

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Housing & Housing Development
Date 15th July 2026



DRAFT TENANCY STRATEGY 2026 - 2031

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KEY DECISION

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. To present the final version of the Tenancy Strategy 2026-2031.
- 1.2. The Strategy fulfils the Council's statutory duty under the Localism Act 2011 to publish a Tenancy Strategy that sets out expectations for Registered Providers operating within the Borough. It aligns with the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards (April 2024), the Tenancy Standard, and emerging national reforms including the Renters' Rights Act 2025.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes the duty placed on Stevenage Borough Council to fulfil its duties under the Localism Act 2011 to publish a Tenancy Strategy.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approves the content and the adoption of the Tenancy Strategy 2026-2031, as seen in Appendix A.
- 2.3 That Cabinet approves that the Strategic Director (RP), be given delegated authority to make minor updates and changes to the Strategy arising from new legislation, after consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Local Councils have a duty under the Localism Act 2011 to publish a Tenancy Strategy setting out expectations for Registered Providers operating within the Borough. Each local housing authority in England had to prepare and publish its first Tenancy Strategy by January 2013. The Council's current Tenancy Strategy, published on the website, is dated 2013 and has not been reviewed since this time. In order to keep pace with regulatory and legislative requirements, a Tenancy Strategy should be reviewed at least every five years and should reflect any changes which may have impacted the allocation of social housing.
- 3.2 The Tenancy Strategy establishes clear expectations regarding the tenancy types used across the Borough. The Council's preference remains for secure, long-term tenancies in general needs housing to promote stability and sustainable communities, as set out in the Council's own Tenancy Policy.
- 3.3 Alternative tenancy types are recognised where appropriate, particularly in temporary, supported or specialist accommodation. Registered Providers are expected to clearly define the tenancy types they use, the length of those tenancies, and how they support long-term sustainability and effective housing management.
- 3.4 The Strategy reinforces the expectation that rents, and service charges, remain compliant with national regulation while being mindful of local income levels and cost-of-living pressures.
- 3.5 Providers are expected to assess affordability at the point of letting and intervene early where financial pressures arise, reducing the risk of arrears and eviction.
- 3.6 The Strategy emphasises early intervention and proactive support to prevent tenancy breakdown. Providers are expected to adopt a preventative approach, working collaboratively with the Council and relevant agencies to support vulnerable households.
- 3.7 Given ongoing demand pressures, the Strategy prioritises efficient use of existing housing stock. This includes tackling under-occupation, addressing overcrowding, promoting downsizing and mutual exchange, and ensuring adapted properties are allocated appropriately.
- 3.8 The Strategy reinforces the Council's strategic housing authority role and its nomination arrangements with Registered Providers. Through retained nomination rights and structured monitoring, the Council ensures that social housing across all landlords contributes to Borough-wide priorities.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 This Tenancy Strategy for Stevenage Borough Council responds to a statutory duty, providing a clear framework for how social and affordable housing tenancies should be allocated, managed, and reviewed across the Borough. It seeks to ensure that the use of tenancies contributes to sustainable communities, makes best use of limited housing stock, and supports residents through changing personal and economic circumstances.
- 4.2 The goal of the strategy is to provide consistency, transparency, and fairness in how tenancies are managed, while allowing Registered Providers the flexibility to operate in a way that responds to the unique needs of Stevenage's residents.

- 4.3 The Renters' Rights Act 2025 received Royal Assent on October 27, 2025, and its provisions came into effect on the 31st May 2026. The Act abolishes fixed term assured tenancies and assured shorthold tenancies, imposing obligations on private landlords and others in relation to rented homes, temporary and supported accommodation. This strategy has been developed having consideration to this new act and will be reviewed as additional guidance is published.
- 4.4 This Tenancy Strategy sets out the Council's position as a Strategic Housing Authority, it expects and requires that all Registered Providers operating within the Borough to develop their own Tenancy Policy, this policy should align with the Localism Act 2011 and the Regulator of Social Housing's Tenancy Standard.
- 4.5 The draft Tenancy Strategy 2026 – 2031 highlights that since the previous Strategy was published in 2013, there has been a decrease in approximately 1300 council homes, mainly under the right to buy regime. The most significant impacts have been across one-, three- and four-bedroom provision. The lack of social and affordable housing is affecting residents at both national and Borough levels and means that it is more important than ever that the Council works effectively with other local providers of social housing to ensure that social housing can be allocated effectively and fairly to those who are most in need.
- 4.6 The Strategy also emphasises that the gap between social and affordable rents and rents in the private sector is widening, placing significant financial strain on low-income households and in many cases, making private rent properties unattainable. It is also clear that Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates (the system used in the UK to calculate the maximum housing support element that a tenant can receive through Universal Credit or Housing Benefit) has not kept pace with market rent. LHA has been frozen until at least 2026/27, pushing many families into financial insecurity, unable to afford essential utilities and food and placing them at risk of homelessness. Citizens Advice estimate that rents in the private sector have risen by 14% since LHA rates were last revised.
- 4.7 The net impact is that more families require the need for temporary accommodation, having been evicted for rent arrears in the private sector. Not only does this create unstable housing environments for families, it also raises temporary accommodation costs for local authorities. Combined with the need for more social and affordable homes, where demand outstrips supply, it is again essential that the Tenancy Policies of local providers underpin the principles set out with the Council's Tenancy Strategy.
- 4.8 The Council has consulted on the draft Tenancy Strategy with residents of Stevenage as well as Registered Providers operating within the Borough. The consultation ran for four weeks starting on the 11th June 2026 and concluded on the 11th July 2026.
- 4.9 The consultation was available on the Council's website and was promoted via social media. The consultation was also shared with all housing register applicants through the on-line bidding system. Tenants of Stevenage Borough Council were also encouraged to complete the consultation via an email from the Council's Housing Portal.
- 4.10 Registered Providers have been engaged separately through meeting with them and were also invited to complete a consultation questionnaire.
- 4.11 The draft Tenancy Strategy 2026-2031 will also be shared with the Council's cross-party Community Select Committee on the 7th July 2026 and comments will be updated to Cabinet on the 15th July 2026.

- 4.12 As of the 6th July 2026, there were 10 respondents to the consultation, 5 of whom were SBC tenants and 5 recognised themselves as homeless or in temporary accommodation. The main message from the consultation is the need for more affordable and accessible housing, with respondents highlighting shortages and long wait times for social homes. Respondents also felt that good tenancy support was important as well as responsive repairs and access to financial support and advice.
- 4.13 There was also support for closer working between the Council and Housing Associations, with respondents wanting to receive better communication and a more joined up approach to improving housing services. Overall, the feedback supports the priorities as set out in the Strategy. Once the Strategy is adopted, the Council will commence further work with Registered Providers to enhance relationships and ensure that affordable housing need is met by ensuring providers place maximum emphasis on tenancy support and accepting nominations from the Council for those most in need of social housing, including homeless cohorts and those on low incomes.
- 4.14 The Council continues its ambitious build programme to develop new and affordable homes and is on target to deliver over 1000 new properties by 2030.
- 4.15 Stevenage Borough Council's Tenancy Strategy will be reviewed and updated every 5-years, or sooner in the event of significant changes in legislation or factors impacting on the provision of social housing.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

The Tenancy Strategy itself does not create new direct financial commitments. Effective tenancy sustainment and improved stock utilisation support the HRA Business Plan by:

- Reducing void loss
- Minimising arrears
- Preventing costly homelessness interventions

Any resource implications arising from legislative changes will be reported separately where required.

5.2 Legal Implications

The Strategy fulfils the Council's duty under the Localism Act 2011. It aligns with:

- The Housing Act 1996
- The Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards (April 2024)
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR
- Renters' Rights Act 2025

5.3 Risk Implications

The strategic commitment of the Council and its partners in the implementation of this strategy will help mitigate key risks. Failure to maintain close working relationships with Registered Providers increases the risk of service disruption and ineffective delivery.

5.4 Policy Implications

The Strategy supports delivery of the Corporate Plan priority: “More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes”, particularly under the sub-priorities of Building New & Sustainable Homes and Maintaining Good Quality Homes.

The Strategy strengthens the Council’s strategic housing role and ensures Registered Providers operate consistently within local priorities.

5.5 Staffing and Accommodation Implications

There are no implications arising from this report.

5.6 Equalities and Diversity Implications

The Strategy supports the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act 2010. It promotes fairness, transparency and equal access to housing.

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken.

5.7 Service Delivery Implications

The Strategy will influence and shape the future work of the Council with its Registered Providers and is aware that effective service delivery is dependent on strong working relationships with those Registered Providers.

5.8 Information Technology Implications

There are no implications arising from this report.

6 APPENDICES

Appendix A – Draft Tenancy Strategy 2026-2031

Appendix B – EQIA