

Report to: Policy & Performance Improvement Committee - 22 July 2024

Director Lead: Suzanne Shead, Director - Housing, Health & Wellbeing

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Report Summary	
<b>Report Title</b>	Update on Property Repair and Letting Arrangements for Council Owned Homes
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To report back on the progress of recommendations endorsed by the Committee at the meeting of 11 September 2023
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>That the Policy &amp; Performance Improvement Committee consider the recommendations set out below:</p> <p>a) consider the options relating to floor coverings in new lets in section 3 and agree officer recommendation:</p> <p><b>Option One:</b> The Council already do more than some housing landlords through the provision of the Starting Well Fund. Continue with existing arrangements given cost pressures on the Housing Revenue Account and write to the Government to address this issue at a national level with any legislation supported by adequate funding.</p> <p><b>Option Two:</b> Expand existing support available via Starting Well Fund to support the cost of installing flooring in more properties/circumstances to recognise the challenges and costs of flooring whilst also balancing the limited funds of the Council. This option would be challenging to put into practice because the Tenancy Officer has discretion to direct support where needed based on financial circumstances of the tenant.</p> <p><b>Option Three:</b> Implement a pilot scheme for one year to increase the circumstances in which flooring will be provided as part of letting standard. Below gives the appropriate costs for providing flooring based on new lettings (excludes transfers) from 2023/24. and to note:</p> <p>b) the progress with the simplified letting standard being introduced;</p> <p>c) the introduction and out turn of the satisfaction measure for temporary accommodation satisfaction of 86%; and</p> <p>d) the progress of the Tree Policy which, once finalised would be adopted through a Portfolio Holder Decision.</p>

## **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 Committee members will recall the report tabled on 11 September 2023, and the endorsement of several recommendations:
- a) Following discussions in the housing sector about furniture poverty and the value of carpeting homes as part of the landlord's lettable standard. It was proposed to take this initiative to the Local Influence Networks to explore the benefits and challenges of providing of floor coverings in all new lettings.
  - b) The committee was asked to support a request to involve tenants to design a simplified Empty Homes Standard to hold the service to account and promote feedback including complaints.
  - c) To support the introduction of a satisfaction measure for quality of temporary accommodation from Qtr. 3 2023-24.
  - d) To support the development of a policy to pilot the Council assisting tenants with maintaining trees within their gardens using funds available from efficiency savings.
- 1.2 The report will set out progress against each recommendation and include any proposals or options for consideration and decision.
- 1.3 During 2023-24, we relet 371 properties with 92% tenants satisfied with their new homes. Over the same period, the Council received five complaints relating to the condition of their home at point of let.

## **2. Progress Against Recommendations**

### **2.1 The provision of floor coverings in all new lettings**

- 2.1.1 This proposal was taken to the Newark and Rural Local Influence Networks in November 2023, and 18 tenants were asked in total.
- 2.1.2 83% of tenants were supportive of this and believed new tenants would benefit from having flooring provided to them. The rationale included:
- It is a large "starting up" cost for tenants to find when moving in, especially with the current cost of living crisis.
  - Flooring helps make a property feel like a home much quicker, with a feeling of warmth.
  - They noted it would also help with cleanliness in the home particularly if there was bare concrete.
  - Encourages a sense of pride in a new home.
- 17% of tenants disagreed that flooring should be provided, and their reasons were:
- The new tenant should be allowed to choose their own flooring rather than having it provided to them.
  - This could delay moving in times for tenants whilst flooring was fitted.

- 2.1.3 The Council already support incoming tenants with setting up in their new home through the starting well fund. The Starting Well Scheme was created in October 2021, initially as a six month pilot and then fully endorsed by Committee in March 2022. This scheme was introduced for all new tenants (not transfer tenants) to start well with the Council; each new tenant is eligible for funds up to £500 which can be used to obtain carpets or a voucher to make their house a home.

The total fund for Starting Well 23/24 was £95,000, of which 64% was allocated to flooring as this was the tenant's priority for support. During 2023-2024, the Council spent £60,000 on flooring from the Starting Well fund which equates to around 120 homes receiving flooring of a monetary value up to £500.

- 2.1.4 Flooring in bathrooms and kitchens is provided as part of meeting the Decent Homes Standard and the Empty Homes team currently spend circa £10,000 per year renewing this outside of the Council's current lettable standard.

- 2.1.5 Provision of flooring is being discussed in the social housing policy arena as the people who need social housing are those least likely to have the funds to afford this significant outlay at an already expensive time in their lives – as moving home is costly.

- 2.1.6 Research released in May 2024, commissioned by Longleigh Foundation ([Final-Report-Longleigh-Flooring-v2.pdf](#)) calls upon the Government to fund an increase in the flooring standard of part of the pending Decent Homes Review, recognising that Local Authorities have significant cost pressures and both Wales and Scotland have already taken steps to include flooring as part of their lettable standard legislative requirements. The report highlights the reasons the Council, as a social housing landlord should consider fitting floor coverings as standard in all relets.

- 2.1.7 The following key findings are highlighted from the report:

- The lack of floor coverings significantly impacts tenants financially; we estimate it takes at least 20 months for those on Universal Credit and 8 months for those on low incomes to repay the cost of floor coverings.
- There are numerous benefits to providing floor coverings, for both tenants and landlords, including increased tenancy sustainment, greater pride in an area, increased community cohesion, and health and wellbeing benefit from less anxiety about money and reduced social isolation.
- Not providing floor coverings may mean tenants and staff are less satisfied. Turnover of tenancies and rent arrears are likely to be higher, and there is an increased cost burden and potential impacts on your tenants' health and feelings of stigma.

- 2.1.8 The report made two recommendations of Local Authorities:

- To stop removing floor coverings during the void process unless the incoming tenant has specifically asked for these to be removed.

*The Council's current approach when a property becomes empty is to assess if the existing floor coverings in the empty property are adequate i.e. the flooring (including laminate) is in good condition, without stains or damage and is safely and correctly fitted. If, following letting, any of the floor coverings are not required by the incoming tenant, the Council will return within 5 days to remove them.*

- To commit to undertaking a pilot on providing floor coverings in empty properties, using the tools outlined in their report.

*Currently, as part of the Council's Starting Well scheme, tenants can choose flooring to value of £500 as part of their move in support. Having spoken to tenants who have benefitted from new flooring at point of letting, feedback has been resoundingly positive and has helped them greatly. In line with the Longleigh Foundation research, it has reduced financial pressure from their startup costs as well as the time and stress of having to organise it themselves and meant they could move in and utilise the property sooner.*

- 2.1.9 Within our tenancy agreement we ask tenants to request permission before fitting laminate flooring if they are living above ground floor:

*If you live in any flat or maisonette above the ground floor you must obtain permission from us before laying laminate flooring (or similar material) or glazed vitreous or quarry floor tiling of any kind as this could cause noise nuisance to neighbouring properties.*

This helps to moderate noise transference between properties and reduce any associated nuisance to neighbours.

- 2.1.10 The challenges of providing a flooring standard in all properties is the percentage of tenants who would prefer to fit their own flooring and therefore the carpets could be removed without the Council's knowledge or at the Council's cost. The percentage of tenants who would do this is unknown. Also, the ability to refit carpet in another property would be challenging due to differing room sizes and storage between fittings.

- 2.1.11 The benefit of engaging with tenants when properties are allocated means that the incoming tenants' priorities are the deciding factor in locations and colour/type of flooring provided as part of Starting Well fund.

## 2.2 The design of a simplified Empty Homes standard

- 2.2.1 Working with tenants and colleagues, a simplified version of the Empty Home standard has been designed and is now on our website and issued to tenants at viewing. A copy is appended to this report.

- 2.2.2 This document forms the basis of the checks completed by tenants who periodically quality inspect empty homes following work being completed and before letting.

- 2.2.3 Further work is ongoing including a review of the current sign-up paperwork which is due to be completed in September 2024 and will include how to prevent and report damp and mould and how to get involved and make a complaint.

## 2.3 The introduction of a satisfaction measure for quality of temporary accommodation

- 2.3.1 This was introduced, a little later than planned, and the outturn is detailed below for quarter 4:

86% of tenants asked were very satisfied and 14% were fairly satisfied.

2.3.2 This satisfaction measure will be included in the performance report for 24/25 onwards.

2.4 The development of a policy to pilot the Council assisting tenants with maintaining trees within their gardens funded through remaining efficiency savings.

2.4.1 The policy is currently in draft form following tenant consultation in February of this year and will be shared under separate cover with this committee once final draft is available. There will be financial implications for the pilot with an initial estimated budget allocation of £30,000 to be secured from the Efficiency Savings reserve.

### 3.0 Options for Consideration Arising from this Report.

#### 3.1 Flooring

As explained in 2.1.8, the Council already assess existing floor coverings and provide some new tenants with support for floor coverings through the Starting Well fund. On this basis, the following options are available:

3.2 **Option One:** The Council already do more than some housing landlords through the provision of the Starting Well Fund. Continue with existing arrangements given cost pressures on the Housing Revenue Account and write to the Government to address this issue at a national level with any legislation supported by adequate funding.

3.3 **Option Two:** Expand existing support available via Starting Well Fund to support the cost of installing flooring in more properties/circumstances to recognise the challenges and costs of flooring whilst also balancing the limited funds of the Council. This option would be challenging to put into practice because the Tenancy Officer has discretion to direct support where needed based on financial circumstances of the tenant.

3.4 **Option Three:** Implement a pilot scheme for one year to increase the circumstances in which flooring will be provided as part of letting standard. Below gives the appropriate costs for providing flooring based on new lettings (excludes transfers) from 2023/24.

Property Size	Amount		
Average room size based on 4x4m (or 16sqm)	Carpet	23/24 No. of Lets	Est. Spend
	£13 per sqm		
1 bedroom & 1 reception room	£416 + VAT	113	£47,008.00
2 bedrooms & 1 reception room	£624 + VAT	120	£74,880.00
3 bedrooms & 1 reception room	£832 + VAT	33	£27,456.00
4 bedrooms & 1 reception room	£1040 + VAT	2	£2,080.00
<b>Total Spend</b>			<b>£151,424.00</b>

- 3.5 Officer recommendation is Option One, to maintain current practice as there is a finite budget with competing pressures and priorities. As detailed above the Council are delivering an enhanced Empty Homes Standard and a much-valued Starting Well Scheme. This is complimented by the Household Support Fund which is accessed by tenancy officers both at sign-up and during the tenancy as required.

The Council will review options again following the outcomes and financial implications from the Decent Homes revision and Awaab's Law are known.

#### **4.0 Implications**

In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.

#### **Financial Implications – FIN24-25/4312**

- 4.1 Where possible the financial implications of each of the three options have been assessed and the details of each are shown below.

#### **Option One – Continue with Existing Arrangements**

There is currently budget provision within the Housing Revenue Account of £105,000 for the Starting Well Scheme for 2024/25. If the current arrangements were to remain the same as they were in 2023/24, with the same percentage of spend under the scheme relating to floor coverings, then 68% of this budget, or **£67,200**, would be spent on floor coverings under this option.

#### **Option Two – Expand Existing Support**

This option is difficult to assess in terms of overall financial cost without an indication of the number of lets which might be involved. However, the cost per let of Option 1 is £500 per floor covering, per property. Whilst, for Option 3, the average cost per floor covering, per property, is marginally higher at a cost of £565. If this second option were to be adopted, with a similar mix of properties detailed in the table in paragraph 3.4, then an increased average cost of £65 per new let property would be incurred.

#### **Option Three – Pilot scheme**

The full cost of this option is detailed in the table in paragraph 3.4 and has been assessed as being **£151,424** for the year during which the pilot scheme would be run. This represents an increase in cost over the current arrangements of **£84,224**. or **25%**. This would be a significant increase in cost and there is currently no budget provision for this within the Housing Revenue Account. Meaning that budget would need to be found from within existing resources.

#### **Equality Implications**

- 4.2 This report has no direct equality implications, if the floor covering pilot is approved an Equality Impact Assessment will be completed.

**Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None

**VHIF001-2024 Empty Homes Inspection Form**  
VOID LETTABLE STANDARD SPECIFICATION



Property Address	
Property Type	
Photos added? Y/N	

	NSDC Inspector	Tenant Inspector
Date of Inspection		
Name of Inspector 1		
Name of Inspector 2		
Signature 1		
Signature 2		

<p>Additional Comments after inspection completion by NSDC Inspector.</p> <p>Include any additional hazards spotted.</p>	
<p>Additional Comments after inspection completion by Tenant Inspector</p> <p>Include any additional hazards spotted.</p>	



	Please use ✓ for completed	NSDC Inspector	Tenant Inspector
1.	<b>HEALTH, SAFETY, &amp; UTILITIES</b>		
	<b>ELECTRICAL</b>		
1.1	EICR condition report & test completed. All Cat 1 and Cat 2 remedial repairs done.		
1.2	Electrical sockets, light fittings & switches clean and undamaged.		
1.3	Immersion heater thermostat replaced if required.		
1.4	Remove all DIY electrics and make good.		
1.5	All non-standard light fittings replaced, all bulbs LED only.		
1.6	Immersion heater in working order - if in use.		
1.7	Minimum one hard-wired smoke detector per floor OR Battery smoke alarm with ten-year battery life.		
	<b>GAS</b>		
1.8	Gas cooker and/or fitted gas hob disconnected.		
1.9	Cooker space available if necessary.		
1.10	Gas test completed.		
1.11	Gas radiators free from rust and in good operational and decorative order.		
1.12	Carbon monoxide detectors tested Y/N		
	<b>WATER</b>		
1.13	Mains cold water tank – insulated, close-fitted lid, suitable base.		
1.14	Any rising or penetrating damp remedied.		
1.15	All drainage systems free flowing and functional.		
1.16	All plumbing systems free of leaks. All stopcocks labelled.		
1.17	Water system drained down and refilled for frost protection.		

	<b>OTHER</b>	NSDC Inspector	Tenant Inspector
1.18	Fire doors and fire prevention mechanisms in good working order.		
1.19	Heating tested and ready for use.		
2.	<b>INTERNAL</b>	NSDC Inspector	Tenant Inspector
2.1	All internal doors free of damage, furniture correctly fitted and serviceable. <i>Curtains, poles and blinds usually left for security reasons - will be removed on request of new tenant.</i>		
	<b>DOORS &amp; FLOORS</b>		
2.2	Any asbestos containing materials removed.		
2.3	Floor tile gaps removed and filled.		
2.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carpets removed if unfit.</li> <li>• Carpets removed - If new tenant requests.</li> <li>• Carpets gifted to new tenants.</li> <li>• Gifted carpets cleaned - if instructed.</li> </ul>		
2.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All internal floorboards, fixed floor coverings, stair treads, banisters, and handrails free of hazards.</li> <li>• All flooring clean and free of hazards.</li> <li>• All gripper rods removed if carpet removed.</li> <li>• Handrails in place between ground and upper floor.</li> <li>• Banister rail gaps not more than 10cm.</li> </ul>		
2.6	Confirm no laminate flooring in first floor or above flats.		
	<b>WALLS &amp; CEILINGS</b>		
2.7	Fitted adaptation handrails left in situ.		
2.8	Polystyrene ceiling tiles removed, and plaster coat applied.		
2.9	Bathroom, kitchen, and internal walls clean.		
2.10	All architraves, skirting boards, picture rail, dado rail painted.		
2.11	After ACM removal, all plaster repairs completed.		
2.12	All walls and ceilings free of excessive cracking or holes. All wall and ceiling surfaces made good and ready to decorate. All doors clean.		
2.13	Loft hatch locked & out of use.		
2.14	Vents unobstructed allowing for free flow of air.		

	<b>BATHROOMS</b>	NSDC Inspector	Tenant Inspector or
2.15	Sinks, basins, WC pan/cistern and baths free from damaged.		
2.16	Clean sealant or sound grouting in place at joints between sanitary units, work top and wall tiles.		
2.17	Enamel bath if in use in good condition.		
2.18	All toilet seats meet British Standard quality.		
2.19	All bath, sink, wash hand basins have usable plugs.		
2.20	New shower head and hose installed. Shower seats in over 55's clean and fit to use.		
	<b>KITCHENS</b>		
2.21	Kitchen fittings and fixtures safe and functional.		
2.22	Kitchen contains an electric cooker point and a gas cooker point. (If gas on site).		
2.23	Kitchen has space for cooker, washing machine and fridge/fridge-freezer.		
2.24	Kitchen has ventilation by means of window(s) or extractor fans.		
2.25	Kitchen contains as a minimum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stainless steel sink top with single drawer.</li> <li>• Kitchens too small to fit a 1000x600mm sink unit can be fitted with a 1000x500mm unit.</li> <li>• Double base unit with draw-line with rolled worktop.</li> <li>• A 1000x300x600 wall unit securely fixed to the wall.</li> </ul>		
	<b>FINISHES</b>		
2.26	All walls and surfaces free from drawing pins, blue tac, nails, screws, picture hooks and holes filled. All carpet tacks and gripper rods removed where flooring removed.		
2.27	All walls and surfaces free from graffiti.		
2.28	All walls and ceilings free from loose wall coverings.		
2.29	All baths, splash back areas and kitchen worktops have two rows high of tiles fitted. Tiles fitted to walls where shower units installed. Tiles fitted to walls from skirting level in cooker spaces.		
3.	<b>External Fabric of the Building - HEALTH &amp; SAFETY</b>	NSDC Inspector	Tenant Inspector or
3.1	Roof is watertight. Any broken or missing tiles, missing pointing to eaves or ridge tiles have been repaired/replaced.		

3.2	Gutters and rainwater systems functional with no signs of leaks.		
3.3	All external footpaths, ramps, steps, and handrails to main door entrances free of tripping hazards and safe to use.		
3.4	All windows and glass in windows and external doors free from damage. A minimum of one window key, for each window in each room – fit for use.		
3.5	Any casement opening windows at first floor level or above fitted with opening restrictors to reduce risk of falling from a height.		
3.6	All Outbuildings and attached canopies / garages safe and watertight.		
3.7	No tenant items remain in roof space/loft space. Roof firebreaks are intact.		
3.8	All window types and materials free from rot or decay, no ingress of water. All openers/closures fit to use. Unfit windows on programmed schedule for repair/replacement.		
	<b>External Fabric of the Building - SECURITY</b>		
3.9	Front fire-door locks have Primary Test euro lock barrel and 2 sets of keys.		
3.10	Minimum 2 working keys for front/back doors; and external side doors, communal door entry, garage, and outside storage sheds linked to property.		
3.11	Non-fire-door front doors have replacement Euro lock in existing multi-lock systems; OR dual latch and mortice lock arrangement for standard timber doors.		
3.12	Door entry systems (where installed) fit for use.		
3.13	All burglar alarms systems and CCTV equipment removed.		
3.14	Key for external meter cabinet key on site.		
4.	<b>CLEANING</b>	NSDC Inspector	Tenant Inspector
4.1	No items on site pertaining to previous tenant. No discarded items on site. No discarded bulky furniture on site.		
		NSDC Inspector	Tenant Inspector
4.2	If applicable, vermin/insect infestation treatment records on file.		
4.3	All cleaning completed using appropriate and safe materials.		

	<b>SPARKLE CLEAN</b>		
4.4	All floors and stairs swept and cleaned, wet mopped where possible. Bathroom and WC floors disinfected.		
4.5	All scuffs (where possible) and paint splashes removed.		
4.6	All internal & external doors, doorframes, architraves, side casings windows, window frames, windowsills, skirting boards, radiators and pipe work clean.		
4.7	No cobwebs in property.		
4.8	All storage cupboards swept and mopped.		
4.9	Kitchen units inside and out, work surfaces, wall tiles, cupboards, drawers and sink to be thoroughly cleaned and fit for use.		
4.10	All bathroom fittings clean and fit for use. All taps clean and free of limescale, fit for use. All toilets clean and fit for use.		
4.11	All electrical sockets, light fittings, & switches clean and fit for use. New light pulls fitted if necessary.		
4.12	All radiators clean and fit for use.		
4.13	Final check toilet strip in place.		
4.14	No evidence of cleaning marks, finish is streak free and dry.		
4.15	All rooms deodorised and a freshener pot in each room.		
5.	<b>GARDEN &amp; CURTILAGE</b>	NSDC Inspector	Tenant Inspector
5.1	No evidence of rubbish or litter left in gardens, garage, and outbuildings. No garden debris or rubbish in dustbins.		
5.2	Hedges to garden areas trimmed - not exceeding 4ft at the front and 6ft at the rear.		
5.4	All grass areas trimmed.		
5.5	Gardens / yards cleared, fit and safe for use.		
5.6	No evidence of garden alterations previously installed.		
	<b>GARDEN &amp; CURTILAGE contd</b>	NSDC Inspector	Tenant Inspector
5.7	All boundary fences, walls, gates etc. safe and fit for use. Note – some boundary fencing or wall bordering onto a public footpath may have been repaired/replaced.		
5.8	Pathways swept and free of hazards.		

5.9	All sheds & greenhouses in good order – these may be gifted to new tenant if agreed. Note: Sheds with asbestos present will be removed within 5 days of letting the property (subject to tenant's approval).		
5.10	The number and condition of trees in the garden noted.		
5.11	Any external access gate has a padlock with keys supplied. All lockable outhouses have a working lock or padlock fitted with keys supplied.		

*Please add additional comments following completion of inspection on page 1.*

*Send completed form and JPEG photos as necessary by email to –  
Responsive Repairs Supervisor and Repairs and Voids Manager.*

**Form ends**