

## CABINET

<b>Report Title</b>	Housing Management Policies
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Wednesday, 7 May 2025
<b>Report Author</b>	Housing Policy and Strategy Officer, Louis Bebb
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Assistant Director Housing Management, Nigel Collumbell Head of Tenancy & Estate Management, Jim Brennan
<b>Lead Cabinet Member(s)</b>	Cabinet Member for Housing & Sustainable Development, Cllr Vicki Smith
<b>Why is this a key decision?</b>	1. Expenditure over £1 Million+ no 2. Significant impact on 2 or more wards yes
<b>Wards Affected</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Identify exempt information and exemption category</b>	Choose an item.  N/A
<b>Is the report urgent?</b>	No
<b>Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)</b>	N/A
<b>Appendices (if any)</b>	1. Tenancy Sustainment Policy 2. Tenancy Fraud Policy 3. Good Neighbourhood Management Policy 4. Domestic Abuse Policy 5. Equality Impact Assessment 6. Housing Management Policies Consultation Report

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 A Self-Assessment against the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) Consumer Standards in 2024 identified improvements that could be made to our Governance and Strategic Oversight through the publication of new housing management policies.

- 1.2 The Housing Improvement and Transformation Programme has been established to ensure compliance with the RSH consumer standards and to ensure the service excellence in the future. Ensuring we have a comprehensive library of policies, which are regularly reviewed and updated, will underpin other work being delivered to transform the service.
- 1.3 This report seeks approval for four Housing Management policies, namely, the Tenancy Sustainment Policy, Tenancy Fraud Policy, Good Neighbourhood Management Policy and Domestic Abuse Policy. Further work is being undertaken on additional policies, which will be presented at a later date.

## **2. Recommendations**

The Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Approve the following draft policy documents:
- Tenancy Sustainment Policy
  - Tenancy Fraud Policy
  - Good Neighbourhood Management Policy
  - Domestic Abuse Policy

## **3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations**

- 3.1 Cabinet approved the adoption of the Housing Strategy 2023-2028 at its meeting in June 2023. The four policies for which approval is now sought will facilitate the effective delivery of the adopted strategy.
- 3.2 The policies set out Sandwell Housing Service's commitment to fairness, support, and safety for all tenants. The Tenancy Fraud Policy ensures housing is allocated fairly, preventing misuse of resources. The Tenancy Sustainment Policy provides support to help tenants maintain stable housing and avoid homelessness. The Domestic Abuse Policy prioritises the safety and well-being of tenants affected by abuse, offering immediate support and safe housing options. The Good Neighbourhood Management Policy encourages community cohesion, addressing antisocial behaviour to create safer, more supportive environments. Together, these policies focus on providing inclusive and responsive services to vulnerable tenants.
- 3.3 These policy documents will provide clarity for the Housing Service as to the standards that we should hold ourselves to RSH as part of the Consumer Standards introduced in April 2024. This also allows Sandwell Council to hold ourselves to account as a housing provider, providing the best possible service to our customers and residents. By enacting these policies, we aim to maintain council-owned assets to a high standard, investing in homes and communities and fostering an environment where residents can thrive.

## **Summary of Policy Documents for Which Approval is Sought**

- 3.4 The key elements of each of the policies and the rationale for seeking approval is set out below;

### **Tenancy Sustainment Policy**

- 3.5 Following the Localism Act 2011 and the creation of the Black Country Tenancy Strategy in 2021 between Sandwell Council, Walsall Council, Dudley Council and Wolverhampton City Council, our approach to Tenancy Sustainment is being revised.

The Tenancy Sustainment Policy sets out Sandwell Council's approach to supporting customers to manage their tenancies, preventing homelessness and minimising any tenancy breakdown which may result in abandonment, eviction and early termination.

This policy will allow us to:

- Make the best use of affordable housing stock in Sandwell.
- Help households to meet their future and current housing needs.
- Create and encourage sustainable communities, as well as continuing to protect vulnerable residents.
- Minimise the number of tenancy failures and prevent homelessness.

### **Tenancy Fraud Policy**

- 3.6 Social housing is in short supply and Sandwell Council is committed to making sure that our homes are lived in by those who need them most and by those they are intended for. We recognise that tackling fraud is an effective way to achieve this, and a Tenancy Fraud Policy will provide an overarching framework for the Housing Service.

This policy sets out Sandwell Council's stance on tenancy fraud and its approach to preventing, detecting, reporting and investigating tenancy fraud.

### **Good Neighbourhood Management Policy**

- 3.7 This policy outlines what it means to be a good neighbour and sets out Sandwell Council's commitment to supporting tenants, leaseholders, and residents in fostering positive and respectful relationships within their communities. By promoting good neighbourly behaviour, this policy plays a key role in preventing issues from escalating into anti-social behaviour (ASB). It supports preventative measures designed to avoid harm to individuals and communities, in line with our wider [Anti-Social Behaviour Policy](#). The proactive approach outlined here aims to address potential disputes or issues at an early stage, reducing the risk of situations that could negatively affect the wellbeing and safety of residents.

### **Domestic Abuse Policy**

- 3.8 This policy sets out the Sandwell Council Housing Service's commitment to assisting and supporting any person suffering or being threatened with

domestic abuse. It also outlines how, by working in partnership with those experiencing domestic abuse and support agencies, the council will:

- Promote the safety and security of victims of domestic abuse and their families
- Sanction and support perpetrators of domestic abuse.

## 4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The alternative option is to not seek adoption for the four policies subject to this report. However, if this were to be the process followed, it would not be possible to deliver the objectives of the Housing Strategy 2023 – 2028 and the Regulatory Housing Standards that came into effect in April 2024. Therefore, this would result in the sub-optimal management of our Housing Services.

## 5 Consultation

### 5.1 Online consultation

The online consultation for the draft policies began on March 24th and were open for five weeks, closing on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025, via Citizenspace.

The surveys featured a mixture of qualitative and quantitative questions, providing respondents the opportunity to give feedback on the policy proposals, whether the document itself is resident-friendly and if there are any things missing in the policy document.

Following respondents' comments on each of the policies, feedback has been considered, and amendments have been made to the policy documents where applicable, before being finalised and taken to Cabinet in May 2025.

### 5.2 Policy Engagement Sessions with Stakeholders:

Throughout the drafting of these documents, we conducted various engagement sessions with stakeholders to ensure we captured as many opinions as possible in order to share this policy. These include the following:

- **Collaboration Across Housing Teams and Partner Services:** These policies have been developed through collaboration across various housing teams and other relevant services, including housing management, ASB (Anti-Social Behaviour) teams, domestic abuse services (both internally and externally), community partnerships, and more.
- **Tenant and Leaseholder Scrutiny Group (TLSG):** The Good Neighbourhood Management Policy has gone through several draft versions, with each version being shared for feedback at TLSG meetings to help improve the document. Since the policy is of great importance to residents across the Borough, the current version is the result of collaborative input from this group.
- **Policy Engagement Session:** On Friday 11th April, we held an engagement session with residents to discuss our Good Neighbourhood Management and Tenancy Sustainment policies. The session was facilitated by our Community Partnerships Team. The purpose of these sessions was to gain a better understanding of how our Housing services currently operate and to help shape the policy approach needed to tackle the Housing Management challenges facing our communities. These

engagement sessions include input from Housing Management staff, as well as tenants and leaseholders taking part across the various meetings. During the session, we also distributed paper copies of the Domestic Abuse Policy and Tenancy Fraud Policy, giving residents the opportunity to review the documents and share their feedback either via postal survey or online.

### 5.3 Policy Scrutiny Working Group

The policies were also cascaded to the group consisting of Elected Members, with a brief meeting scheduled on Teams approximately one week after they have received the policies. This meeting included relevant individuals such as the report author, housing colleagues, and any additional participants as necessary. Its purpose was to address any questions that arise and provide an opportunity for officers to seek specific guidance or direction from the scrutiny board. This meeting took place on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> April.

## 6. **Financial Implications**

- 6.1 Delivery of these policies will be through existing Housing Revenue Account (HRA) resources. The council's HRA is ring-fenced specifically for the provision of landlord related services or facilities, provided primary for the benefit of its tenants.

## 7. **Legal and Governance Implications**

### 7.1 Tenancy Fraud Policy

**Legal:** Ensures compliance with housing laws but may face challenges if enforcement is too harsh or discriminatory.

**Governance:** Requires robust systems for detecting fraud, clear accountability, and fair enforcement.

### 7.2 Tenancy Sustainment Policy

**Legal:** Supports tenant rights and housing law compliance but may face legal challenges if support or eviction decisions are mishandled.

**Governance:** Requires clear frameworks for monitoring support programmes and ensuring accountability in tenancy decisions.

### 7.3 Good Neighbourhood Management Policy

**Legal:** Supports anti-social behaviour laws but must avoid violating privacy or free expression rights.

**Governance:** Needs clear protocols for handling disputes and complaints fairly and transparently.

### 7.4 Domestic Abuse Policy

**Legal:** Complies with domestic abuse laws and protects victims' rights, but must be careful not to violate due process.

**Governance:** Requires strong oversight and training to ensure fair treatment of victims and perpetrators.

## 8. Risks

- 8.1 Financial resources available to deliver the policies, including inflation
- 8.2 Future changes to national policy and requirements that could impact on the content of the policies – for instance, new regulations and legislation.

## 9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

### 9.1 Tenancy Fraud Policy

- Ensures resources are fairly distributed, helping vulnerable or disadvantaged groups access housing.

### 9.2 Tenancy Sustainment Policy

- Assists vulnerable groups (e.g., families, elderly, disabled) in maintaining stable housing, reducing disparities in housing access and support.

### 9.3 Good Neighbourhood Management Policy

- **Positive:** Encourages inclusivity and cooperation among residents, fostering an environment where diverse groups can live together peacefully.
- **Negative:** If the policy overlooks cultural, ethnic, or socioeconomic differences, it could lead to alienation or tension within the community.

### 9.4 Domestic Abuse Policy

#### **Equality & Diversity Implications:**

- **Positive:** Protects all victims, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or background, and ensures equal access to support services.
- **Negative:** If the policy does not specifically address the needs of marginalised groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ individuals or people with disabilities), it may fail to provide adequate support for them.

## 10. Other Relevant Implications

### 10.1 Tenancy Fraud Policy

- **Health/Wellbeing:** Reduces strain on resources, ensuring housing goes to those in need, but may cause stress for falsely accused individuals.
- **Social Value:** Promotes fairness and transparency in housing allocation, building community trust.
- **Crime & Disorder:** Reduces fraud and criminal syndicates exploiting housing, but overly strict enforcement may lead to minor criminalisation.

### 10.2 Tenancy Sustainment Policy

- **Health/Wellbeing:** Promotes stable housing, improving mental and physical health, but risks dependency on support services.

- **Social Value:** Increases community stability and economic activity through reduced turnover.
- **Crime & Disorder:** Prevents homelessness and related crime, though failure to sustain tenancies can lead to poverty and crime.

### 10.3 Good Neighbourhood Management Policy

- **Health/Wellbeing:** Encourages community cohesion, reducing isolation and promoting wellbeing, but can cause tensions if poorly managed.
- **Social Value:** Builds cooperation and shared responsibility in the community.
- **Crime & Disorder:** Strengthens safety and reduces crime through cooperation, but poor management may worsen tensions or victimisation.

### 10.4 Domestic Abuse Policy

- **Health/Wellbeing:** Supports victims with safety and services, promoting recovery, but may fail if resources are insufficient.
- **Social Value:** Fosters a culture of respect and accountability, contributing to safer communities.
- **Crime & Disorder:** Reduces violence and criminal behaviour, but inadequate support can lead to underreporting or re-victimisation.

## 11. **Background Documents**

- [Sandwell Council Housing Strategy 2023-2028](#)
- [Sandwell 2030 Vision: Corporate Plan 2021-2025](#)
- [Housing Revenue Account 30 Year Business Plan 2023-2053](#)
- [Regulatory Standards for Landlords](#)
- [Reasonable Adjustments Policy](#)
- [Anti-Social Behaviour Policy](#)
- [Tenant Handbook](#)
- [Tenancy Conditions](#)
- [Sandwell Community Safety Strategy 2022-2026](#)

## 12. **How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?**

### 12.1 Growing up in Sandwell:

- **Tenancy Sustainment Policy:** Ensures stable housing for families and children, providing a secure environment for growth and education.
- **Domestic Abuse Policy:** Protects children and families from abuse, supporting healthy development and stability.
- **Good Neighbourhood Management Policy:** Creates safe, supportive communities, fostering positive environments for young people.

### Living in Sandwell:

- **Tenancy Sustainment Policy:** Supports long-term housing stability, improving residents' quality of life.

- **Tenancy Fraud Policy:** Ensures housing is allocated fairly, guaranteeing access to those in need.
- **Domestic Abuse Policy:** Offers support and protection for victims, improving safety and quality of life.
- **Good Neighbourhood Management Policy:** Promotes cohesive, safe communities where people want to live.

#### Healthy in Sandwell:

- **Tenancy Sustainment Policy:** Reduces housing-related stress, promoting better mental and physical health.
- **Tenancy Fraud Policy:** Ensures resources are directed to those who need them most, supporting health and wellbeing.
- **Domestic Abuse Policy:** Provides crucial support for victims, improving their physical and mental health.
- **Good Neighbourhood Management Policy:** Encourages healthy lifestyles and community engagement, enhancing well-being.

#### One Council One Team:

- **Tenancy Sustainment Policy:** Promotes inter-departmental collaboration to support tenants' needs.
- **Tenancy Fraud Policy:** Fosters teamwork across departments to prevent fraud and protect resources.
- **Domestic Abuse Policy:** Requires multi-department cooperation to offer integrated support for victims.
- **Good Neighbourhood Management Policy:** Encourages collaboration between local authorities, businesses, and residents for community improvements.



## Relevance Check

**Budget Reduction/Service Area:**

**Service Lead**

**Date:**

In what ways does this Budget reduction have an impact on an outward facing service? How will the service feel different to your customers or potential customers?

N/A

If not, how does it impact on staff e.g. redundancies, pay grades, working conditions? Why are you confident that these staff changes will not affect the service that you provide?

N/A

Is a Customer Impact Assessment needed? No