

REVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT POLICY

Cabinet Member Cllr Ray Stanley
Responsible Officer Housing Services Manager

Reason for Report: To review the Neighbourhood Management Policy in order to ensure that it takes account of health and safety concerns.

RECOMMENDATION(S): To recommend to the Cabinet that the new draft of this policy is adopted.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Council must run the Housing Service efficiently and effectively and in accordance with the provisions of the regulatory framework.

Financial Implications: The housing stock is a valuable resource and the Council needs to take a proactive approach to identifying any necessary repairs, potential improvements and tenant damage. Effective neighbourhood management enables the Council to identify any health and safety hazards on estates and to minimise claims arising from any accidents or other incidents which might arise.

Legal Implications: The regulatory framework contains a specific expectation that registered providers of social housing should consult with tenants in developing a published policy for maintaining and improving the neighbourhoods associated with their homes. The policy shall include any communal areas associated with the Council's homes.

Risk Assessment: Failure to have a neighbourhood management policy in place would put the Council in breach of the regulatory framework. Failure to have adequate arrangements in place for housing management could result in the Council failing to meet its statutory and contractual obligations.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 It is important that the Housing Service has clearly defined policy in place because this helps staff to understand their responsibilities. In this way, they are empowered because it means that they have a clear point of reference and do not have to seek guidance from more senior Officers.
- 1.2 The Homes & Communities Agency requires the Council to have a neighbourhood management policy. However, by defining the arrangements for periodic inspections of estates, known as Neighbourhood Walkabouts, and regular inspections of communal areas, the policy ensures that Officers, tenants and other stakeholders, including leaseholders, private tenants and owner occupiers, are all clear about how the Council will manage its estates and take a pro-active stance towards housing management.

2.0 The Rationale for Reviewing the Policy

- 2.1 It is good practice to review policies on a regular basis. This policy, which was originally approved by the PDG in May 2012, was due to be reviewed in March 2016. This date has been brought forward as a result of some complaints made about the way in which the Council responded to issues raised in connection with hanging baskets.
- 2.2 Although there was some press coverage about this case, the facts were not all in the public domain and the Council acted appropriately and in accordance with policy given the circumstances.
- 2.3 As part of the Council's response to the publicity arising from the case, it was agreed that the Neighbourhood Management policy would be reviewed.

3.0 The Existing Policy

- 3.1 The existing policy states that the Council understands the importance of ensuring that tenants have the right to quiet enjoyment of their homes, which are in a safe, clean and secure environment that they can take pride in.
- 3.2 The existing policy also states that Officers are responsible for monitoring estate management within a specified geographical area. This will involve, in accordance with the provisions of the policy, any breaches of tenancy and any health and safety concerns. Where such concerns are identified, the tenant will be contacted and, if applicable, will be advised to remedy the issue.
- 3.3 It is important to note that clause 7.3.2 of the secure tenancy agreement states that the tenant or anyone living with them in the property must not throw anything or allow anything to fall from any windows, balconies or communal areas.

4.0 Proposed Changes

- 4.1 The revised policy is shown at appendix 1 (with changes to the existing policy marked so that Members can see where amendments have been made).
- 4.2 The Scrutiny and Improvement Group (SIG) was consulted on this matter at their meeting on 14 August 2014 and agreed that the following paragraph should be inserted into the Neighbourhood Management Policy:

“Tenants must seek permission if they wish to install hanging structures such as hanging baskets or bird feeders but these must be positioned in such a way as to avoid damage to the structure of the building. If they are to be installed in blocks of flats, other residents living on lower levels should be consulted, where possible, and there should be evidence of this before permission will be given. Tenants will need to be mindful of the conditions of their tenancy when seeking permission and if, at any time, the Neighbourhood Officer identifies a breach of tenancy relating to the cultivation of plants in hanging baskets, then permission will be withdrawn.”

- 4.3 This paragraph has been inserted into the draft policy as a bullet point in the section relating to responsibilities under the policy.
- 4.4 Some members of the SIG also requested some amendments to grammar, punctuation and the format of the policy.
- 4.5 Some other minor changes have also been made to the draft to make it clearer.
- 4.6 Members are asked to approve the revised policy and recommend to the Cabinet that it is adopted.

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Circulation of the Report: Councillor Ray Stanley, Cabinet Member for Housing

List of Background Papers:

Mid Devon District Council

Housing Services

**Neighbourhood Management
Policy**

August 2014 V2

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PART 1: Statement of Policies

POLICY STATEMENT

Mid Devon District Council (MDDC) understands the importance of ensuring that tenants have quiet enjoyment of their homes, which are in a safe, clean and secure environment that they can take pride in. This policy identifies how we manage our neighbourhoods and how it contributes towards a proactive housing management service. This should be read in line with our other policies including recharges, garage management, car parking management, improvements to Council properties and tenant involvement.

RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER THIS POLICY

In implementing this policy, the Council's overall objectives are to:

- Work with tenants and other residents, to keep our estates as clean and tidy as possible
- Identify any areas that are in need of attention or improvement
- Enable tenants to get involved with neighbourhood management by suggesting improvements and initiatives to prevent anti-social behaviour
- Ensure that tenants and private occupiers are made aware of, and accept, their responsibilities in relation to estate management.
- Tenants must seek permission if they wish to install hanging structures such as hanging baskets or bird feeders but these must be positioned in such a way as to avoid damage to the structure of the building. If they are to be installed in blocks of flats, other residents living on lower levels should be consulted, where possible, and there should be evidence of this before permission will be given. Tenants will need to be mindful of the conditions of their tenancy when seeking permission and if, at any time, the Neighbourhood Officer identifies a breach of tenancy relating to the cultivation of plants in hanging baskets, then permission will be withdrawn.

NEIGHBOURHOOD AREAS

The Housing Service has Neighbourhood Teams which are responsible for specific areas within Mid Devon's boundaries. Each officer within each team has their own patch based on a specific geographical area and that officer is responsible for estate management in that area. Information regarding neighbourhood areas is available on our website. Where tenants do not have internet access, they are able to contact the Neighbourhood teams for more information by telephoning 01884 255255.

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NEIGHBOURHOOD WALKABOUTS

Tenants, Councillors (both district and parish) and other agencies such as the Police are welcome to join Neighbourhood Officers when an estate in their area is inspected to raise any concerns and share ideas for improvement. A schedule of neighbourhood walkabouts is available on our website.

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Neighbourhood walkabouts enable Neighbourhood Officers to identify issues surrounding the following:

- Breaches of tenancy
- Grounds maintenance issues, including hedges, trees, boundaries, grassed / planted areas
- Repairs
- Any health & safety issues. For example, any deterioration to pathways which could be trip hazards
- Communal areas – internal and external
- Car parks and garages
- Security issues, including fencing / boundaries, security doors
- Tenancy issues, including property condition, property improvements, untidy gardens, pets
- Anti-social behaviour, including graffiti / vandalism, drugs, abandoned cars, fly-tipping

Where concerns are identified, the tenant(s) to which the issue relates will be contacted and if applicable, will be advised to remedy the issue. If necessary, other agencies will also be contacted.

In addition to ad-hoc visits undertaken by Neighbourhood Officers, neighbourhood walkabouts are undertaken at a minimum of every six months.

COMMUNAL INSPECTIONS

In addition to neighbourhood walkabouts, inspections of communal areas are undertaken on a monthly basis by Neighbourhood Officers where any issues are identified and acted upon. Where notice boards are in place, tenants/leaseholders are able to leave comments for Neighbourhood Officers.

As outlined in the Fire Risk (with a particular focus on communal areas) Policy, Housing Caretakers also inspect communal areas.

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Checklists are completed in order to identify if there are any areas of concern for both internal and external communal areas in order for these to be followed up. This includes communal areas being free from items which are not permitted to be there and identifying slip, trip and fire hazards.

ENVIRONMENTAL BUDGET

The Housing Service has an allocated annual environmental improvement fund to help improve the security and general appearance of our estates and communities.

Tenants are encouraged to offer suggestions to the Housing Service for ideas of work / projects to be carried out and for which this fund can be used.

REVIEW

Unless there is significant change beforehand, the next review of this policy is due August 2018 and every four years thereafter.

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- <#>Ensure that tenants and private occupiers are made aware of, and accept, their responsibilities in relation to Estate Management.

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