

Report to Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board

29 April 2025

Subject:	Outcome of the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board Working Group Session on Draft Housing Policies
Director:	Executive Director of Place Alan Lunt
Contact Officer:	John Swann, Democratic Services Officer

1 Recommendations

1.1. To consider and comment upon the findings of the Scrutiny Working Group Session in relation to Draft Housing Policies and approve the tabled recommendation as follows:

- a) that the Executive Director of Place amend the draft Tenant Sustainability Policy to include detail within the pre-tenancy section setting out what checks and processes are incorporated into the affordability assessment conducted upon prospective tenants.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 A Self-Assessment against the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) Consumer Standards in 2024 identified improvements that could be made to our Governance and Strategic Oversight through the publication of new housing management policies.

2.2 The Housing Improvement and Transformation Programme has been established to ensure compliance with the RSH consumer standards and to ensure the service excellence in the future. Ensuring we have a comprehensive library of policies, which are regularly reviewed and updated, will underpin other work being delivered to transform the service.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

Living in Sandwell	<p>Tenancy Sustainment Policy: Supports long-term housing stability, improving residents' quality of life.</p> <p>Tenancy Fraud Policy: Ensures housing is allocated fairly, guaranteeing access to those in need.</p> <p>Domestic Abuse Policy: Offers support and protection for victims, improving safety and quality of life.</p> <p>Good Neighbourhood Management Policy: Promotes cohesive, safe communities where people want to live.</p>
Growing Up in Sandwell	<p>Tenancy Sustainment Policy: Ensures stable housing for families and children, providing a secure environment for growth and education.</p> <p>Domestic Abuse Policy: Protects children and families from abuse, supporting healthy development and stability.</p> <p>Good Neighbourhood Management Policy: Creates safe, supportive communities, fostering positive environments for young people.</p>
Healthy in Sandwell	<p>Tenancy Sustainment Policy: Reduces housing-related stress, promoting better mental and physical health.</p> <p>Tenancy Fraud Policy: Ensures resources are directed to those who need them most, supporting health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Domestic Abuse Policy: Provides crucial support for victims, improving their physical and mental health.</p> <p>Good Neighbourhood Management Policy: Encourages healthy lifestyles and community engagement, enhancing well-being.</p>
One Council, One Team	<p>Tenancy Sustainment Policy: Promotes inter-departmental collaboration to support tenants' needs.</p> <p>Tenancy Fraud Policy: Fosters teamwork across departments to prevent fraud and protect resources.</p> <p>Domestic Abuse Policy: Requires multi-department cooperation to offer integrated support for victims.</p>

	Good Neighbourhood Management Policy: Encourages collaboration between local authorities, businesses, and residents for community improvements.
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4 Context and Key Issues

- 4.1 At its meeting on 6 February 2025, the Board resolved to create a working group to consider draft policies as and when such policies were made available to the Board.
- 4.2 On 14 April 2025, Working Group members attended a session to discuss four draft housing policies, during which a recommendation was made.
- 4.3 The Working group considered four draft policies, namely:
- Tenancy Sustainment Policy
 - Tenancy Fraud Policy
 - Good Neighbourhood Management Policy
 - Domestic Abuse Policy
- 4.4 Cabinet approved the adoption of the Housing Strategy 2023-2028 at its meeting in June 2023. The four policies for which approval is now sought will facilitate the effective delivery of the adopted strategy.
- 4.5 The policies set out Sandwell Housing Service's commitment to fairness, support, and safety for all tenants. The Tenancy Fraud Policy ensures housing is allocated fairly, preventing misuse of resources. The Tenancy Sustainment Policy provides support to help tenants maintain stable housing and avoid homelessness. The Domestic Abuse Policy prioritises the safety and well-being of tenants affected by abuse, offering immediate support and safe housing options. The Good Neighbourhood Management Policy encourages community cohesion, addressing antisocial behaviour to create safer, more supportive environments. Together, these policies focus on providing inclusive and responsive services to vulnerable tenants.
- 4.6 These policy documents will provide clarity for the Housing Service as to the standards that we should hold ourselves to RSH as part of the Consumer Standards introduced in April 2024. 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 Draft Housing Policies

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

Tenancy Sustainment Policy

- 4.8 Following the Localism Act 2011 and the creation of the Black Country Tenancy Strategy in 2021 between Sandwell Council, Walsall Council, Dudley Council and Wolverhampton City Council, our approach to Tenancy Sustainment is being revised.

The Tenancy Sustainment Policy sets out Sandwell Council's approach to supporting customers to manage their tenancies, preventing homelessness and minimising any tenancy breakdown which may result in abandonment, eviction and early termination.

This policy will allow us to:

- Make the best use of affordable housing stock in Sandwell.
- Help households to meet their future and current housing needs.
- Create and encourage sustainable communities, as well as continuing to protect vulnerable residents.
- Minimise the number of tenancy failures and prevent homelessness.

Tenancy Fraud Policy

- 4.9 Social housing is in short supply and Sandwell Council is committed to making sure that our homes are lived in by those who need them most and by those they are intended for. We recognise that tackling fraud is an effective way to achieve this, and a Tenancy Fraud Policy will provide an overarching framework for the Housing Service.

This policy sets out Sandwell Council's stance on tenancy fraud and its approach to preventing, detecting, reporting and investigating tenancy fraud.

Good Neighbourhood Management Policy

- 4.10 This policy outlines what it means to be a good neighbour and sets out Sandwell Council's commitment to supporting tenants, leaseholders, and residents in fostering positive and respectful relationships within their communities. By promoting good neighbourly behaviour, this policy plays a key role in preventing issues from escalating into anti-social behaviour (ASB). It supports preventative measures designed to avoid harm to

individuals and communities, in line with our wider [Anti-Social Behaviour Policy](#). The proactive approach outlined here aims to address potential disputes or issues at an early stage, reducing the risk of situations that could negatively affect the wellbeing and safety of residents.

Domestic Abuse Policy

4.11 This policy sets out the Sandwell Council Housing Service's commitment to assisting and supporting any person suffering or being threatened with domestic abuse. It also outlines how, by working in partnership with those experiencing domestic abuse and support agencies, the council will:

- Promote the safety and security of victims of domestic abuse and their families
- Sanction and support perpetrators of domestic abuse.

Consultation

4.12 Online consultation

The online consultation for the draft policies began on 24 March 2025 and will be open for a period of four weeks, closing on 21 April 2025, via Citizenspace.

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 May 2025.

4.13 Policy Engagement Sessions with Stakeholders:

Throughout the drafting of these documents, are carrying out various engagement sessions with stakeholders to ensure we capture as many opinions as possible in order to share this policy. These include the following:

- **Collaboration Across Housing Teams and Partner Services:**
These policies have been developed through collaboration across various housing teams and other relevant services, including housing management, ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) teams, domestic abuse

services (both internally and externally), community partnerships, and more.

- **Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group (TLSG):** The Good Neighbourhood Management Policy has gone through several draft versions, with each version being shared for feedback at TLSG meetings to help improve the document. Since the policy is of great importance to residents across the Borough, the current version is the result of collaborative input from this group.
- **Policy Engagement Session:** In April, we will be carrying out engagement sessions with residents for our Good Neighbourhood Management and Tenancy Sustainment policies 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 Management challenges affecting our communities. The policy engagement sessions will include representation from both Housing Management staff and tenants and leaseholders across various meetings. At these meetings, we also provided paper copies of the Domestic Abuse Policy and Tenancy Fraud Policy so that residents can review these and provide feedback on the documents via postal survey, or online if they wish.

5 Implications

Resources:	Financial resources available to deliver the policies, including inflation
Legal and Governance:	<p>Tenancy Sustainment Policy: Supports tenant rights and housing law compliance but may face legal challenges if support or eviction decisions are mishandled. Requires clear frameworks for monitoring support programmes and ensuring accountability in tenancy decisions.</p> <p>Tenancy Fraud Policy: Ensures compliance with housing laws but may face challenges if enforcement is too harsh or discriminatory. Requires robust systems for detecting fraud, clear accountability, and fair enforcement.</p> <p>Domestic Abuse Policy: Complies with domestic abuse laws and protects victims' rights, but must be careful not to violate due process. Requires strong oversight and training to ensure fair treatment of victims and perpetrators.</p>

	Good Neighbourhood Management Policy: Supports anti-social behaviour laws but must avoid violating privacy or free expression rights. Needs clear protocols for handling disputes and complaints fairly and transparently.
Risk:	Future changes to national policy and requirements that could impact on the content of the policies – for instance, new regulations and legislation.
Equality:	The policies will need to provided consistency across all customers.
Health and Wellbeing:	A lack of policies can impact upon customers health and wellbeing.
Social Value:	There are no specific social value implications arising from this report.
Climate Change:	There are no specific climate change implications arising from this report.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no specific Corporate Parenting implications arising from this report.

6 Appendices

Appendix One – DRAFT Tenancy Sustainment Policy

Appendix Two - DRAFT Tenancy Fraud Policy

Appendix Three - DRAFT Good Neighbourhood Management Policy

Appendix Four - DRAFT Domestic Abuse Policy

6 Background Papers

7.1 None