

Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) Review of Recharges - Empty Homes

Table of Recommendations

(To be read in conjunction with the TSP review report)

TSP Recommendations	SLHD Response to Recommendations	Date to be Actioned
9.1.1 The change in direction for Recharges should start when the Voids Team Surveyor checks the home after the tenant has given notice to leave the tenancy and is present. The tenant should be made aware of the tenancy agreement they signed (section 2.12 (b) (c) (d) Ending your Tenancy, and give them information on how to dispose of household goods via the CDC website, or hand them a photocopy of the Bulk Collection arrangements (Appendix 2) www.doncaster.gov.uk/doitonline/disposable-bulky-item-colection	Agreed, to action where tenants give notice and where an officer gets to communicate with the tenant ahead of leaving. 14/2/25 - Update: Looking to rearrange resources so that Housing team visit mutual exchanges so that Voids Surveyors can undertake other visits.	In progress
9.1.2 The Voids Team to inform the tenant that should a skip be needed for the tenants left behind household goods it will be invoiced and Recharged.	Agreed, as above.	CLOSED

9.1.3 Consider the introduction of Appendix 5 which clearly lays out the requirements when a tenant is vacating their home.	Agreed, as above.	CLOSED
9.2.1 The Housing Officer is the face of the company, and this first contact is crucial to the trust and contract between the company and the prospective tenant. The presentation needs to be methodical and reasoned, so that the tenant is left in no doubt of the obligations to maintain the tenancy in a good and reasonable condition.	Agreed. 12/9/24 – Update: Setting out tenants’ obligations – this is done already but with little emphasis on recharges so can build this in. 13/2/25 - Update: Recharges are explicitly discussed at the new tenancy sign up and a fact sheet provided – this part is complete The new tenancy agreement will have more emphasis on recharges – this is due to be agree at Cabinet in August 25	Partially completed
9.2.2 The paperwork that is currently taken into viewing/sign-up needs to be reduced where possible, because at present it is mind boggling to a tenant, who just wants the keys, and zones out the responsibility of what is being said. (see para 4.1.3)	To review. 12/9/24 – Update: Streamline sign up pack – we have done this and now have a ‘sign up critical docs’ list and an ‘afterwards’ list. 13/2/25 - Update; New sign-up process and documents in place	COMPLETED September 2024
9.2.3 There is a strong case to implement the sign-up process digitally, which gives easier and quicker information and a digital footprint.	To review. 12/9/24 – Update: Digital sign ups – currently being piloted in North – to roll out in 2 weeks.	In progress

9.2.4 The Transfer of Tenancy Agreement, at present, is just string of words and paragraphs (Appendix 3) the subgroup suggest an alternative (Appendix 4) which put the words into clear box ticking information that when read out makes signing the agreement clearer.	To review. 12/9/24 – Update: Transfer agreement – yes we can do this.	TBC
9.2.5 The Viewing Checklist (Appendix 7) should have the added box for information on Recharges.	To review. 12/9/24 – Update: Add recharges on viewing checklist – completed.	COMPLETED September 2024
9.2.6 The Allocation of Tenancy-Checklist. This is a tick box list of information and should have a Recharge box (after the Ending your Tenancy box) (Appendix 8)	To review. 12/9/24 – Update: Add recharges to allocation checklist – completed. 13/2/25 - Update: Digital sign ups rolled out across the organisation	COMPLETED September 2024
9.2.7 Consider a tenancy package created just for the High- and Low-Rise Buildings which have a unique requirement: a. Information to residents regarding the sprinkler system b. Fire Safety High-Rise Booklet (Appendix 21) c. Sprinkler activation (Appendix 18) d. Asbestos in the home (Appendix 16a & 16b) e. Switch 2 (Balby Bridge Flats) (Appendix 17) f. Wallpaper steamers (re sprinklers) (Appendix 15)	To review – very relevant especially in terms of high rise and the higher degree of risk associated that a lack of awareness of living in a building that has shared entrances and communal spaces can impact on others. 12/9/24 – Update: Tenancy package for high rise – started – we have developed a draft high rise fact sheet and also added a new section to the tenancy agreement (under review). 17/9/24 – Update: The Head of Building Safety has issued a draft document to CDC that is specific to high rise. This is titled	COMPLETED

	<p>‘Mandatory Occurrence reporting’, which is a legal requirement under the Building Safety Act and also a requirement of the Consumer Standards, the latter also stipulates a standalone resident engagement strategy for high rise/higher risk buildings.</p> <p>14/11/24 – Update: The Resident Engagement Strategy and Mandatory Occurrence Reporting process went through One Voice Forum at the end of last year. The Building Safety Team are working on a draft of a revised living in a high-rise leaflet.</p>	
9.2.8 The panel are unsure how the paperwork for new tenants could be reduced for clarity. When you look at all the paperwork in Para 4.1.3 they all seem important information for the tenant, but unsure if as suggested some paperwork is accessed digitally via the website or phone would disenfranchise the older tenant. It is important however, that the sign-up process with its many details is professional on behalf of the company, and not a “take it or leave” attitude, which in past has created bad feelings from the start.	<p>To review.</p> <p>12/9/24 – Update: Streamline sign up pack – we have done this and now have a ‘sign up critical docs’ list and an ‘afterwards’ list.</p>	COMPLETED September 2024
9.2.9 ALL tenancy related policies should be on the company website, freely accessible in PDF form and easily located.	<p>To review.</p> <p>12/9/24 – Update:</p>	In progress

	All policies are on the website, however, we are currently reviewing the information on our website around tenancy management to add more.	
9.2.10 The company to consider a Rent/Save scheme, where at sign-up the option is discussed to save one or two pounds each week, in a Credit Union to cover any outgoing costs when vacating the tenancy. The company already discusses with the tenant the Rental Exchange system in conjunction with Experian.	To consider signposting to credit unions. 12/9/24 – Update: We have tried this as part of universal credit to encourage direct rent payments – this was not taken up so would presume similar lack of uptake. We will continue to mention this.	CLOSED
9.2.11 The tenant would complete a membership form for the Credit Union, then create a Standing Order from their income or benefit each week/month. (Appendix 20 & 21) The group are aware that it could be a hard sell, with many of the tenants on benefits, and living chaotic lifestyles, but the saving of £1 per week over a year is £50.00. The tenant of course could withdraw the money at any time, but it could be an incentive, and worth a trial period. Where one person leads, others follow.	As above. 12/9/24 – Update: Again, we already do this and take up is extremely low.	CLOSED
9.2.12 A constant theme throughout all the TSP reviews, is accessing and supporting tenants who`s English is not their first language. To them, the viewing and sign-up stages can be a minefield of information. Which is why at the start of this report, we mention how crucial it is for a Housing Officer to have all the tenant`s information prior to the first meeting, and be prepared if the prospective tenant is a non-english speaking person.	To confirm. We would expect that most if not all our documentation is available in a wide range of formats. 12/9/24 – Update: We should know before sign up if the tenant has language barriers. We have a translation service in place to utilise.	CLOSED

9.3.1 The Recharge Policy is not fit for purpose. It was created on the 1st of December 2015 for review in December 2017 in effect 9 years out of date. The TRIP panel (as it was then) reviewed the policy on 17th July 2019 making recommendations, and the original copy is in the TSP archives.	Addressed - The policy has now been updated.	September 2024 - COMPLETED
9.3.2 The current Recharge Policy 5.5.1 covers Charges and says: “These charges will be reviewed, should there be a change in the rate of VAT or where SLHD schedule of works/repairs change. That schedule of work is dated 2015. (Appendix 19)	Addressed – See response at 9.3.5 - The policy has now been updated.	September 2024 - COMPLETED
9.3.3 The TRIP Panel, at that time on 17th July 2019 did suggest that changes for the recharges in the Appendix 19 needed updating with increases in VAT and a 10% increase across the board.	Addressed – See above.	September 2024 - COMPLETED
9.3.4 It isn't rocket science to see that if the company have kept to the policy, they have been grossly under charging for the Recharges, but if they have been charging tenants current costs, the policy does not reflect that, and therefore underlines the policy is not fit for purpose.	Agreed – A trial is underway on voids to capture costs and invoice to the tenant where forwarding details for them exist.	In progress
9.3.5 When talking to the Empty Homes Manager, it was pointed out the company did use SOR (Schedule of Rate) but was not clear if that was based on current costs or	Agreed - The policy has now been updated. The out of date costs, Schedule of Rates (SORs), have been removed and will be replaced with a statement to say	September 2024 - COMPLETED

the policy. Either way the policy is out of date and reflects badly on the governance of the company.	that the National Housing Federation (NHF) SORs will be followed. Therefore, increases overtime will follow suit with the NHF SORs.	
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