

# **Draft Tenancy Strategy 2012-2016**

This Tenancy Strategy complements Southampton's Housing and Homelessness Strategies. The aim of this strategy is to set out our vision for the way social housing in the city is allocated. We will use the stock of housing available in the city to its maximum effect. We intend to provide a stable, long term home for those who need it and to also use our resources to provide a step up for those who just need a helping hand on the way to securing their own longer term home.

This tenancy strategy has at its heart the city plan and the city's key objectives; providing good value, high quality services, getting the city working, investing in education and training, keeping people safe, keeping the city green and clean and looking after people. We hope that all housing providers in the city will sign up to these aims.

There is far more demand for social housing than current supply can meet so it is essential that the City Council, together with its partners, makes the very best use of the resources we have. The strategy outlined below sets out our view of how this can be achieved and we welcome the assistance of our partners in helping to implement and further develop this framework.

1. As a social landlord ourselves we will use the full range of tenancy types available to us to meet the city's housing needs and to achieve our key objectives. We will look to other social housing providers to do the same.
2. Where fixed term tenancies are used we would generally expect these to be for a minimum of five years. The choice of tenancy term should be based on both individual needs and the characteristics of particular areas. For instance, we would expect providers to take into account needs such as consistency of schooling, employment, training, regeneration and low demand.
3. For most general needs housing we would support tenancies of up to 10 years in length following a robust introductory tenancy for new tenants.
4. For older people moving into supported accommodation we will support the use of lifetime, secure tenancies if appropriate.

5. The introduction of fixed term tenancies and potential changes to the allocations scheme will mark a significant shift in the culture and expectations around social housing. We consider the use of limited transitional arrangements for some existing applicants may be necessary. The possibility of phasing the length of fixed term tenancies to ensure a coherent approach to the first wave of reviews may also be needed.
6. We are conscious of the need to make best use of resources available to help support people with disabilities. Where a property has a significant adaptation we will encourage the use of fixed term tenancies. Families no longer requiring adapted properties will be expected to take alternative accommodation so that better use can be made of this precious resource.
7. We expect that the criteria used to review fixed term tenancies will include income status and household size. Subject to any overriding issues around community stability, families who are sufficiently well placed to make alternative arrangements for their housing or who no longer need the same size of property should expect to move on to more appropriate accommodation. We will consult stakeholders on the most appropriate measure of income status.
8. Providers may also wish to include other criteria for the review of fixed term tenancies. This may depend on the characteristics of an area, property type, family make up, local objectives or other relevant issues. Whilst we are entirely supportive of the need to make sure tenancies are properly conducted, we will expect providers to take appropriate action in cases of antisocial behaviour throughout the tenancy rather than relying on the review period as a mechanism for dealing with poor behaviour.
9. Similarly, in the case of rent arrears or other breach of tenancy, we will expect providers to take timely action rather than waiting for the review process.
10. We consider that introductory/starter tenancies and probationary tenancies must play an important role in testing the ability to properly manage a tenancy. We encourage the continued use of these alongside other tenancy types.

11. Alternative rent models can be used as a tool to protect community stability and encourage tenants to improve their situation. We support the use of affordable rents and shared ownership options and see a valuable role for these as social housing options to help create balanced communities and meeting housing need. We would expect providers to consider the level at which local housing allowances are set when deciding their rent policy for affordable rent. We will not support policies which result in any disincentive to work or to improve a family's situation or which are likely to result in households being unable to pay their rent.
12. We will retain a single housing list combining both transfer and housing register applicants and will consult with our partners on proposals to change this approach.
13. We welcome the opportunity to use properties in the private rented sector to discharge homelessness duties appropriately. We will work with landlords to encourage use of this sector.
14. Greater flexibility to provide extra priority to particular groups of people will enable us to better support people proving positive role models and making a contribution to the community. We intend to introduce greater preference for applicants who help to enhance their neighbourhood through activities such as volunteering, fostering, contributing in a positive way to a local school or making an economic contribution through working. We will also introduce greater priority for local residents, for tenants who conduct their tenancy well and for applicants leaving the Armed Forces. Tenants who conduct their tenancy poorly can expect their priority for housing to be severely reduced.
15. We aim to introduce a strategy which is fair and transparent and will expect partner agencies to do the same.

We intend to produce a landlord tenancy policy early in 2012 and to introduce a revised lettings policy later in the year. We will work with our partners and stakeholders to use the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 to make the very best use of the resources available to us and to continue to make Southampton a great place to live.