

## CABINET

<b>Report Title</b>	Approval of Asset Management Policies
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Wednesday, 9 April 2025
<b>Report Author</b>	Louis Bebb
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Executive Director - Place
<b>Lead Cabinet Member(s)</b>	Cabinet Member for Housing & Sustainable Development
<b>Why is this a key decision?</b>	<div>1. Expenditure over £1 Million+ no</div> <div>2. Significant impact on 2 or more wards yes</div>
<b>Wards Affected</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Identify exempt information and exemption category</b>	N/A
<b>Is the report urgent?</b>	No
<b>Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)</b>	N/A
<b>Appendices (if any)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy</li> <li>2. Complaints Compensation Policy</li> <li>3. Rechargeable Repairs Policy</li> <li>4. Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy</li> <li>5. Repairs Timescales / Tenant Handbook Changes</li> <li>6. Lettable Standard</li> <li>7. Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy Consultation Report</li> <li>8. Complaints Compensation Policy Consultation Report</li> <li>9. Rechargeable Repairs Policy Consultation Report</li> <li>10. Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy Consultation Report</li> <li>11. Equality Impact Assessment</li> </ol>

## **1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 Cabinet approval is required for four Housing Asset Management related policies, namely, the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy, Complaints Compensation Policy, Rechargeable Repairs Policy and Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy.

## **2. Recommendations**

The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Approve the following draft policy documents:
- Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy
  - Rechargeable Repairs Policy
  - Complaints Compensation Policy
  - Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy

## **3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations**

- 3.1 Cabinet approved the adoption of the Housing Asset Management and Compliance Strategy 2025-2030 at its meeting of December 4 2024. The four policies for which approval is now sought will facilitate the effective delivery of the adopted strategy.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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. 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.

## **Summary of Policy Documents for Which Approval is Sought**

- 3.4 The key elements of each of the policies and the rationale for seeking approval is set out below;

### **Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy**

- 3.5 This policy outlines the principles and standards for our responsive repairs service, detailing how we will:
- a. Maintain homes in line with all regulatory and legislative requirements to ensure safety and compliance.

- b. Deliver a timely, high-quality, customer-focused service that adopts a right-first-time approach, ensuring homes are kept in good repair.
- c. Maximise operational efficiency and demonstrate value for money through effective decision-making and procurement practices.
- d. Engage with residents to influence the development of the service by prioritising, measuring, and reporting customer satisfaction, and using customer feedback to drive continuous improvement.

By implementing this policy, it will create a process and timeline for carrying out repairs in a timely manner in order to ensure the safety of tenants and the compliance of the councils housing stock with the relevant regulatory framework. This will help achieve all three of our Asset Management and Compliance Strategy priorities which are to provide modern homes that are energy efficient, safe and driven by constant performance improvement.

## **Rechargeable Repairs Policy**

3.6 This policy explains how Sandwell Council manages rechargeable repairs.

The main aims of this document are to:

- Outline the process for charging tenants for repairs caused by damage or neglect (whether intentional or accidental) while excluding normal wear and tear.
- Ensure repair costs are recovered fairly and efficiently, helping the Council manage its housing services responsibly.
- Prevent rechargeable repairs where possible by keeping tenants informed about their rights and responsibilities for repairs during their tenancy.

By implementing this policy, this will achieve our strategic priority of ensuring that homes remain safe, secure and ensure investment priorities can be achieved by maximising our financial potential.

## **Complaints Compensation Policy**

3.6 The aim of this policy is to provide a framework for offering compensation to tenants and residents where appropriate.

To offer reasonable compensation to tenants and residents who have been affected by failures in service, and to restore residents to the position they would have been in had the service failure not occurred.

It is intended that this will improve complaint handling and resident satisfaction, measured through tenant and resident feedback, as well as continued monitoring of Housing Ombudsman determinations. As a result, this will achieve our strategic priorities around striving to constantly improve service performance and innovation.

## **Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy**

3.7 This policy outlines our responsibilities for ensuring passenger lifts are regularly serviced, thoroughly inspected, tested, and efficiently repaired, while keeping clear and accurate records.

This policy will also outline Sandwell Council's responsibilities for promptly resolving lift breakdowns within its housing stock. It also emphasises how we will support tenants and leaseholders through timely communication, focused assistance for vulnerable residents, and efficient repairs to minimise disruption during lift breakdowns. By doing so, this will help to address our strategic objectives around asset compliance and building safety, in addition to supporting tenants and leaseholders through an effective service delivery.

## **4 Alternative Options Considered**

4.1 The alternative option is to not seek adoption for the four policies subject to this report. However, if this were to be the process followed, it would not be possible to deliver the objects of the Housing Asset management and Compliance Strategy and therefore, would result in the sub-optimal management of our housing assets.

## **5 Consultation**

### **5.1 Resident Engagement Meetings:**

Throughout November and January, we have carried out engagement sessions with residents for our Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy 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. The policy engagement sessions included representation from both Housing and Asset Management staff, plus around 30 tenants and leaseholders in total across these various meetings. At these meetings, we also provided paper copies of the Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy, Rechargeable Repairs Policy and Complaints Compensation Policy so that residents could review these and provide feedback on the documents via postal survey.

### **Online consultation**

The online consultation on the draft policies ran for a 4-week period throughout February and March. The surveys featured 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.

A consultation report has been prepared for each of the four policy documents, summarising the overall satisfaction with the policies and addressing specific areas where proposals for amendments have been made. For a more detailed understanding of tenant and resident perspectives on each policy, the individual consultation reports are available. These reports provide an in-depth analysis of satisfaction levels, include qualitative feedback, and outline any revisions made in response to the recommendations. The full reports can be accessed in the appendix.

Following respondents' comments on each of the policies, feedback has been considered, and amendments have been made to the policy documents

where applicable, before being finalised and approved by Cabinet in April 2025. Information on this can be found below:

### **Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy**

- **Damp & Mould:** Tenants have called for a dedicated Damp and Mould Policy that prioritises repairs for vulnerable tenants and ensures prompt action. The Council is committed to developing this policy by December 2025.
- **Repairs Timescales:** There is a request for clear timescales for repairs. In response, a Repairs-Specific booklet will be introduced by April 2025, which will include these timescales along with easy-read summaries for better clarity.
- **Tenant vs Landlord Responsibilities:** Tenants have asked for a clearer breakdown of responsibilities between themselves and the Council. This will be addressed by updating sections 4.1 to 4.4 of the policy to provide greater transparency.
- **Language Accessibility:** Feedback highlighted the need for clearer language and improved support for non-English speakers. The Council will review language support options by linking in with Corporate Services around this.
- **Post-Tenancy Inspections:** There is a demand for more information about post-tenancy property inspections. To address this, a new section will be added to the policy, with the updated details available.

### **Rechargeable Repairs Policy**

- **Examples of Rechargeable Repairs:** Tenants have requested clearer examples of which repairs are chargeable. These will be added to the Repairs-Specific booklet, available by April 2025.
- **Self-Upkeep Responsibilities:** Clearer guidance is needed on tenants' responsibilities for maintaining their homes. To clarify this, a link to the Housing Repairs Policy has been included in the document.

### **Complaints Compensation Policy**

- **Clear Timescales:** Tenants want defined timescales for submitting complaints and receiving responses. The Complaints Compensation Policy has been updated to include these timescales.

### **Lift Maintenance and Breakdown Policy**

- **Maintenance Notices:** Residents have expressed a desire for advance notice of maintenance or lift breakdowns to reduce inconvenience. The Council will work on improving communication around this and ensure timely updates.
- **Language Accessibility:** There are requests for policies to be available in accessible formats. The Council will review language support options by linking in with Corporate Services around this.

## Next Steps

Most of these actions are set to be completed by **April 2025**, with the **Damp and Mould Policy** being finalised by **December 2025**. The key priorities will be improving communication, enhancing accessibility, and providing clearer information to tenants about repairs responsibilities.

### Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities (SNAC) Board

Recommendations were also received from elected members around operational delivery when the policies were presented to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny (SNAC) Board on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2025. These included the following recommendations which have since been addressed in the final drafts of these policy documents:

- Amend the draft Rechargeable Repairs Policy, to ensure the 15% administration fee is waived regardless of the tenants preferred payment method.
- In the Rechargeable Repairs Policy, section 9.4.4 should be amended to section 4.4.4.

### Leadership Team

Furthermore, recommendations were provided during the presentation of the policies at the Leadership Team Meeting on 12th March 2025. After reviewing these documents, the following recommendations were made which have since been addressed in the final drafts of these policy documents:

#### Repairs Policy

- Greater explanation needed as why SMBC repairs responsibility was SMBC responsibility – e.g. due to the legislation etc. as we state tenants responsibility was related to their agreement (specifically 4.3).
- Comments made about pushing digital more – encouraging this to be the priority route of contact 24/7.

#### Compensation Policy

- Policy needs to reference why this is appropriate for the housing setting and not just for wider service failure.
- Reference to insurance – vague mention suggesting that if they have insurance something different may apply – too discretionary.

#### All Documents

- Need final proof read for spelling and highlights.
- Remove hyperlinks to any old policies.

## 6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Delivery of these policies will be through existing Housing Revenue Account (HRA) resources. The council's HRA is ring-fenced specifically for the

provision of landlord related services or facilities, provided primary for the benefit of its tenants.

## **7. Legal and Governance Implications**

- 7.1 There are a variety of legal factors that must be considered which underpin these policies. 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.
- 7.2 Unless there are major legislative changes or significant service changes, these policies will be reviewed periodically.

## **8. Risks**

- 8.1 Financial resources available to deliver the policies, including inflation
- 8.2 Future changes to national policy and requirements that could impact on the content of the policies – for instance, new safety regulations.

## **9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)**

- 9.1 The key equality impacts identified within this assessment are the following:
  - **Disability** - These policies will ensure that those with disabilities or additional needs are not disadvantaged in relation to rechargeable repairs or accessing council services. They will also 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.
  - **Age** - 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.
  - **Race** - Our commitment to make the best use of the homes we have will benefit ethnic minority groups particularly. These households typically live in poorer housing conditions than white households and are especially likely to experience problems of damp and mould etc.
  - **Social and economic status** – In particular, our Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy will improve the energy efficiency of our homes whilst supporting tenants in fuel poverty – having energy efficient homes will protect tenants' household incomes.

In order to address these, the following measures will help to mitigate any of these circumstances:

- Accessible communication within these policies
- Making reasonable adjustments
- Regular monitoring and feedback
- Reviewing policies on a periodical basis.

## **10. Other Relevant Implications**

### **10.1 Health and Wellbeing**

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.

### **10.2 Social Value**

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.

## **11. Background Documents**

- [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](#)

## **12. How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?**

### **12.1 Growing up in Sandwell:**

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.

#### Living in Sandwell:

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.



#### Thriving Economy in Sandwell:

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.

#### Healthy in Sandwell:

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.

#### One Council One Team:

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

***To be completed if you do not need an Equality Impact Assessment.***

**Relevance Check**

**Budget Reduction/Service Area:**

**Service Lead**

**Date:**

In what ways does this Budget reduction have an impact on an outward facing service? How will the service feel different to your customers or potential customers?

N/A

If not, how does it impact on staff e.g. redundancies, pay grades, working conditions? Why are you confident that these staff changes will not affect the service that you provide?

N/A

Is a Customer Impact Assessment needed? No

**NB for Officers (not part of the report).**

*The Democratic Services Team are able to offer advice on report writing, should you require assistance.*

*See the report guidance on a page and report style guide documents that have previously been circulated to Officers.*

*Finally, please delete any red wording before the submission of this report and ensure that the report is presented in the correct style.*