

Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

6 February 2025

Subject:	Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy Rechargeable Repairs Policy Complaints Compensation Policy Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy
Director:	Assistant Director – Asset Management, Sarah Ager
Contact Officer:	Housing Policy and Strategy Lead Officer, Louis Bebb louis_bebb@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the Board considers and comments upon the following draft policies:
- Rechargeable Repairs Policy
 - Complaints Compensation Policy
 - Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy
 - Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Each policy aims to bring together an overview of housing repairs, maintenance and complaints management from across the Council.
- 2.2 The policies set out Sandwell Housing Service's commitment to delivering responsive repairs and maintenance (including passenger lift maintenance and breakdowns), recovering the cost of rechargeable repairs, and offering compensation to those who have been affected by failures in service.

2.3 These policy documents will provide clarity for the Housing Service as to the standards that we should hold ourselves to. This also allows Sandwell Council to hold ourselves to account as a housing provider, providing the best possible service to our customers and residents.

2.4 By enacting these policies, we aim to maintain council-owned assets to a high standard, investing in homes and communities and fostering an environment where residents can thrive.

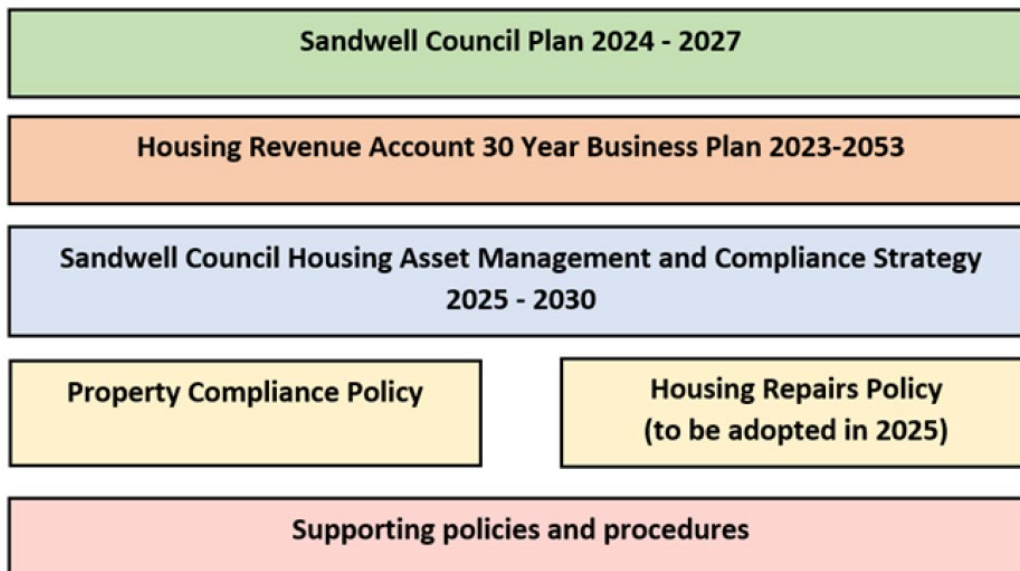
3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

<p>Growing Up in Sandwell</p>	<p>Good quality and suitable housing are essential to delivering this objective. These policies will ensure that the Housing Service is held to a certain standard and that any necessary repairs or maintenance are made in a timely and efficient manner. This will allow children in council accommodation to grow up in well-maintained and safe homes.</p>
<p>Living in Sandwell</p>	<p>Sandwell Council's Housing Service aims to support people no matter their age or ability. These policies allow us to support our most vulnerable tenants by ensuring that the homes/communal areas provided by the council are safe and of good quality. A quality Housing Service will have a positive impact on the lives of residents at each life stage, as well as helping residents maintain their independence as they get older.</p>
<p>Thriving Economy in Sandwell</p>	<p>By investing in our homes and service, we are making long-term investments that benefit our borough, helping Sandwell to be an attractive place to live and work. By using local providers to undertake certain works, we will also boost the local economy and support Sandwell businesses.</p>
<p>Healthy in Sandwell</p>	<p>Housing and the quality of the neighbourhood contribute to delivery of this objective. Sandwell has diverse communities made up of differing socio-economic status, race, ethnicity and disabilities. These policies recognise Sandwell's responsibility to maintain housing assets within the borough to promote wellbeing and help people live healthy lives.</p>
<p>One Council One Team</p>	<p>By having policies stating how Sandwell Council and its Housing Service will approach certain issues, there is a clear code of conduct for all employees, holding them accountable to delivering a certain standard of service. This</p>

means that all employees should be providing a uniform level of service, helping residents in an efficient and consistent manner.

4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 The four drafted policies are important documents for establishing the council's priorities and objectives for meeting the housing service needs and those of our residents, tenants and leaseholders.
- 4.2 We must ensure that the hierarchy of policies and strategies informs our approach to Asset Management and Compliance. Following the adoption of the Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy in November 2024, the next phase is to implement our Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy (in addition to the other three subsequent policies and procedures in the Appendices).



- 4.4 The adoption of these documents will also help to address policy gaps identified in our self-assessment against the Consumer Standards regulatory framework for social housing that we carried out last year. As a result, this will ensure greater compliance from Sandwell Council across the four standards:
- Safety and quality standard
 - Transparency, influence and accountability standard
 - Neighbourhood and community standard
 - Tenancy standard
- 4.5 The aims and purpose of these documents are as follows:

- **Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy** - This policy outlines how Sandwell Council will provide responsive repair and maintenance services for Housing Revenue Account (HRA) properties and communal areas. This policy is accompanied by **two appendix documents**: the first summarises the changes made to the Tenant Handbook; and the second is the Lettable Standard 2025 – these draft documents will be released for public consultation, with the revised timescales for the Housing Repairs Service being of particular interest to respondents.
- **Rechargeable Repairs Policy** - The purpose of this policy is to set out how Sandwell Council will recover the cost of repairs that are deemed to be rechargeable to tenants, former tenants or leaseholders due to damage, neglect, misuse or abuse.
- **Complaints Compensation Policy** – The purpose of this policy is to set out how our Housing Service will offer compensation to complainants who have been affected by failures in service and complaints handling.
- **Lift Maintenance and Repairs Policy** - This policy outlines Sandwell Council's responsibilities for maintaining passenger lifts, including regular servicing, inspections, testing, and repairs to ensure they remain operational. It also details how the Council will address lift breakdowns, prioritising timely communication, support for vulnerable residents, and minimising disruption.

4.6 We have engaged with various local authorities across the Black Country and West Midlands to discuss their own experiences in creating and implementing their Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy documents. As part of this, we have undertaken a benchmarking exercise to compare the housing repairs timescales for various housing providers in order to inform our own service standards at Sandwell Council. This has produced some very informative feedback through collaboration with other local authorities that we have been able to feed into our own policy document.

4.7 Consultation

Online Consultation:

The online consultation on the draft policies will run for a 4-week period throughout February and March. The surveys will feature a mixture of qualitative and quantitative questions, providing respondents the opportunity to give feedback on the policy proposals, whether the document itself is resident-friendly and if there are any things missing in the policy document.

Following respondents' comments on each of the policies, feedback will be considered, and amendments will be made to the policy documents where applicable, before being finalised and approved by Cabinet in April 2025.

Policy Engagement Sessions with Residents:

Throughout November and January, we have carried out engagement sessions with residents which have been facilitated by our Community Partnerships Team. These sessions were to understand what our Housing services currently look like and to establish the policy approach we need in order to address the Housing and Asset Management challenges affecting our communities over the next five years. The policy engagement sessions included representation from both Housing and Asset Management staff, plus around 50 tenants and leaseholders in total across these various meetings.

5 Implications

Resources:	Delivery of these policies will be through existing resources such as the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The council's HRA is ring-fenced specifically for the provision of landlord related services or facilities, provided primarily for the benefit of its tenants.
Legal and Governance:	There are a variety of legal factors that must be considered which underpin the strategy. For instance, there have been significant changes to our legal obligations which became law during 2022 because of the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 and the Building Safety Act 2022. These have had a significant impact on the Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy. Unless there are major legislative changes or significant service changes, these policies will be reviewed periodically.
Risk:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial resources available to deliver the policies, including inflation • Future changes to national policy and requirements that could impact on the content of the policies – for instance, new safety regulations.
Equality:	These four policies are key to reducing housing-related and wider inequalities and addressing the diverse housing needs of our communities. Age:

	<p>Certain policies are needed to meet the housing needs of Sandwell's older population. The four policies consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick and efficient repairs to properties and passenger lifts will help to maintain a supply of suitable and accessible homes where older people can feel safe and keep their independence for longer. <p>Disability:</p> <p>The numbers of disabled people or those in poor health in Sandwell is significantly higher than the national average. Maintaining safe and well adapted housing is essential to help people remain independent if they experience health problems. These policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that those with disabilities or additional needs are not disadvantaged in relation to rechargeable repairs or accessing council services • Ensure that those with disabilities or additional needs will receive clear and timely communication, as well as extra support in the event of a lift or adaptive equipment malfunction.
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>The proportion of those in poor health in Sandwell is notably higher than the national average. With the significant health issues in the borough, these policies will play a key role in ensuring our homes and services help people to maintain independence and quality of life. For instance, our Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy is designed to quickly identify any issues with passenger lifts in our council properties, ensuring that they can be dealt quickly and efficiently, causing minimum disruption to our residents with health and mobility needs.</p>
Social Value:	<p>A large part of social value in these policies is about providing housing, services and creating communities in which people feel safe and welcome. Access to necessary repairs and maintenance, as well as providing compensation where the Service failed to meet its standards, will promote greater wellbeing and satisfaction amongst our residents, providing social value. Additionally, engaging with Sandwell's tenants and residents (each policy has a corresponding public consultation) generates social value by interacting with and empowering the community to help shape the future of the council's Housing services.</p>
Climate Change:	<p>Housing plays a key role in addressing climate change due to its strong environmental impact. These policies recognise the need to reduce carbon emissions from housing (e.g. our</p>

	Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy) and how well-maintained homes will improve the energy efficiency of our stock, helping the borough transition to a net zero carbon future.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no corporate parenting implications directly arising as a result of this report.

6 Appendices

Appendix One – DRAFT Rechargeable Repairs Policy

Appendix Two – DRAFT Complaints Compensation Policy

Appendix Three – DRAFT Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy

Appendix Four – DRAFT Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy

Appendix Five – DRAFT Summary of Changes to the Tenant Handbook

Appendix Six – DRAFT Lettable Standard 2025

7. Background Papers

- [Sandwell Council Housing Strategy 2023-2028](#)
- [Sandwell Council Asset Management and Compliance Strategy 2025-2030](#)
- [Sandwell 2030 Vision: Corporate Plan 2021-2025](#)
- [Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Business Plan 2023-2053](#)
- [Regulatory Standards for Landlords](#)
- [Building Safety Act 2022](#)
- [Fire Safety Act 2021](#)