

CEB 5 December 2012 Appendix A
Tenancy Strategy and Policy Consultation Autumn 2012

There were 2 strands to this consultation – Public and Registered Providers with housing in the City

Public consultation

107 responses were received

Clarity of document. The majority of respondents (82%) said that the strategy was completely clear or, mostly clear.

Tenancies for life The majority of respondents (78%) supported the principle of tenancies for life.

Flexible Fixed Term Tenancies A smaller proportion supported the introduction of Flexible Tenancies (40%) . Of those who supported FT a number made additional comments about the circumstances in which they should be used or the perceived benefits. Some of these related to cases where tenants circumstances change, making best use of property. However, some related to issues such as anti social behaviour, rent arrears, drug and alcohol misuse, drug dealing and damage or mis-use of property. Housing management issues such as this are tackled by the use of Introductory Tenancies and ongoing housing management. Those who were against FT (38%) also provided comments in a higher number of responses. A significant proportion of respondents (22%) were unsure about Flexible (fixed term) Tenancies. This indicates the need for further explanation of Flexible Tenancies, the effects on existing tenants and clarification around misunderstanding of the use of fixed terms as an additional management tool.

Affordable Rents – existing social housing. A significant majority (89%) were against the introduction of Affordable Rents when re letting existing homes.

Affordable Rents – new homes A smaller majority (60%) were against affordable rents for new build homes. Of those who responded yes to AF on new build (15%) there seemed to be some understanding about the link to development grant.

Respondents 88% of respondents were council or housing association tenants, 3% were private sector tenants and 6% were homeowners.

Current social housing rent levels Most respondents (71%) felt that current social housing rents were about right.

Comments There was an option to comment on the issues raised and examples of responses follows

- *I think it will tie up more housing long term*
- *I work with people with mental health problems. Proper social housing would help us in our work of helping people re-build their lives which they can't do whilst homeless or insecurely housed*
- *Making the rents higher would make Oxford an even harder place for most people to live. It's a horrible idea to do in a recession when many people are unemployed and incomes are stagnant.*

- *Not sure they will have much effect on us as we're not expecting to be able to move into social housing unless there's a drastic increase in availability*
- *Hard to say, but we need to revisit the allocation of social housing, demand higher standards of responsible tenancy, and be less tolerant on things such as rent arrears and, of course pressure government to increase social housing building.*
- *I was born in Oxford and so were all my children. I can barely afford my rent and will most likely have to leave the city in the near future, disrupting my children's homes and school life and making travel to work difficult, just so I can find an affordable property.*
- *The private rental sector already dominates, which means high rental costs, lack of security and lack of freedom to make a home your own. Oxford will become a city of exclusion, where only the wealthy can afford to stay.*
- *Part buy part rent is a trap for some families due to prices increasing. Rents are far too high and HB is propping up over priced housing. Houses should be about homes- not profit. Affordable housing does not exist now unless you are wealthy*
- *If I wanted to down size the rent for a 1 bed flat may be more than my 2bed if it had been built using HCA funds. I would be unable to move as I couldn't afford more rent and don't want to claim HB.*
- *Will not affect me I live alone and have no wish to move. The rent is just about affordable and I feel tenants get an excellent deal from the city council.*
- *I just think that if people can afford to get a mortgage they would and we're in a council house because we can't afford a mortgage and we just would hate to have to move as we have lived in the area for the past 33years him and 23 years me. Plus its convenient for work and school.*
- *Not enough help or support in helping to move out of existing property. Inc. rent up to 80% of private market rents would put more families into poverty and make it harder if not impossible for hard working families on low income to make work pay. Also there would be higher levels of rent arrears, more evictions and re housing, which long term would be much more costly to the council*
- *It will make me more insecure. Whilst I am grateful to have a home the effect of design on my health as been substantially negative leading to loss of work, expensive health issues and lowered quality of life. We become the result of the design of our direct environment.*
- *I'm concerned about rent increases in the event of an exchange of tenancy. Thanks for continuing with introductory and secure tenancies.*

.Conclusion

It would appear that the majority of those responding to the consultation are supportive of the Oxford City Council Tenancy Strategy and Policy. These results may be influenced by the status of the majority of respondents (88%) being social housing tenants.

In some cases, there appears to be a misunderstanding of the implications of the new types of tenancies and this will be clarified in future communications with the public

Registered Providers

A separate survey was sent to Registered Housing Providers with housing in Oxford. The response rate has been very low, only 4 associations completed and returned the survey. Invitations were sent directly to Registered Providers with reminders sent at 14 and 7 days. A number of phone calls have also been made to encourage further response. The matter was published through and discussed at the ORAH meeting in October 2012

There are not enough responses to complete a meaningful analysis however the summary of results follows here:

Is our Tenancy Strategy and Policy clear and easy to understand?

Respondents felt the documents were clear -completely clear 50% (2)
mostly clear 50% (2)

Do you support the principle of 'tenancies for life' provided by housing association assured tenancies and council secure tenancies?

Mixed results: (Yes 50% (2), No 25% (1), I'm not sure 25% (1))

Do you think there should be any exceptions where new council and housing association tenancies are offered as Flexible (fixed term) Tenancies?

Mixed results (Yes 50% (2), No 50% (2))

Do you think that tenants moving into new build council or housing association homes should be charged rents of up to 80% of the average private sector rent?

Yes 100% (4)

Do you think that tenants moving into existing council and housing association homes should be charged rents of up to 80% of those charged in the private sector?

Mixed (Yes 50% (2) No 50% (2))

Do you support Oxford City Council's approach to its Tenancy Strategy and Policy?

Mixed (Yes 50% (2) No 25% (1), Don't Know 25% (1))

How will your organisations policy have regard to the Oxford City Council Strategy?

- *500 characters is not sufficient to answer this as we work with approx 80 Local Authorities and therefore it is impossible to align our policies with each LA. We have written our policy based on research into our stock and Tenancy Standards. We are happy to meet with OCC to discuss the finer points. (A2D)*
- *This is a requirement of the Localism Act. (Bromford)*
- *We have no plans to offer flexible tenure or let property on an Affordable Rent (Hastoe)*
- *We will work within this strategy (SOHA)*

What is/ will be your organisations policy in the City in relation to Flexible Tenancies?

- *as per previous question (A2D).*
- *Refer to earlier responses. (Bromford)*
- *Our current position is to continue to offer lifetime tenancies. (Hastoe)*
- *We have no current plans to introduce fixed term tenancies (SOHA)*

What is /will be your organisations policy on conversions to Affordable Rents in the City?

- *as per previous questions. (A2D)*
- *Refer to earlier responses. (Bromford)*
- *We have no plans to let property on an Affordable Rent (Hastoe)*
- *We would wish to provide new homes at Affordable rent levels where this is appropriate (SOHA)*

How many conversions to Affordable Rent does your organisation plan to undertake in the City in the next 3 Years?

- *unknown at present (A2D)*
- *NONE (Hastoe)*
- *NONE (Bromford)*
- *We have no current plans to convert any existing tenancies to affordable rent levels when they become vacant. (SOHA)*

Will you agree to enter into a protocol on respective roles at the end of a Flexible Tenancy to prevent Homelessness?

Mixed (Yes 75% (3), Don't Know 25% (1))

- *Our policy is being written with regard to ensuring that our procedures do not encourage homelessness (A2D)*
- *But dependant on content and negotiation. (Bromford)*
- *If we move towards flexible tenancies (Hastoe)*

Conclusion

The small number of responses has not allowed a meaningful conclusion. However 3 of the 4 Registered Providers who responded are broadly supportive of lifetime tenancies although all supported the use of Affordable Rents (in contrast to public responses).

It is clear that there needs to be further discussion with Registered Housing Providers with stock in the city. The responses received are from 4 providers.