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## **Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**15 August 2024**

### **Draft Tenancy Strategy 2024**

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#### **Summary**

This report introduces the Draft Tenancy Strategy 2024 which replaces the previous Tenancy Strategy approved by Cabinet in 2018. The Draft Tenancy Strategy 2024 sets out the move away from wide use of fixed term tenancies, which was a material change set out in the 2018 Tenancy Strategy to a focus on secure tenancies and the use of fixed term tenancies in specific circumstances.

#### **1. Recommendations**

- 1.1. The recommendation is that the Committee agree that the Draft Tenancy Strategy 2024 proceeds to Cabinet with a view to approval in October 2024. The Draft Strategy is attached as appendix 1.

#### **2. Budget and policy framework**

- 2.1. The Draft Tenancy Strategy 2024 has been developed in line with the Council Plan and sets out the Council's contribution to meeting the aims of the Council Plan with respect to Housing. The approval of a Tenancy Strategy is a matter for Cabinet.

#### **3. Background**

- 3.1. Medway Council's current Tenancy Strategy was agreed in 2018. It was recognised that an updated strategy was required to reflect the changes in local demand and national legislative changes and our ability to successfully manage tenants and local communities. Since the 2018 Strategy, a new raft of legislation including significant focus on tenant satisfaction measures have been brought in by the Charter for Social Housing Residents: The Social Housing White Paper (2020) This, coupled with the ongoing effects of socio-economic conditions stemming from the pandemic and the costs of living crisis in terms of impacts on households and communities, requires that we update the Strategy.

- 3.2. As required by the Localism Act responses to the strategy consultation will be analysed by officers within strategic housing services, and any potential changes to the draft identified and a log of responses to consultation and any answers to questions raised will be summarised in the report to Cabinet.

## 4. Options

- 4.1. The options are:
- 4.2. To agree that the draft Tenancy Strategy can be presented to Cabinet.
- 4.3. To propose amendments to the draft Tenancy Strategy in advance of presentation to Cabinet.
- 4.4. To not agree to the progression of the draft Tenancy Strategy and carry on business as usual without a new strategy in place.

## 5. Advice and analysis

- 5.1. The draft strategy has been developed based upon a comprehensive review and consideration of:
  - 5.1.1 The national changes in legislation with regards to additional focus on ensuring tenant satisfaction across all social housing provision.
  - 5.1.2 The local context and the challenges faced by tenants during the cost-of-living crisis.
  - 5.1.3 Consultation with Medway Housing Tenancy teams with regards to effectively managing tenants and communities.
- 5.2. Sustainability is an ongoing commitment for all Medway Housing activities, and whilst there are no material impacts within the strategy efforts are made to ensure that all activity aligns with Medway's Climate Change Action Plan.
- 5.3. The strategy is written bearing in mind Medway Housing's ongoing commitment to include the needs of Looked After Children. Whilst not targeted to this group, the additional flexibility contained within the strategy will provide a second chance to many groups who may have challenges in maintaining a tenancy.
- 5.4. The key material change in the Tenancy Strategy as opposed to the previous Strategy is that Medway Housing Tenants will receive a secure tenancy in the majority of circumstances. The previous Strategy had outlined that flexible tenancies would be the standard offer for new Medway Housing Tenants.
- 5.5. Given the pressures on Medway households and communities, as outlined in the background section, as well as the changes in legislation, flexible tenancies will be used on an occasional basis where significant circumstances

warrant this approach. (e.g. to give a family another chance to engage with services in an attempt to avoid eviction proceedings).

5.6. Of 2653 tenancies of general needs housing units, Medway Housing currently have 2087 households on secure tenancies (a further 69 on introductory secure tenancies) with 478 households on flexible tenancies (a further 8 on introductory flexible tenancies). The expectation is that the vast majority, if not all, of those on a flexible tenancy will move to a secure tenancy. One household is on a Family Intervention Tenancy. Medway Housing currently have 10 households where an extended introductory tenancy has been put in place representing less than 0.5% of tenancies. These figures support the case for secure tenancies to be the standard offer for Medway Housing.

5.7. A Diversity Impact Assessment is attached as appendix 2

## 6. Risk Management

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b>	<b>Risk rating</b>
That the changes detailed in the strategy are not carried out.	The move away from the previous stated position on flexible tenancies as a tool to be used where necessary, instead of a default position, is central to the strategy.	The realities of the national and local context have meant that, in effect, the changes have already started. The Tenancy Strategy gives formal notice to these changes.	CIII
That the decision is made not to update the 2018 Tenancy Strategy to this draft version, leaving the council open to challenge as not having a current strategy.	The strategy has been written to take into account the national picture and the evolving needs of Medway Housing's Tenants.	The direction outlined in the strategy is a response to local changes which are already in effect. Should the strategy not be agreed, the work areas would continue under the aims of the previous strategy.	CIII
<b>Likelihood</b>		<b>Impact:</b>	
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare		I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor	

## 7. Consultation

7.1 Due to the focus of the Strategy, consultation initially took place with members of Medway's Housing Revenue Account as to how best fit the changing needs of Medway Housing's Tenants and ensure that the golden thread of

Satisfaction Measures remained to the forefront. The strategy was then sent to the Registered Providers of Social Housing in Medway to ensure that they had chance to comment, given the stipulation in the Localism Act that they should have regard to Medway's Strategy. The Strategy was also presented to a Panel of Medway Housing Residents on 12 July 2024 to seek their views.

- 7.2 We received one response to our consultation with registered providers of social housing in Medway (there was also only one response to the previous consultation in 2018) Mhs homes, who responded as follows - 'as Medway's largest social landlord mhs homes and Heart of Medway welcome Medway Council's Tenancy Strategy and fully support the objectives'.
- 7.3 At the Tenant and Leaseholder Panel on 12 July 2024, which formed our consultation with residents of Medway Housing, the strategy was agreed by the panel of tenants. The sole caveat raised was around ensuring that families were not put under additional stress through any changes following them being put on a Family Intervention Tenancy (FIT). It was explained that this would only ever be used alongside a related support offer and the FIT would in fact give the household an additional layer of protection against potential eviction.
- 7.4 The draft strategy was circulated to colleagues in Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Public Health, with agreement on the content. One minor amendment was made to the draft strategy wording as a result.

## 8. Climate change implications

- 8.1 Due to the nature of the changes within the previous Tenancy Strategy to the updated Strategy, there are no anticipated climate change implications.

## 9. Financial implications

- 9.1 The draft Tenancy Strategy 2024 does not include any budgetary commitments over and above those already planned for.

## 10. Legal implications

- 10.1. There is a legal requirement for a local authority to have a Tenancy Strategy, and to revise this when there have been material changes.

## Lead officer contact

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## Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Draft Tenancy Strategy 2024  
Appendix 2 - Diversity Impact Assessment