



Sustainable Tenancies Strategy

2018 - 2022

Introduction

Dacorum Borough Council is committed to delivering a great housing service to those living in council owned homes.

This strategy sets out how we as a housing service will work in partnership with our tenants and focus our services so they have successful tenancies. We know that our role as a social landlord is more than giving someone a home at an affordable rent. It is about enabling our tenants to develop their skills and aspirations, advocating on their behalf in times of change and recognising when they themselves need a helping hand. This strategy explains how we will support tenants to combat issues threatening their tenancies and how our approach to enforcement is based on being fair and proportionate.

For the purpose of this strategy, the term tenant refers to all household members living in a Dacorum Borough Council owned home.

<h2>Contents</h2>	
The Housing Vision for Sustainable Tenancies	3
National and local context	4
Delivering a Great Service	5
The commitments	6
Putting commitments into action	12



‘I’m pleased to introduce our Sustainable Tenancies strategy. Throughout this strategy, we outline how our service will support tenants to maintain a good standard of living and reach their optimum level of independence
Councillor Margaret Griffiths



The Housing Vision for Sustainable Tenancies

To deliver a great housing service our vision is to *'empower our tenants to maintain a good standard of living and make informed choices on their lifestyle so they can fulfil their tenancy agreement and have a positive impact within their home and community.'*

This strategy supports the councils corporate vision of *'...working in partnership to create a borough that enables Dacorum's communities to thrive and prosper'.*

By empowering tenants to sustain their tenancies, we are able to support them to live in safe and clean environments and build strong and vibrant communities. This also supports our commitment to continuing to provide good quality and affordable homes, particularly to those most in need. Promoting independence through employment contributes to the economic growth and prosperity of our borough. As a landlord we will also work with our tenants to achieve efficient and modern services.



The National Context

There have been a number of changes in legislation that have a direct impact on our tenants and their tenancies. This strategy has been developed so our services minimise the impact of these changes to our tenants.

Universal Credit

Universal Credit is replacing most means tested benefits, including Housing Benefit, Job Seekers Allowance and Working Tax Credits. This means our tenants will instead receive a single monthly payment. This change places more pressure on tenants to have the right budgeting skills to cover their bills and day to day needs. We already know this is increasing the likelihood of rent arrears. Delays to applications or the risk of sanctions can also cause further stress to tenants, especially tenants dealing with issues such as addiction.

Household Trends

Trends in living arrangements have changed significantly which has impacted on the types of households living in social housing. Factors such as a breakdown of relationship, second families, merging households and cultural expectations can lead to issues such as overcrowding, illegal subletting and under occupancy. This strategy takes into consideration the importance of tenancy audits and knowing who is living in our homes.





Continued...

The Local Context

In Dacorum, there are approximately 60,000 properties housing over 147,000 people. Dacorum Borough Council owns over approximately 10,000 of these properties and is responsible for 1,700 leaseholds.

With 5,700 people actively bidding on the housing register at the time this strategy was written and a further 24,000 people living in our homes the demand for social housing is significant.

The purpose of social housing is to ensure people on low incomes or receipt of benefits can afford a place to come home. However increasingly, we as the housing landlord are working with tenants that have a higher support need. With less homes available at social rent, homes are being allocated to those considered most vulnerable. This is having a knock on effect on the role of the housing landlord.



Delivering a Great Service

Equality and Diversity

As a Housing Service, we believe anyone facing issues that affects their ability to sustain their tenants should have access to the right support regardless of; age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation (Equality and Diversity Act 2010). We do however recognise that some tenants are more likely to need support.

Value for Money

It is important that we deliver value for money for our tenants. Increased demand for social housing as well as increasing complex need requires us to explore new ways to create sustainable tenancies. Through effective housing management and targeted interventions, we will work alongside our tenants to achieve positive outcomes.



The Commitments

To develop this strategy, current tenants and people on the housing register as well as, staff and stakeholders. Through focus group we were able to identify how our service can allow our tenants to have successful tenancies.

From this we have developed five outcome based commitments:

Commitment 1: Every tenant has the best possible start

Commitment 2: We have the right support in place for people that need it

Commitment 3: Our tenants take responsibility for themselves and their tenancy

Commitment 4: We take an informed approach to managing tenancies

Commitment 5: Our tenants make positive choices for themselves and their homes

These commitments will underpin this strategy and ultimately enable us to deliver our vision of tenants and leaseholders feel listened to, empowered to influence decisions and have the opportunity to challenge us.



Commitment 1: Every tenant has the best possible start

How a tenancy starts can play a big part in the relationship we have with our tenant. We want to make sure our tenants have the best possible start to their tenancy. This includes working with them to outline not only our expectations of them as a tenant, but their rights and what support we can offer.

Through this commitment we will explore how our service can give tenants the best experience when they move into one of our homes and set them up so they can enjoy their home.

To achieve this, we will:

- Review our sign up process with the aim to improve new tenants experience
- Identify what information our tenants need when they start their tenancy and how they would like to receive it
- Review how we can identify any support needs at the earliest point and ensure we have this support in place
- Be proactive as a landlord in building relationships with support agencies
- Develop a new set of standards called 'Our House – Your Home' to facilitate a good working relationship with our tenants

Commitment 2: We have the right support in place for people who need it

As a landlord our main job is to provide a safe and secure home for our tenants. We recognise that some of our tenants will need extra support. This support can range from a short intervention aimed at helping them through a specific issue or on-going.

The housing service's priority when providing support is centred around equipping tenants with the tools and skills they need to resolve issues for themselves. It is also about working with them to identify how their choices or behaviour can influence their ability to maintain their tenancy.

To achieve this, we will:

- Continue to develop the services use of support plans and help tenants to track their progress
- Use Tenant Academy as a way of building life skills for our tenants and explore their aspirations beyond their home e.g. budgeting, DIY and decorating
- Establish a service dedicated to helping tenants with hoarding disorder
- Use our Tenancy Sustainment team to help tenants struggling to maintain their tenancy
- Use our internal Housing Panel to review cases in detail and make decisions where exceptions to policy are needed

Commitment 3: Our tenants take responsibility for themselves and their tenancy

Being a responsible tenant is about getting the basics right. Its understanding not paying rent, engaging in anti-social behavior, not keeping a home or garden clean and tidy impacts not just the tenant but the wider community and housing service.

It's also about establishing a relationship with tenants where they feel confident to act on our advice.

To achieve this, we will:

- Explore how we can recognise and encourage 'responsible tenants'
- Be proactive in our approach to tenancy audits to identify issues and work with tenants to solve them
- Ensure our approach to enforcement is proportionate but sets out clear consequences
- Review our approach to managing anti-social behaviour so we can help tenants resolve issues between themselves
- Identify tenants that create high levels of demand on the service and work with them to understand the cause

Commitment 4: We take an informed approach to managing tenancies

With our commitment to continuously improving our service we can use the knowledge, skills and experience of our officers combined with data to make informed decisions.

We recognise it is important to invest in getting the basics right so we as a landlord are meeting our responsibilities while still investing in opportunities to do things differently. We are committed to working with our tenants and partners to get this balance right.

By investing in improvements and building our knowledge we can streamline our approach to managing tenancies and provide better value for money.

To achieve this, we will:

- Build up the information we hold on our tenants and use it to tailor our services based on changes in need or demographics
- Ensure our approach to health and safety, compliance and safeguarding is at the forefront of decision making
- Develop a better understanding of why some houses need more repairs and maintenance than others
- Continue to work with tenants to review our performance and find areas for improvement
- Review demand across the service to ensure all tenants receive a good service not just those who 'shout the loudest'

Commitment 5: Our tenants make positive choices for themselves and their homes

A home is about feeling safe, secure and having a space that allows a good quality of life. We want our tenants to make positive choices that supports this.

This includes considering whether their home is the right fit for them. It is also about understanding that we as the landlord prioritise safety and this plays a big part in shaping the policies we put in place.

To achieve this, we will:

- Use the Our House – Your Home initiative to raise tenant’s awareness of their responsibilities and help officers manage expectation
- Explore how we can better support older tenants to move to a smaller home
- Ensure all tenants are aware of where permission needs to be granted e.g. home alterations, keeping a pet
- Promote the importance of health and safety in the home and communal areas e.g. clear landings
- Publish key policies so tenants understand what is required of them e.g. safety in communal areas, fire safety

Conclusion

Within this strategy we have set out how Dacorum Borough Council housing service will work with key stakeholders, partners and older residents to fulfil our role as a housing landlord and ensure our tenants have sustainable tenancies.

This strategy is centred on empowering tenants so they can enjoy their homes and feel safe and secure.

As the demand for social housing increases, we will continue to see people living with complex needs. This means we as a landlord must do everything possible to help tenants. We also recognise that most of our tenants are ‘responsible tenants’. Where tenants do cause pressure on the service through high demands or expectations, it is important we understand the causes and have open conversations so we as a service meet and consider the needs of all not just those who shout the loudest.

This strategy will be monitored by the Tenant and Leaseholder Committee, Supported Housing Forum and the Housing and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee will receive an annual update.