



DRAFT

TENANCY STRATEGY 2024

2024

This Tenancy Strategy is intended as a guide for registered providers of social housing in the Dartford Borough in the development of tenancy policies for their own housing stock.

CONTENTS

| Section | Title | Page |
|---------|--------------------------------------|------|
| 1. | INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| 2. | PURPOSE | 3 |
| 3. | DARTFORD'S PROFILE | 4 |
| 4. | DARTFORD'S HOUSING | 4 |
| 5. | HOUSING APPLICATIONS AND ALLOCATIONS | 5 |
| 6. | TENANCY STANDARD | 5 |
| 7. | INTRODUCTORY AND STARTER TENANCIES | 7 |
| 8. | LIFETIME TENANCIES | 7 |
| 9. | FIXED TERM TENANCIES | 7 |
| 10. | COMPLAINTS | 9 |
| 11. | EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY | 9 |
| 12. | REVIEW | 10 |

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Localism Act 2011 places a statutory duty on local authorities to produce a Tenancy Strategy to guide registered providers of social housing¹ in their area in the development of tenancy policies for their own housing stock.
- 1.2. Dartford Borough Council's Tenancy Strategy was first published in 2013 and reviewed in 2021. The first Strategy set out the Council's objective for using the discretionary powers introduced in the Localism Act 2011 to grant flexible tenancies, which are fixed term secure tenancies and are used as an alternative to secure lifetime tenancies. The Council started issuing flexible tenancies from May 2014. In 2021, the Council reviewed its Strategy and set out plans to end the use of flexible tenancies.
- 1.3. Following a thorough review of the flexible tenancy regime, the Council decided to end the use of flexible tenancies, based on this review of their effectiveness, and in recognition of the importance of longer term housing stability for Council tenants. The Social Housing White Paper 2020 (Charter for Social Housing Residents) has also affirmed the view that social rented housing should be places where residents can put down roots and contribute to their communities.
- 1.4. Where other registered providers choose to grant fixed term tenancies, this Tenancy Strategy sets out the expectations the Council has on their use.
- 1.5. The aim of the Tenancy Strategy for Dartford is to ensure that the Council manages its tenancies in such a way that it can offer housing to those with the highest housing priority, and to encourage registered providers of housing to provide housing services, which complement those of the Council.

2. PURPOSE

- 2.1. The Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to develop a Tenancy Strategy setting out the matters which registered providers of social housing should have regard to when formulating their policies for their own stock. The Strategy relates to:
 - a) The types of tenancies granted
 - b) The circumstances in which a particular type of tenancy is granted
 - c) Where tenancies are granted for a specified term, the lengths of the terms granted
 - d) The circumstances in which a further tenancy is granted; where an existing tenancy is ending.
- 2.2. The Council expects registered providers to have regard to this Tenancy Strategy in developing or updating their tenancy policies so that tenants and housing applicants across the Borough understand the types of tenancies available.

¹ Registered providers include local authority landlords and housing associations (including not-for-profit and for-profit organisations)

- 2.3. This Tenancy Strategy has been developed having regard to the Council's [Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy](#) and the [Housing Allocations Policy](#). It also meets the Council's [Corporate Plan's](#) strategic ambition to provide a high quality and responsive housing service that's built on respect for aspiring and existing tenants. We want to be practical, honest and straightforward in all the information and advice we give.
- 2.4. This Tenancy Strategy is supplemented by a [Tenancy Policy](#) for the Council's own housing stock. The Tenancy Policy contains more detail regarding the Council's approach to the types of tenancies that will be offered; how assignment is carried out, including discretionary succession rights; how tenancy fraud is prevented and tackled; and how tenancies are sustained and unnecessary evictions are prevented.

3. DARTFORD'S PROFILE

- 3.1. The Borough of Dartford is situated in North West Kent, abutting South East London. It includes the historic market town of Dartford on the River Darent, and a number of smaller communities to the east and south. It has 120,700 residents and the highest population density in Kent of 4.5 persons per hectare. (Office for National Statistics (ONS)).
- 3.2. The Borough has experienced economic regeneration in recent years, with major large-scale developments underway, including in the Ebbsfleet area and the Town Centre.
- 3.3. Dartford experiences upward pressure on the price of housing (sale and rent), due to its proximity to London and relatively good transport connections. Currently, this is most noticeable in the private rented sector although similar effects are evident in other sectors of the housing market from time to time.

4. DARTFORD'S HOUSING

- 4.1. There are a total of 49,199 dwellings in Dartford. Of this, 4,226 (8.6%) dwellings are owned by the Council and 2,124 (4.3%) dwellings are owned by private registered providers. The remaining 42,849 (87.1%) dwellings are within the private sector which is made up of privately rented and owner-occupied dwellings. (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)).
- 4.2. The average monthly rent for a Council property in the Borough is £406.40 and the average monthly rent for a private registered provider property is £499.40 (MHCLG). In the private rental market, the average monthly rent for a two bedroom property in the Borough is £1,632 (estate agent data).

5. HOUSING APPLICATIONS AND ALLOCATIONS

- 5.1. Under the Localism Act 2011, local authorities are able to decide which categories of applicant should qualify to join the housing register, although the statutory ‘reasonable preference’ categories remain in place. Local authorities are also able to give additional reasonable preference to certain groups for other reasons. The Council’s [Housing Allocations Policy](#) sets out how social housing properties will be allocated to eligible applicants in housing need.
- 5.2. The Council’s housing register currently (September 2024) shows that there are 1,385 households waiting for suitable accommodation. Band A is the highest priority band. The following table shows a breakdown of all bands by bedroom size and number of applicants.

Table 1: Bands by bedroom size and number of applicants

| Band | Studio/ 1bed | 2 bed | 3 bed | 4 bed | 5 bed | TOTAL |
|-------|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| A | 42 | 25 | 12 | 5 | 2 | 86 |
| B | 115 | 197 | 325 | 58 | 3 | 698 |
| C | 89 | 50 | 38 | 6 | 0 | 183 |
| D | 124 | 173 | 102 | 17 | 2 | 418 |
| TOTAL | 370 | 445 | 477 | 86 | 7 | 1,385 |

- 5.3. Over the last three years the average number of lettings to Council tenancies totalled 278, equating to 6.6% turnover of stock. The average number of lettings to housing association properties totalled 141.

6. TENANCY STANDARD

- 6.1. The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England sets out the specific standards that registered providers of social housing must meet. Within this framework, the Tenancy Standard 2024 places a number of required outcomes and specific expectations, set out below, on registered providers.

6.2. Tenure

- 6.2.1. Registered providers shall offer tenancies or terms of occupation which are compatible with the purpose of the accommodation, the needs of individual households, the sustainability of the community, and the efficient use of their housing stock.
- 6.2.2. They shall meet all applicable statutory and legal requirements in relation to the form and use of tenancy agreements or terms of occupation.
- 6.2.3. Registered providers shall publish clear and accessible policies, which outline their approach to tenancy management, including interventions to sustain tenancies and prevent unnecessary evictions, tackling tenancy fraud, and set out:

- a) The type of tenancies they will grant
- b) Where they grant tenancies for a fixed term, the length of those terms
- c) The circumstances in which they will grant tenancies of a particular type
- d) Any exceptional circumstances in which they will grant fixed term tenancies for a term of less than five years in general needs housing following any probationary period
- e) The circumstances in which they may or may not grant another tenancy on the expiry of the fixed term, in the same property or in a different property.
- f) The way in which a tenant or prospective tenant may appeal against or complain about the length of fixed term tenancy offered and the type of tenancy offered, and against a decision not to grant another tenancy on the expiry of the fixed term
- g) Their policy on taking into account the needs of those households who are vulnerable by reason of age, disability or illness, and households with children, including through the provision of tenancies which provide a reasonable degree of stability
- h) The advice and assistance they will give to tenants on finding alternative accommodation in the event that they decides not to grant another tenancy.
- i) Their policy on granting discretionary succession rights, taking account of the needs of vulnerable household members.

6.2.4. Registered providers must grant general needs tenants a periodic secure or assured (excluding periodic assured shorthold) tenancy, or a tenancy for a minimum fixed term of five years, or exceptionally, a tenancy for a minimum fixed term of no less than two years, in addition to any probationary tenancy period.

6.2.5. Before a fixed term tenancy ends, registered providers shall provide notice in writing to the tenant stating either that they propose to grant another tenancy on the expiry of the existing fixed term or that they propose to end the tenancy.

6.2.6. Where registered providers use probationary tenancies, these shall be for a maximum of 12 months, or a maximum of 18 months where reasons for extending the probationary period have been given and where the tenant has the opportunity to request a review.

6.2.7. Registered providers shall grant those who were social housing tenants on the day on which section 154 of the Localism Act 2011 came into force, and have remained social housing tenants since that date, a tenancy with no less security where they choose to move to another social rented home, whether with the same or another landlord. (This requirement does not apply where tenants choose to move to accommodation let on Affordable Rent terms).

6.2.8. Registered providers shall grant tenants who have been moved into alternative accommodation during any redevelopment or other works a tenancy with no less security of tenure on their return to settled accommodation.

7. INTRODUCTORY AND STARTER TENANCIES

- 7.1. Introductory and starter tenancies are a type of trial tenancy that last up to 12-months, which can be extended up to 18-months. During the trial period, the tenant has fewer rights than a lifetime or fixed term tenant. After successful completion of the trial period, the tenant becomes a lifetime tenant or fixed term tenant, depending on the landlord's tenancy policy.
- 7.2. Introductory and starter tenancies provide an effective housing management tool, to ensure that new tenants understand their obligations under their tenancy agreement and can do so successfully. The Council recommends that all registered providers in the Borough continue to make use of introductory and starter tenancies or consider including them in their policy framework if they are not already in use.

8. LIFETIME TENANCIES

- 8.1. Lifetime tenancies are secure or assured periodic tenancies where, with some limited exceptions, if tenants do not breach the conditions of their tenancy agreement, their tenancy will last as long as the tenant wants it to.
- 8.2. Lifetime tenancies are the Council's preferred tenancy type. The Council encourages all registered providers in the Borough to provide maximum security of tenure without a fixed term wherever possible. Lifetime tenancies enable residents and their families to feel secure, with a long-term connection to their neighbourhoods.
- 8.3. The Council's policy as a social landlord is to grant all of its existing flexible tenants with a lifetime tenancy. For new tenants, the Council will grant a 12 month introductory tenancy before granting a lifetime tenancy once the trial period has been successfully completed.
- 8.4. In accordance with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, where the Council, for reasons connected with domestic abuse, grants a new tenancy to a person who has an existing lifetime tenancy of social housing, the Council will grant the person a lifetime secure tenancy. The Council expects that, where registered providers offer further tenancies in such circumstances, that they are granted on a lifetime basis where possible. The aim is to ensure victims and survivors of domestic abuse are provided with the stability and security they need.

9. FIXED TERM TENANCIES

- 9.1. Fixed term tenancies are secure tenancies with a statutory minimum term of two years. At the end of the fixed term, the registered provider may decide to offer the tenant another fixed term tenancy; offer a lifetime tenancy; or not renew the tenancy.
- 9.2. Although the Council as a registered provider no longer grants fixed term tenancies, it recognises that some registered providers may still wish to offer them. Where registered providers do use fixed term tenancies, the Council expects the following factors to be taken into account:

- In most instances, fixed term tenancies should be granted for a minimum of five years
- Where fixed term tenancies for less than five years are offered, registered providers must outline their justification for doing so in their tenancy policy. Shorter tenancies of two years should be used only in exceptional circumstances and are not encouraged.

9.3. **Tenancy reviews**

- 9.3.1. If using fixed term tenancies, registered providers must clearly set out in their tenancy policy how they will review a tenancy prior to the end of the fixed term. This should include details of any financial limits that may prevent the granting of a further tenancy, and how the registered provider will decide if a property continues to meet a household's needs.
- 9.3.2. The tenancy review should primarily be an opportunity for both registered provider and tenant to consider if the current home still best meets the tenant's needs and how it might be possible to meet the tenant's future housing aspirations.
- 9.3.3. Where the tenancy review is being carried out with a vulnerable tenant, the Council expects registered providers to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the tenant can fully participate in the review.
- 9.3.4. The Council expects the review to take place in adequate time before the tenancy is due to come to an end to allow sufficient time for a tenant to find alternative housing if the tenancy is not renewed and alternative accommodation has to be sought by the tenant.
- 9.3.5. If the circumstances of the tenant are broadly similar to those at the time of the original letting, there should be a presumption that a fixed term tenancy will be renewed.
- 9.3.6. In circumstances where the tenancy is likely to be renewed, but the property is no longer suitable for the tenants' needs, the registered provider should offer the tenant an alternative and more suitable property under a new fixed term tenancy where, for example:
- The property is no longer suitable in size for the tenant due to under or over occupation
 - The property has been extensively adapted for someone with a disability who no longer lives with the tenant, and this would allow the property to be released for someone who will benefit from the adaptations.

9.4. **Appeals**

- 9.4.1. Tenants and prospective tenants may appeal against the length of the fixed term tenancy offered by registered providers, and the type of tenancy offered, and also against a decision not to grant another tenancy on the expiry of the fixed term.

9.4.2. The Council expects registered providers' tenancy policies to:

- Set out to whom appeals or reviews should be made (this is expected to be a more senior officer that was not involved in the original decision) and how they can be made
- Give timescales for dealing with appeals or reviews
- Set out how the tenant can take their appeal or review further if they are dissatisfied with the response i.e. to a tenant panel or Housing Ombudsman and where they may get independent advice
- Be accessible and easily available i.e. published on websites and available in local offices.

9.5. Providing advice and assistance

9.5.1. Where a fixed term tenancy is not renewed at the end of the fixed term, the registered provider must ensure appropriate housing advice is provided to help the tenant find alternative accommodation. The main purpose of this advice and assistance will be to ensure tenants are aware of the different housing options available to them, given their particular circumstances, and have appropriate support to access those different options. All reasonable steps to prevent homelessness should be taken.

9.5.2. As the Council has a statutory responsibility to provide homelessness advice and assistance, it expects registered providers to notify it in advance when a tenancy is not to be renewed and no alternative housing arrangements have been found (under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 Duty to Refer).

10. COMPLAINTS

10.1. If a social housing tenant or housing applicant is dissatisfied with the service they have received from their registered provider regarding a tenancy decision, the registered provider must have a clear process in place to handle complaints.

10.2. Registered providers are required to comply with the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code, which sets out how to respond to complaints effectively, swiftly and fairly. It is recommended that registered providers set out how a complaint can be made in their tenancy policy.

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

11.1. The Council is committed to welcoming and valuing diversity, promoting equality of opportunity and tackling unlawful discrimination in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. The Council, in delivering this Tenancy Strategy, will have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty and ensure that no individual is discriminated against based on their sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, disability or age.

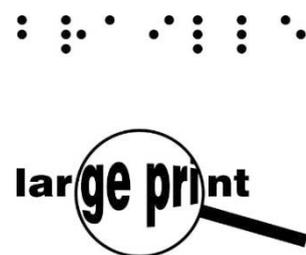
11.2. The Public Sector Equality Duty is a duty on the Council and that responsibility cannot be delegated to a contractor/service provider and is a continuing duty.

- 11.3. This Tenancy Strategy has been subject to a [Customer Access Review](#) to assess the impact it will have on equality. A Customer Access Review has also been carried out on the Council's Tenancy Policy. The assessments concluded that the Tenancy Strategy and Tenancy Policy should have an overall positive impact on tenants and housing applicants by assisting them to understand the types of tenancies available and what is expected in their use to ensure homes are let in a fair, transparent and efficient way.
- 11.4. The Council equally expects all registered providers to carry out equality impact assessments on their own tenancy policies.

12. REVIEW

- 12.1. The Council will periodically review the Tenancy Policies of registered provider's operating in Dartford to ensure they have had regard to this Tenancy Strategy.
- 12.2. The Council will review this Tenancy Strategy every three years or earlier to address legislative, regulatory, best practice and operational issues.

If you or anybody you know requires this or any other council information in another language, please contact us and we will do our best to provide this for you. Braille, Audio tape and large print versions of this document are available upon request.



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