

## **Breckland Tenancy Strategy 2023 (adopted XXX)**

### **Introduction**

Breckland Council recognises that social housing is a scarce resource and needs to be used effectively to meet housing need. The high costs of renting privately or buying properties can lead to people being reliant on social housing.

The Localism Act 2011 enables Breckland Council to develop systems and policies that are focused on protecting and supporting those who need it most, making decisions about who is eligible for local provision and for how long, on the basis of local need and circumstance. We are committed to:

- Having an up to date Tenancy Strategy so our actions and expectations are clear and relevant
- Reviewing and updating our allocations policy to reflect changes in local circumstances and need, as required
- Using the private rented sector to discharge our homelessness duty
- Encouraging Registered Providers to offer fixed term tenancies tailored to individuals circumstances, where relevant

This Tenancy Strategy sets out Breckland Council's expectations for tenancies taken up by applicants from the Councils Housing register into Registered Provider accommodation.

Breckland Council became a Registered Provider in 2023.

The document should be considered as a framework, alongside the Council's Allocations policy, which sets out who will be offered accommodation.

Registered providers ( more commonly known as Housing Associations) have over 9000 units of social housing in Breckland (in 2023) which are currently let on a mixture of assured tenancy with a social rent.

Registered Providers must give regard to a local Authorities tenancy strategy when setting out their tenancy standards for their stock. Each Registered Provider must publish a tenancy standard which should cover their approach to :-

- Allocations
- Rents
- Tenure

## **Flexible Tenancies**

Prior to 2012, Registered Providers in Breckland offered accommodation to successful applicants on an assured tenancy, usually after holding an introductory tenancy satisfactorily for a period of time. Some tenants may have a secure tenancy if they have been in their property prior to July 1989.

Both these types of tenancy offer the tenant the right to remain in their home for life providing they meet their obligations within their tenancy agreement, regardless of their change of circumstances.

New tenants can be offered different forms of tenancy based on their circumstances. This is a Flexible Tenancy and could enable better use of the housing stock as people's circumstances change.

### **Tenancy length.**

The Council supports Registered Providers in offering a 12 month introductory tenancy which, following the suitable sustainment of that tenancy, to then receive a 5 year flexible tenancy. Prior to the end of the tenancy term the Registered Provider will carry out a review, taking into account the suitability of the accommodation for the current needs of the occupant, their circumstances and the management of the tenancy during the time they have held the tenancy.

The Registered Provider will decide whether to renew the tenancy or, in some instances, may terminate the tenancy, giving reasonable notice.

There may be circumstances where a longer term tenancy is offered and this will be reflected in the needs of the tenant being the offered the accommodation. The Council expect that the Registered Provider will make sure that the tenure offered is compatible with the type of housing being offered and the sustainability of the local community.

The Council accepts that there are instances when longer term tenancies should be offered. This applies to accommodation which has is classed as Sheltered accommodation or Housing with Care or other forms of supported accommodation where a tenant has a lifelong need and would be disadvantaged by not being offered a longer term tenancy.

It is expected that a review is carried out by a Registered Provider at the end of a tenancy term, the Council will work closely with the Registered Provider to ensure appropriate assistance is given to all parties during the process. The Council will expect that as part of the review the Registered Providers will ensure that the following areas are considered :-

- The current circumstances of the household, the need for the type of property and the size of the property
- The conduct of tenant and other members of the household during the tenancy
- The current financial circumstances of the household

The Registered Providers working within the district should have appropriate policies setting out should they determine that a renewal of a tenancy is not appropriate, the process for moving the current occupier on. In instances where a termination occurs the Council will expect the Registered Provider to work closely with the Housing Options team to ensure appropriate advice and guidance is given to ensure there is not an increase in homelessness with the District.

Existing tenants on the day the Localism Act 2011 is enacted, who choose to move should be offered a tenancy with the same security they currently enjoy, especially where this is enabling a better use of the existing stock.

### **Affordable Rents**

Affordable rents are rents which are set at up to 80% of the market rent chargeable for the property.

The housing market across Breckland varies greatly with marked differences on affordability across the District. Therefore, the Council expects a local approach to be taken on new developments when applied in practice to ensure that affordable housing remains affordable in reality.

To continue to meet the objective of housing being affordable the Council will support affordable rents at up to 80% of the market rent, only where it falls within the Local Housing Allowance for the area, including any service charges that may also be applied.

The Council supports Registered Providers who have been accepted into the Homes and Communities Agencies framework to charge an affordable rent on some of the properties which become available for reletting so long as prospective tenants are not discouraged from securing affordable housing due to being disadvantaged financially due to higher rents in particular areas.

Registered Providers are expected to set rents at a level that enables the home to be affordable to the household size.

### **Accommodation**

Affordable housing is available in a variety of types across the District such as flats, houses, bungalows and bedsits, 1 to 4+ bedrooms.

There is a high demand for housing which does not come available very often, around 4.5% of the total stock becomes vacant in a year.

Supporting a supply of new developments, which reflects the needs of the local community, is a priority for the Council, along with ensuring that the existing stock is maintained for as long as possible as affordable housing to meet the needs of residents across the District.

At times some stock may be disposed of by Registered Providers to meet their business plan requirements. The Council requests that this is only reverted to when all alternatives have been explored and there has been a full consultation with the Council and the local community on the impact of the loss of stock in the given area.

The Council will support Registered Providers to address over or under-occupation in appropriate cases where this will enable a better use of the housing stock, taking into account the circumstances of the customers involved.

The limited availability of accommodation means that the Council can not always meet customers' aspirations for an affordable home with a Registered Provider but will work closely with Landlords from all sectors to have a person's housing needs met in the most appropriate way. This will mean using the private sector to its fullest extent where it is affordable and realistic.

The Council will discharge its homelessness duties to accommodation in the private rented sector, where it is suitable and affordable. Private accommodation will be deemed as suitable where a 12 month tenancy can be secured and the property is suitable for the customer. The Council actively encourages and enforces good standards of private rented accommodation in Breckland.

### **Local Lettings Policies**

The Council works with partners to introduce local lettings policies appropriate to the area to tackle a local issue that's has arisen, usually on a time limited basis.

The promotion of such policies is important to the Council to support a local approach to meeting local housing need: the impact from the policy will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure compliance along with assessing relevance pertinent to the time. Local lettings policy will sit within the framework of the overarching allocations policy and take account of the tenancy strategy and the Registered Providers own lettings policies when being drafted.