

# Housing Services Tenancy Update Visit Policy

Department	Housing Services
Responsible Person	Director of Housing
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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Housing directorate within the Council manages the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham's social housing stock and acts as the landlord for tenancy management, property maintenance, rent collection etc.
- 1.2 Social housing is a valuable asset that provides security and stability to people in housing need. All local authorities have a duty to make the best use of public resources and ensure existing stock is allocated fairly and properly maintained.
- 1.3 As a landlord, the Council has the responsibility to make sure that its properties are both safe to live in and that both the Council and its tenants keep them in a good condition.
- 1.4 One of the ways the Council carry out this duty is through its Tenancy Update Visit process. The Council visits its tenants at their home and has a conversation with them about their tenancy and their property, and any issues they may have where the Council can support them as their landlord.

## **2. The Policy**

- 2.1 A Tenancy Update Visit is a visit that the Council, as the landlord undertakes as part of its housing management service. These visits are conducted by specialist Tenancy Update Officers or mainstream Housing Officers who are responsible for managing the tenancy and acting as the tenant's primary contact for any tenancy issues they may have.
- 2.2 During the visit the officer discusses any maintenance and repair issues the tenant may have regarding their home and carries out an inspection to make sure that the property is safe and habitable and records any concerns that they find.
- 2.3 Officers use the visit to check on the wellbeing of the tenant(s) and other occupants living at the property and identify any support needs or referrals to other agencies or departments.
- 2.4 They also take this opportunity to update the information the Council holds on both the tenant and the other occupants within the household. Lastly, they discuss the rent account balance with the tenant and identify if they require additional support managing their rent account.
- 2.5 The aim of this policy is to set out how the Council conducts Tenancy Update visits, how the information collected is used, and what actions may be taken as a result of the information obtained.

### **3. Tenancy Update Visits**

#### **3.1 Household Information**

During a Tenancy Update visit the information the Council currently holds against the tenancy account is reviewed and updated for the entire household, including those that are named on the tenancy agreement and any other occupants.

##### **3.1.1 This information may include, but not be limited to:**

- The names, gender and dates of birth for all those currently living at the property, along with their relationship to the named tenants.
- Any health issues or vulnerabilities the tenant may want to share with the Council so that, where possible, the Council can adjust the way it delivers its services to better accommodate their needs. A specific outcome of the Tenancy Update Visit is to identify any vulnerabilities the household might have and when a vulnerability is identified a flag will be added to the Council's Housing Management system.
- Contact details for each occupant so that the Council has the best method by which to contact them.
- SEND status of children.

#### **3.2 A physical inspection of the property**

During a Tenancy Update visit the Council carries out a non-technical inspection of the property to make sure that there are no apparent emergency hazards that require immediate repair, that any electrical appliances appear to be working and that there is no overload of power sources, as the Council wants its tenants to feel safe and secure in their homes.

##### **3.2.1 The Council checks to make sure that there are no significant leaks; that the property is free from damp and mold; and that both the heating and water supply are working correctly. If the Council sees a hazard or maintenance issue that requires a repair, they will raise the repair on the tenant's behalf.**

##### **3.2.2 However, if the Council finds deliberate damage to its property or there are items where it is the tenant's responsibility to maintain them, including keeping the property tidy, then the Council will bring this to the tenant's attention and discuss with them what steps the tenant needs to take to address the issues. This may result in a post-visit letter being sent to the tenant which acts as formal warning, outlining what improvements need to be made and the timescale by which they need to be completed.**

##### **3.2.3 The Council expects its tenants to abide by their tenancy agreements which require them to:**

- Keep the interior of their home clean and in a good state of decoration.

- Keep and maintain gardens, trees, lawn and hedges in a neat and tidy condition.
- Make good any damage to fixtures and fittings, or structure of the property, caused by a member of the household or a visitor to the home.
- Report any repairs, items of disrepair or defects, promptly to the Council's approved repairs service via [housing.repairs@lbbd.gov.uk](mailto:housing.repairs@lbbd.gov.uk) or by calling 0208 592 7388

### **3.3 Supporting Council tenants**

During the Tenancy Update visit, the Council will discuss any support needs or referrals to agencies or departments they feel may benefit the tenant or their other occupants. These may include, but are not limited to, safeguarding, antisocial behavior management, disability adaptations and referrals to community navigators for support around disability, money and debt advice, benefits, emotional and welfare support, volunteering and employment and lifestyle support.

### **3.4 Rent Discussion**

If the tenant's rent account is in arrears, the Council will discuss this with the tenant to establish why this may have happened. The Council provides support and guidance to its tenants, by exploring all the options available to help its tenants address any arrears and avoid eviction. Where appropriate, the Council will make the tenant aware of other agencies or Council departments that can offer additional specialist support.

- 3.4.1 If the tenant can make a payment to reduce or clear the arrears, the officer can take payments at the time of the visit.

### **3.5 Permissions for alterations and improvements**

Tenants that have a "Secure" tenancy type, have the right to carry out certain improvements with the permission of their landlord. During the Tenancy Update visit the Council's Tenancy Update or Housing Officer makes a note of any alterations made by the tenant within the property and will seek clarification from the tenant that they sought and obtained permission from the Council before commencing the alteration This is checked against records held on the tenancy.

- 3.5.1 In some cases, if permission had not been sought prior to the alteration taking place, a retrospective permission may be given. However, if the Council considers that the non-permitted works are unsatisfactory and/or unsafe then they can instruct the tenant to reinstate the property to its original condition. Failure to comply with this instruction may legally constitute a breach of their tenancy conditions and could put their tenancy at risk.

### **3.6 Tenancy Fraud**

Under the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013 it is a criminal offence to sub-let or part with possession of social housing. The Council take

appropriate investigatory and legal action to ensure that its homes are only occupied by those with a legal right to be in residence.

3.6.1 In line with current conditions of tenancy, tenants must use the property as their only or principal home. Therefore, tenants will be asked to provide proof of identification and proof of address during the visit to ensure that the correct persons are living in the property.

3.6.2 Tenant(s) must also inform the Council as their landlord if they intend to be away from their property for longer than four weeks, to avoid the possession proceedings against the address.

### 3.7 **Gaining Access**

The Council as the landlord, carry out tenancy visits to all its tenanted properties. Visits will be made in person; therefore, it is essential that access to the property is obtained.

3.7.1 In most cases, the Council would notify the tenant(s) of the intended visit (including all relevant information about the purpose of the visit) either in writing or by phone at least 48 hours prior to the date of the Tenancy Update visit. However, there may be cases where the Council need to conduct a Tenancy Update visit without prior notice, often referred to as a 'cold call'.

3.7.2 The conditions of tenancy state that a tenant must allow access for the Council to inspect, service, repair, improve or carry out maintenance work to its property.

3.7.3 Failure to provide access to carry out a Tenancy Update Visit after more than three fixed appointments may be considered by the Council as the landlord as a breach of their conditions of tenancy and may result in the Council taking legal action against the tenancy.

## 4. **Equality Impact**

4.1 Applying this policy consistently and sensitively will ensure that all tenants and their household members in Council owned homes who have protected characteristics and/or are deemed vulnerable for other reasons receive services that are based on a recognition of their vulnerability. The Council will make all appropriate adjustments to the services they receive in order to mitigate any potential negative impacts on them and to ensure they receive fair and equal treatment from the Council as their landlord.