

Report to: Housing Review Board



Date of Meeting 16 March 2023

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release NA

Tenancy Visits Policy & Procedure

Report summary:

To provide the Housing Review Board with proposals on the planned implementation of a rolling program of tenancy visits across all Council tenancies in East Devon.

This report seeks the approval of the Housing Review Board to implement a tenancy visit program and policy (attached) based on proposed levels of staffing within the Estate Management team.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

1. That members note and agree the tenant visits policy and procedure (attached)
2. That members agree the recommendation for all properties to be visited annually
3. That members recommend to Cabinet and Council the additional two Housing Officer posts and the additional budget requirement.

Reason for recommendation:

To implement a programme of tenancy visits to all EDDC tenancies

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- Economy and Assets
- Finance
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; .

Links to background information .

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
 - A greener East Devon
 - A resilient economy
-

Report in full

Background

1. Current Arrangements

There is the need to ensure we have a regular, formalised mechanism in place for us to check, update and maintain the data we hold on tenants living in our housing stock. We have previously undertaken these visits and captured this information in a variety of ways, across different teams however there is the need for a renewed focus from Estate management on this area.

2. Objectives

We need to ensure that our tenants are supported in a variety of ways, that our systems are up-to-date with the correct household information, and that our properties are being looked after and used for intended purposes. Tenancy visits will also identify customers at risk of tenancy failure at an early stage to enable us to respond positively.

Government guidance including the Social Housing Charter, places the focus on social landlords to ensure the safety of its tenants and to promote their right to recourse should we fail to keep them safe or listen to their views. We can only do this if we know how best to communicate with them and how their accommodation meets their needs.

Our approach is to make sure that our tenant/household data is regularly updated through tenancy visits.

This will enable us to:

- Ensure that housing accommodation is safe and meets the needs and aspirations of the tenant/household;
- Maintain sustainable tenancies and proactively manage tenancies;
- Identify any support needs within the household;
- Identify any Safeguarding concerns
- Identify the communication needs of tenants/household;
- Ensure that properties are being maintained in accordance with the tenancy agreement;
- Identify tenancy fraud – abandonment, unlawful subletting or unauthorised occupation
- Check for outstanding repairs to make sure the property is safe and fit for habitation;
- Capture up to date information to improve the tenant profiling; and
- Identifying whether tenants would be interested in getting involved on forums or customer scrutiny panels

3. Advantages

- Tenancy visits should save the Council a considerable amount of money by working proactively to prevent issues escalating. For instance, by identifying and addressing property condition issues, which could prevent costly disrepair claims or identifying un-authorised alterations. As a result, the Council could see a reduction in repair costs and void turnaround times, as well as a reduction in the loss of rental income.
- Tenancy visits will also enable us to identify the level of overcrowding in our stock, whilst allowing us an opportunity to promote downsizing to those tenants who may be interested in moving.
- Housing Officers may also be able to identify any tenancy or estate management issues early (e.g. hoarding), so that problems can be resolved before escalating into wider issues that will take more time and resources to resolve.

4. Current Housing Stock Information

Our current stock levels are 4,184 properties across the district. This number is split between 2,837 general needs properties and 1,347 sheltered housing properties.

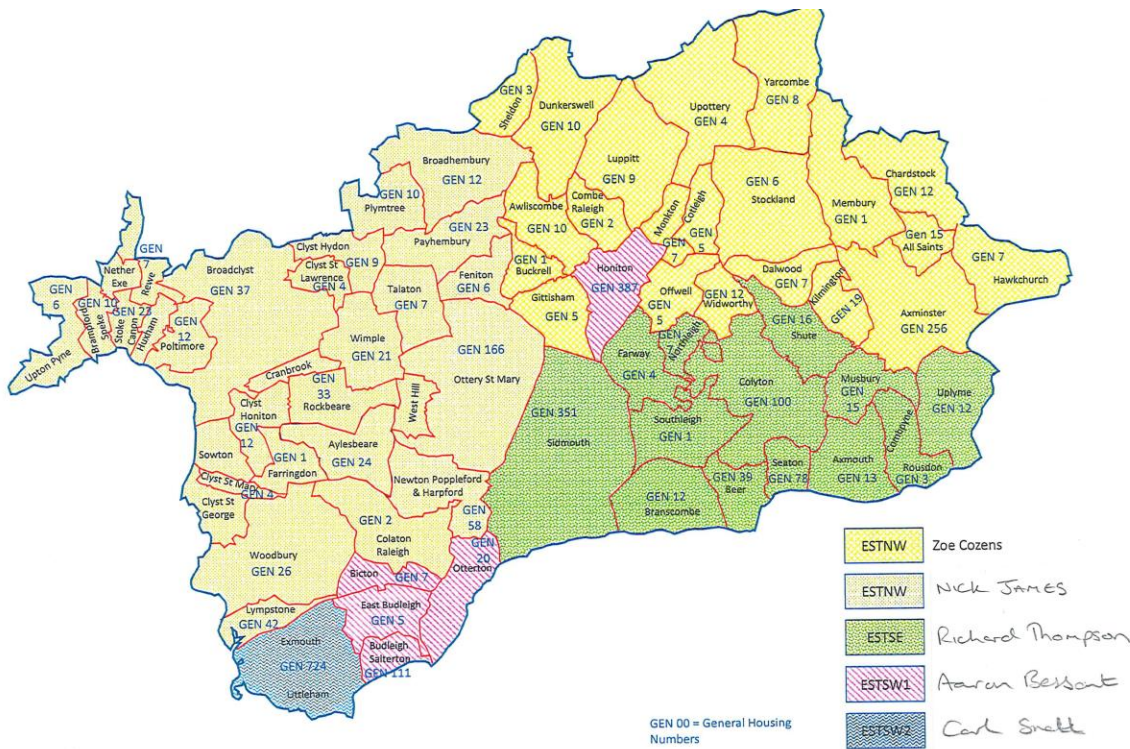
Sheltered housing tenancy health checks will be carried out alongside the annual TAP review to avoid duplicity so will be completed annually.

5. Current staffing levels

Tenancy visits for general needs properties will be carried out by Estate Management Housing Officers. Present staffing arrangements within the department consist of 5 x full time employed (FTE) officers (of which 1 is on a 12 month contract), 1 x floating officer (6 month contract) 1 x senior officer and 1 x Estate Manager.

Each of the Officers are each assigned a geographical area or patch. These patches vary in terms of stock size, density and distance and there is disparity in the number of properties managed by each Officer. This is illustrated by the table and map below:

Patch	Stock Size General needs and sheltered)	Patch Officer
North East	497	Housing Officer A
North West	775	Housing Officer B
South East	990	Housing Officer C
South West 1	716	Housing Officer D
South West 2	1213	Housing Officer E



The current interim staffing structure for Estate Management has increased staffing on an operational level to an additional 2 FTE Officers employed on temporary 6 and 12 month contracts respectively.

There are currently five FTE Housing Officers under the permanent staffing structure and one part time Officer whose role is to solely deal with fire compliance checks.

Title	Job Role	(Hours worked)	FTE/PTE/ Temporary	Patch/Stick Size (General needs and Sheltered)
Housing Officer	Tenancy & Estate Management	37 hrs	FTE	716
Housing Officer	Tenancy & Estate Management	37 hrs	FTE	775
Senior Housing Officer	Tenancy & Estate Management	37 hrs	FTE	None
Housing Officer	Tenancy & Estate Management	37 hrs	FTE	497
Housing Officer	Tenancy & Estate Management	37 hrs	FTE	1213
Housing Officer	Fire Compliance Checks	22.2 hrs	PTE	None
Housing Officer	Tenancy & Estate Management	37 hrs	Temporary – 6 months	Floating Officer- Compliance Checks
Housing Officer	Tenancy & Estate Management	37 hrs	Temporary – 12 months	990

6. Estimated Time Spent on Tenancy visits

The estimated time taken to complete a tenancy visit will undoubtedly vary, but as a general rule, it is estimated that each tenancy visit will take in excess of 2 hours to complete. This includes the time

spent at the property and takes into account any abortive visits; travelling time to and from the property; and follow-up work on return to the office.

It is envisaged that some tenancies may generate additional work where concerns have been identified and result in multiple return visits to a property or visits that necessitate two officers in attendance, which could significantly impact on workloads.

However, this could be offset as there may be opportunities for Officers to carry out tenancy visits as part of other planned visits to the property. For example, to conduct a flexible tenancy review, which would negate the need for multiple visits. However, where tenancy visits can be linked to other visits to make the best use of resources, tenancy visits are an essential part of the landlord tenant relationship and helps to ensure people know who their housing officer is.

The proposed Getting to Know you – tenant profiling form would also be updated and at these visits.

The appointment of a housing administrator will also reduce workload pressures on Officers. This post was filled in January 2023.

7. Frequency of Tenancy visits

The options described below are based on permanent staffing arrangements and not the interim structure or temporary posts.

Option 1 – Annual Tenancy visits

If the number of tenancy visits are split equally between the five FTE members of staff, it will require officers to undertake 2.5 tenancy visits each day or 12.5 each per week. Broadly speaking, the amount of time that is likely to be spent on carrying out a tenancy visit equates to in excess of 2 hours. So, each Officer would be devoting in excess 25 hours per week on conducting tenancy visits to meet this target.

This is based on the following formula:

229 working days per annum

The total number of working days takes into consideration the average number of holiday entitlement (22 days) and 9 days public holidays.

5 full time employees x 229 working days = 1,145

2,837/1,145 working days (total number of general needs properties)

Each officer has to conduct 2.5 properties per day.

Or 12.5 properties per week.

With current staffing levels, this is an unrealistic target as the Officers could not meet the demands. There may also be unplanned sickness or absenteeism, which may further impact on the number of days worked by Officers.

To implement annual tenancy visits it is estimated that an additional two Housing officers would be required.

Option 2 – Tenancy visits every 2 years

If the number of tenancy visits are apportioned over a 2 year period it will necessitate that each officer conducts on average 1.25 tenancy visits per day or 6.25 per week, which would equate to in excess of 13 hours per week or a little over 1 and a half working days. This is considered to be more realistic than option 1 based on current staffing arrangements but would still place additional burden of workloads and stretch resources. Staffing would also need to be maintained in order to effectively manage the number of tenancy visits conducted each week.

Option 3 – Tenancy Visit Check every 3 years

If each tenancy received a visit every 3 years that would result in each Officer conducting 4 visits per week. This would afford Officers more time to balance other workloads, but would take longer to accomplish tenancy visits across the housing stock. This would be more achievable based on current workloads and resources.

Option 4 – All tenancy visits to be completed in year one then reverting to a two year cycle.

All general need properties to be visited annually within the first year of this policy being adopted. Thereafter, tenancy visits will be conducted bi-annually by Housing Officers unless exceptional circumstances apply. This could include, where ongoing support and assistance is being provided to tenants to help them sustain their tenancies and/or where safeguarding issues have been identified.

Tenancy visits for general need properties will be prioritised where tenants have had little or no contact with the Council for a significant amount of time. This will also ensure that all tenants receive minimum annual contact from the Council.

Sheltered housing stock will receive a tenancy visit annually by the Mobile Support Officer responsible for managing sheltered housing properties. This tenancy visit will occur, and form part of, the requirement to conduct a yearly tenant assessment for sheltered housing tenants.

Officers will be tasked to complete 100% of tenancy visits throughout the first year. This will be broken down into quarterly targets and managed accordingly.

This option will require an additional two Housing Officers in year one.

Recommended Option – Option 1 Annual Tenancy visits

This option is recommended as we would like to provide the maximum support to our residents in maintaining their tenancy and in ensuring our properties are looked after. Annual tenancy visits will ensure tenants are supported, their personal needs and preferences are identified, properties are maintained, reducing void costs, we are able to evidence any disrepair claims and also improve our empty property turnaround times.

9. Equalities Implications

The Council has a commitment to ensure that it complies with the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010. Undertaking this programme of tenancy health will improve the data we currently hold on our tenants and household members. This will help us identifying anyone with a 'protected characteristic' under the legislation. In turn, this will allow us to tailor our services to the specific needs of customers.

10. Financial Implications

It is expected that this proactive approach of visiting tenants in their homes will identify previously unreported repairs and issues within households that will need to be addressed.

This is an essential activity to identify and resolve any maintenance issues and help combat issues of property condition so early intervention can be instigated when a tenancy is showing signs of failing and the tenant needs support.

The staffing budget for the team will require an additional £64'040 per annum for the additional Housing Officers

11. Performance Indicators

The tenancy visits program will be managed by the Interim Estates Manager and progress and trends will be shared with the SMT.

Officers will be tasked to complete 100% Tenancy visits based on recommendations adopted by SMT Review Board and this will be broken down into quarterly targets and managed accordingly.

We will also monitor refusal rates to properties/abortive visits and there may be trends to develop additional interventions. Wherever we have concerns about the management of a particular tenancy we will invoke our existing tenancy management procedures to gain access and or offer support, where necessary.

We will also benchmark with other housing providers through House Mark.

12. Process Mapping

Once recommendations have been approved by SMT Review Board, consideration will be given to how tenancies are prioritised for tenancy visits. This could include extracting data on those tenancies who have not reported repairs for a significant period of time or by length of tenancy, for instance

13. Risk Assessment

Safe operational working practices to be applied whilst undertaking tenancy visits and staff will have training/re-fresher training in Health & Safety and Lone Working.

Hazard warning markers will be logged on Housing management systems to alert staff of any issues regarding a particular tenant or tenancy address. Hazard warning markers will be checked prior to Officers carrying out tenancy visits and these are to be reviewed periodically to ensure accuracy and relevance.

Financial implications:

Given the resource implications of ensuring that 100% of general need properties are visited in the first year, the Board is requested to provide funding for two additional full-time posts (37 hours) to meet this target. A budget bid of £62,040 is requested from the 2023/24 Housing Revenue Account Budget for the addition of two permanent, full time Housing Officers (Grade 4).

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications on which to comment.