

Name of meeting: Cabinet
Date: 14 January 2020
Title of report: Enhanced Lettable Standard Pilot 2020

Purpose of report:

This report is to advise and seek support from Cabinet about a targeted Enhanced Lettable Standard and Home Starter Fund pilot that Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) propose to deliver on behalf of Kirklees Council (KC) from January 2020 to December 2020. The report will also support a strategic discussion with Cabinet about the opportunities offered by the pilot to establish a long term Enhanced Lettable Standard and Home Starter Fund offer that will be ground-breaking in the social housing sector and give new Kirklees tenants the best possible start to their tenancies.

Both the Enhanced Lettable Standard and the Home Starter Fund will positively contribute to the KC Partnership Outcomes of Best Start, Well, Independent, Safe and Cohesive, Aspire and Achieve. The Kirklees Housing Strategy (2018-2023) states ‘Access to a good home is vitally important to people’s start in life, ongoing health and wellbeing, economic prosperity, security and to foster aspirations’ and the proposed pilot will also be a significant step forward in delivering this outcome.

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| Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards? | Yes The pilot will require identified HRA resources to fund the enhanced lettable standard and the home starter fund for the 12 month period. |
| Key Decision - Is it in the <u>Council’s Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports)?</u> | Yes |
| The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny? | Yes |
| Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name | Karl Battersby - 12.12.2019 |
| Is it also signed off by the Service Director - Finance? | Eamonn Croston - 17.12.2019 |
| Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning? | Julie Muscroft - 13.12.2019 |
| Cabinet member portfolio | Councillor Cathy Scott - Housing and Democracy |

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: None

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes

1. Summary

- Kirklees Neighbourhoods Housing (KNH) manage just under 22000 Council owned residential properties on behalf of KC. In recent years the average number of properties relet each year has reduced to around 1700, which is relatively low in the social housing sector. This is in part an outcome of focussed work by KNH and its partners to support more tenants in sustaining successful tenancies, which then positively contributes to successful communities where people are proud of where they live.
- Council owned properties managed by KNH are currently relet to a lettable standard that was reviewed and updated in 2018. This revised standard includes flooring and mechanical extraction to kitchens and bathrooms as well as more customer responsive flexibility to change things such as kitchen layouts or offer additional items to meet the specific needs of new tenants.
- Potentially introducing a further enhanced lettable standard would give assurance to the Council that new tenants, in particular those who are the most vulnerable, are provided with a very good standard of accommodation to give them the best chance of sustaining their tenancy and settling in their community

2. Information required to take a decision

- **The Enhanced Lettable Standard** proposed would mean each home relet would have:
 - Underlay and carpets in a choice of colours fitted throughout
 - Blinds fitted to all windows
 - Fully plaster skimmed walls where the existing condition of walls will not accept new emulsion
 - Decorated throughout with wood gloss and emulsion to walls and ceilings
 - A fused spur at the top or bottom of any staircase (which could be used to power a stairlift if required) unless there is an obvious reason why a stairlift would never be an option for a particular property.
 - A welcome to your new home starter pack which will be left in each property
- It is important that the additional work carried out is sustainable and not likely to be removed and replaced by the new tenant so the quality of the additional elements such as carpets will be of a high standard and will be selected in advance by the incoming tenant.
- This enhanced offer directly aligns to the KC Housing Strategy strands on improving housing quality and on meeting a range of diverse housing needs to support good health and wellbeing and enable people to sustain a suitable home of their own and remain independent as long as possible. Key additional elements such as the inclusion of a fused spur in certain properties to allow a future easier installation of a stairlift if needed is an example of how this pilot will be important in delivering long term positive outcomes for new Kirklees tenants.
- During the pilot the following new tenant groups will receive the Enhanced Lettable Standard and they have been selected for specific reasons:
 - **Care leavers** – care leavers are a vulnerable group facing setting up a home for the first time and the enhanced lettable standard offer will give them a good foundation to start to put a first home together without having to worry about decorating, carpets and blinds.
 - **Tenants moving from a Domestic Violence Refuge** – this is a group of new tenants who are often traumatised and facing setting up a new home with very little from their former home and often facing financial difficulties. They are often at high risk of not sustaining their tenancy and the enhanced lettable standard gives them a good foundation to start to rebuild their lives.

- **Tenants moving from KC Temporary accommodation** – this is another group of new tenants who have faced homelessness and may have been living in temporary accommodation for quite a long time. They are also at high risk of not sustaining their tenancy unless the level of support offered makes setting up a new home easier and quicker.
- **Tenants moving into a Retirement Living Scheme property** – Often these will be people who are downsizing so there is potential to free up larger accommodation for families in housing need if they are already a Kirklees Tenant. Also many people moving into Retirement Living Schemes are vulnerable with health problems and the enhanced lettable standard will help people quickly settle into their new home and start their tenancy on a more positive route to staying healthy in independent accommodation longer.
- **Existing tenants who are downsizing** - often people who are living in accommodation that is too big for them are daunted by the prospect of moving home and all that is involved. By making the move easier it is hoped that more people will decide to take up opportunities to downsize thus freeing up larger accommodation for people in housing need in the higher allocations bands
- There will also be flexibility and provision for additional groups to be identified and receive the standard as they emerge during the pilot. It is expected that the pilot will involve about 25% to 30% of all properties relet throughout 2020 based on figures from April to September 2019.
- **The Home Starter Fund** will allow certain eligible new tenants to apply for funding to help them buy carpets (if they are not in the Enhanced Lettable Standard pilot group), white goods, beds and household goods up to a value of £2000. Frequently tenancies that fail in the first few months are because of the difficulties some new tenants have accessing the basics they need to start to put a home together. Therefore this provision will have a direct impact on tenancy sustainability and contribute further to giving new tenants the best possible start. The criteria for accessing the fund will target the highest need groups and those more likely to struggle with the basics that are needed to establish a home such as people who are homeless and have been living in temporary accommodation. There will be some individuals who qualify for both the Enhanced lettable Standard and the Home Starter Fund and others who will qualify for one or the other.
- With reference to the climate emergency the Project Team who are developing the Home Starter Fund will be exploring with KC and partner colleagues ways to give new tenants access to appropriate quality recycled goods and will also look at retaining used but high quality carpets and blinds left by previous tenants if they meet the quality offered new through the Enhanced Lettable standard.

3. Implications for the Council

Working with People

- Both elements of the proposed pilot present a great opportunity for the Council to develop a more person focussed rehousing offer that would relate to individual, personal need. In addition to giving some new tenants a much better property to make their home through the Enhanced Lettable Standard pilot, the Home Starter Fund pilot will offer some new tenants real, practical support to set up a home and sustain their new tenancy.
- There will be built in flexibility during the pilot that will allow new tenants to decide if any of the elements are ones they want to opt out of or delay until they move in, such as the installation of blinds. There will be a conversation with each new tenant about what is being offered so they can make personal choices about each additional element including choices on colour schemes. This will directly support the KC restorative practice approach of working with people rather than doing to or for them.

- Throughout the pilot new tenant decisions and requests will be recorded and tracked to help inform any final decision on what a long term Enhanced Lettable Standard and Home Starter Fund might look like.

Working with Partners

- Throughout the pilot there will also be work done to track the sustainability of relevant tenancies and consider in each case what additional support was needed to ensure the individual had the best possible outcomes and what challenges were faced in getting the individual the support that they needed. This will then help develop an understanding of what more is needed in addition to the two elements of the pilot that are being proposed, as for some people their ability to sustain a successful tenancy is such a challenge that even this additional offer might not be enough to secure the outcome being sought.
- The success of the pilot will also depend on positive partnerships with external contractors such as carpet and blind suppliers and where possible these contractors will be Kirklees based and employ Kirklees people positively contributing to a sustainable local economy and contributing directly to the climate emergency work due a reduced carbon footprint of the services provided.

Place Based Working

- The pilot will deliver outcomes that in addition to supporting sustained and successful tenancies will also support developing diverse and successful communities in places where people are proud to live. Communities thrive where people feel settled, safe, and welcome and have a strong sense of belonging and this foundation is undermined if new people to a community struggle to settle and commit to a place as their home. The aspiration is that by providing new tenants with an offer that gives them the best possible start to their tenancy, over time positive impacts will be seen across all communities in Kirklees.

Improving outcomes for children

- The pilot is intended to evidence that by offering certain tenant groups an improved empty home offer accompanied by more support, it will increase their chances of sustaining a tenancy and support other life outcomes. A significant number of the households affected by the pilot will include children and there is a direct correlation between the existence of a stable, good quality home and life outcomes for children. For instance, simple things such as having a place to do homework at home has a significant impact on the educational achievement of children.

Other (e.g. Legal/Financial or Human Resources)

- The Enhanced Lettable Standard will have some impact on void rent loss but KNH is focussing on looking at all aspects of the empty homes process to ensure each is as efficient as possible and directly counteracts any significant impact on how quickly properties are relet. By offering new tenants unprecedented help to set up a home and sustain their tenancies it is expected that this will have a positive impact on turnover rates and on the stability and success of communities. This will then have a direct positive impact on void rent loss levels.
- Funding of the pilot will come from the Housing Revenue Account and is including in the 2020/21 budget preparation work.

4. Consultees and their opinions

- The proposed Enhanced Lettable Standard was presented to the KC Leadership Management Team (LMT) on the 21 October 2019. LMT welcomed the proposals and the benefits that they would deliver in terms of assisting tenants to settle in properties and in increasing the appeal of properties. LMT agreed to endorse the pilot with a view to informing the development of a potentially broader, long term delivery plan.

5. Next steps and timelines

- A Project Team is working on a plan to start delivering the Enhanced Lettable Standard for the identified tenant groups from January 2020.

6. Officer recommendations and reasons

- Cabinet are asked to support the proposal for a targeted Enhanced Lettable Standard and Home Starter Fund pilot that Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) propose to deliver on behalf of Kirklees Council (KC) from January 2020 to December 2020.

7. Cabinet Portfolio Holder's recommendations

- The portfolio holder, Councillor Cathy Scott, is fully supportive of the recommendations proposed, within this report and would ask, that Cabinet support the proposal for a targeted Enhanced Lettable Standard and Home Starter Fund pilot that Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) propose to deliver on behalf of Kirklees Council (KC) from January 2020 to December 2020.

8. Contact officer

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9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

Enhanced Lettable Standard paper to LMT 21 October 2019

10. Strategic Director responsible

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