

Housing Services Viewing and Sign-Up for Tenants Policy

Department	Housing Services
Responsible Person	Director of Housing
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy outlines the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham's (the council) approach to property viewings and tenancy sign-ups for all new tenants. It sets out the overarching principles that guide the process and ensures that applicants receive a fair and transparent service.

2. Purpose of the Policy

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all applicants experience a consistent and professional viewing and sign-up process. It sets out the expectations for both officers and tenants, clarifies the documentation required, and ensures that the process supports wider objectives around tenancy sustainment, safeguarding, and financial wellbeing.

3. Capturing Tenant and Household Information

- 3.1 As part of the viewing and sign-up process, the council will collect essential information about the applicant and all household members who will be living in the property.
- 3.2 This includes personal details, identification, contact information, and confirmation of household composition. This information ensures that the tenancy is set up correctly, that the property is suitable for the household, and that the council can meet its legal and safeguarding responsibilities.
- 3.3 All information will be managed in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 and used only for legitimate housing management purposes.

4. Identifying Vulnerabilities and Support Needs

- 4.1 The viewing and sign-up process provides an important opportunity to identify any vulnerabilities, support needs, or risks that may affect the tenant's ability to sustain their tenancy. Officers will sensitively explore whether the applicant or any household member has health conditions, disabilities, communication needs, or other circumstances that may require additional support.
- 4.2 Where appropriate, tenants may be referred to support services, welfare teams, adult social care, children's services, or external support agencies.

Early identification of needs helps ensure that tenants receive the right support from the outset and reduces the risk of future tenancy difficulties.

5. Financial Support, Rent and Council Tax

- 5.1 The council is committed to supporting tenants to manage their financial responsibilities and officers will support tenants with setting up Direct Debits for rent and council tax. Officers will also explain rent charges, payment schedules, and arrears prevention, and signpost tenants to financial advice where needed.

6. Contact Requirements and Withdrawal of Offers

- 6.1 Applicants must remain contactable throughout the offer, viewing, and sign-up process. The council will make reasonable attempts to contact applicants using the communication methods held on the system, including telephone, email, and SMS.
- 6.2 If the council is unable to make contact within 48 hours, the offer will be withdrawn and re-offered to the next eligible applicant. This ensures that void properties are let efficiently and that delays are minimised.
- 6.3 Applicants who are on holiday or temporarily unavailable must notify the council in advance wherever possible. Where an applicant is unable to attend due to being away, the council may apply discretion and proceed to offer the property to the next applicant. This ensures fairness to all applicants and prevents unnecessary delays in the letting process.

7. Viewing Expectations

- 7.1 Ordinarily viewings take place prior to the property being ready to let. Applicants are expected to attend the appointment, comply with any safety measures in place, and treat officers respectfully.
- 7.2 Officers will verify the applicant's identity and provide essential information about the property and tenancy. Applicants should notify the council promptly if they are unable to attend. Children are not permitted to attend viewings as works may still be underway at the property.

8. Sign-Up Standards

- 8.1 The Tenancy Agreement and terms and conditions of tenancy will be explained to the tenant who is required to sign all required documents. Keys and safety certificates will be issued to the tenants.

9. Refusals

- 9.1 If an applicant refuses a property, they must provide a clear reason for refusal. This will be recorded and verified. Repeated refusals without valid reasons may affect future offers in line with the council's allocations policy.

10. Council Officers Responsibilities

- 10.1 Council Officers are responsible for providing accurate information, ensuring documentation is complete, identifying support needs, and conducting viewings and sign-ups professionally.

11. Tenants Responsibilities

- 11.1 Tenants are responsible for responding promptly to offers, attending appointments, providing accurate information, completing required forms, and complying with tenancy conditions. They must also disclose any relevant support needs so that the council can provide appropriate assistance.

12. Rent Collection at Sign-Up

- 12.1 At the point of tenancy sign-up, the council requires tenant(s) to make an initial rent payment equivalent to **one week's rent**. The purpose of this requirement is to ensure that the tenancy begins with a positive rent balance and to support the tenant in establishing good payment habits from the outset.
- 12.2 Officers will explain the rent charge, the payment schedule, and the importance of maintaining a clear rent account to the tenant. Where needed, officers will assist tenants in setting up a Direct Debit for ongoing rent payments and will provide guidance on how to manage their account online.
- 12.3 Tenants who are applying for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit will be supported to complete the relevant applications during the sign-up process. However, these applications do not remove the requirement to pay one week's rent at sign-up. This ensures that tenants remain responsible for their rent liability and reduces the risk of arrears while benefit claims are being processed.

- 12.4 The council may exercise discretion in exceptional circumstances, but this will only occur where clear evidence of vulnerability or financial hardship is identified, and where appropriate support arrangements are in place.

13. Provisional Acceptance and Legal Responsibilities

- 13.1 In most cases, viewings will take place prior to the property becoming formally ready to let. At this stage, applicants will be asked whether they wish to provisionally accept the property, subject to the final sign-up appointment. A provisional acceptance does not create a tenancy, but it allows the council to prepare the sign-up documentation and progress the letting process efficiently.
- 13.2 Once the tenancy agreement is signed, the tenancy becomes a legally binding contract. If a tenant subsequently changes their mind after signing, they will be required to complete a Notice to Quit, giving 28 days' notice, and will remain liable for rent for the full notice period. This applies even if the tenant has not yet moved into the property, as the tenancy legally begins from the date stated on the agreement.
- 13.3 If, in exceptional circumstances, the signed tenancy has not yet been uploaded to the system, the council reserves the right to apply landlord discretion. This may include withdrawing the tenancy before it is activated, but such discretion will only be exercised where justified and supported by clear evidence. Discretion is not guaranteed and will be applied consistently and fairly in line with the council's duties as a social landlord.

14. Equality Impact

- 14.1 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.