behalf and other members of the local community. We also understand our obligations for building health and safety compliance when set in the context of regulation, legislation and approved codes of practice.
- 22.2 New policies and procedures are in place for all key areas of building health and safety compliance, including gas safety, electrical safety, fire safety, asbestos management and water hygiene. At the point of developing this strategy, we were implementing new software which aims to help us provide great assurance of our building health and safety compliance.
- 22.3 We will continue to develop our approach so that, as a minimum, it complies with the requirements being introduced by the Building Safety Bill, Fire Safety Act 2021 and those arising from the Social Housing White Paper published in November 2020.
- 22.4 We will also continue to ensure that contractor performance and data governance remain robust, customer liaison, engagement and information (including enforcement action) is effective and assurance mechanisms are effective and subject to periodic independent review.

## **23 Repairs and maintenance**

- 23.1 The repairs and maintenance service is the very important to our tenants and a key determinant of customer satisfaction. The Council has contractual responsibility to maintain tenants' homes in a good state of repair and each year around 15,000 repairs are carried out.
- 23.2 Most repairs are delivered by the Council's in-house repairs team, with some work undertaken by external contractors where specialist skills or additional capacity is

- required. This approach provides flexibility and enables the Council to benchmark its costs and service quality.
- 23.3 We have aligned specifications where possible with our investment activity to ensure that materials used are standardised for greater efficiency.
  - 23.4 During the next five years, we will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the current delivery arrangements to ensure that we achieve value for money and high customer satisfaction. We will also keep under review our repairs policy to ensure that tenants are clear about the repairs which the Council will undertake and those which are a tenant's responsibility.

## **24 Empty homes (voids)**

- 24.1 Each year around 400 properties become empty and they are prepared to our agreed re-let standard. This standard was increased during 2021 to ensure they are attractive to new tenants when they move in to their new home. Further improvements are being considered and any further changes are expected to be introduced during the first year of the Strategy.
- 24.2 Most void works are undertaken by the Council's in-house repairs team, with some work delivered by external contractors where specialist skills or additional capacity is required.
- 24.3 Some empty homes require substantial repair and investment to bring them up to the re-let standard. We will ensure that these properties are reviewed in line with our active asset management approach before incurring significant costs in bringing them back into use. This will allow us to determine the most appropriate solution which may include their disposal.

## **25 Environmental services and neighbourhood improvements**

- 25.1 The Council is responsible for managing and maintaining a large number of communal areas near to our customers' homes. Our aim is to ensure that the tenants and leaseholders receive high quality, value for money services which result in them being healthy, safe and pleasant places. We also want to ensure that anyone who visits a communal area experiences a high quality physical environment.
- 25.2 The grounds maintenance service is, in particular, important to customers and since 2021 has been delivered by the Council's in-house team. We will monitor the service to ensure that it delivers the expected value for money and high levels of customer satisfaction.
- 25.3 We recognise that investing in the fabric of tenants' homes is not enough to create long term sustainable communities. We will therefore continue to invest in environmental improvements, such as improved lighting and security doors, as this is proven to reduce ASB and improve tenant satisfaction.
- 25.4 Alongside this, we will respond to some of the parking challenges that our tenants experience through targeted investment.

## **26 Community Centres**

- 26.1 The Council has 39 community centres around the District, providing facilities for tenants and residents to improve their health and wellbeing and create social space.
- 26.2 We will assess the use and condition of our community centres and through our Tenant Engagement Team look to maximise their use as community hubs ensure they are well kept, clean facilities.

## 27 Provision of new homes and regeneration

- 27.1 The Council remains committed to providing new, high quality social housing within the district and, having established the capability and infrastructure, has delivered 300 new homes within the last four years, with a further 35 homes expected to be developed by the end of 2023 and the five year HRA development programme.
- 27.2 Our ambitions for new homes will be incorporated in the new HRA Business Plan which will be developed once the results of the new externally-conducted stock condition survey of 50% of the housing portfolio have been analysed.
- 27.3 We will continue to work in partnership with the Arkwood Living (the Council-owned housing development company), other property developers, with Homes England and other funders to secure more Council-owned social housing.
- 27.4 In addition, we will continue to pursue opportunities for the regeneration and redevelopment of existing sites. A key priority during the next five years is to ensure that the regeneration of Yorke Drive in Newark is delivered, building on the considerable work which has already been undertaken, and which will provide 100 new social homes, enhanced community facilities and 190 homes for private sale.

## Appendix - Supporting Documents

The Landlord Strategy is supported by the following documents, which provide further information about the Council's strategic approach and plans for delivering the strategy:

- HRA Business Plan (with narrative focussing on financial plan and risk)
- Asset management strategy (HRA)
- Action plan(s) to achieve Landlord Strategy
- Tenancy Policy

Social housing-specific policies:

- Lettings and voids
- Abandoned properties
- Income collection
- Rent and service charges
- Repairs
- Aids and adaptations
- Gas safety
- Asbestos management
- Electrical safety
- Water hygiene and safety
- Lift safety
- Fire safety
- Customer improvements
- RTB
- Leasehold management

Council-wide policies (or similar) which will incorporate a housing-specific element:

- Complaints
- Customer service
- Community protection/ASB (could include domestic abuse or be separate policy)
- Safeguarding
- Tree management?
- Community engagement (inc tenant involvement, influence and scrutiny)
- Community investment
- Illegal occupation
- Environmental and neighbourhood services (e.g. grounds maintenance, estate cleaning, bulk refuse, dumped items, parking)

## Approval, Consultation and Review Timetable

<b>Document title</b>	Landlord Strategy		
<b>Version number</b>	DRAFT v.2	<b>Protective marking</b>	Official
<b>Lead Director</b>	Director Housing Health and Wellbeing		
<b>Lead Business Unit</b>	Directorate Wide		
<b>Lead contact</b>	Business Managers Housing Repairs & Asset Management and Housing and Estates		
<b>Date approved (SLT)</b>		<b>Date approved (Members)</b>	
<b>Reviews due:</b>	April 2023 April 2024 April 2025 April 2026 April 2027		
<b>Consultation</b>			
<b>Consultee</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Comments received</b>	<b>Material change requested (yes/no)</b>
Tenants			
BMs			
HCC			
Audit			