

To: Cabinet
Date: 13 November 2024
Report of: Housing and Homelessness Panel
Title of Report: Furnished Tenancy Scheme

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Housing and Homelessness Panel recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Lizzy Diggins, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities
Corporate Priority:	Good, Affordable Homes, Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028
Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report	

Appendices	
Appendix A	Draft Cabinet response to Scrutiny recommendations

Introduction and overview

1. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met on 7 November 2024 to consider a report on Furnished Tenancy Scheme. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 13 November 2024, recommends that Cabinet approve the procurement of a contract at a value of £4,300,000 over a 5-year period for a supplier or suppliers to provide household furniture, white goods, and carpets as part of a Furnished Tenancy Scheme; and to delegate to the Interim Executive Director for Communities and People in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, authority to award a Furnished Tenancy Scheme contract to a supplier or suppliers, selected by an evaluation panel, following a fully compliant procurement process.
2. The Committee is grateful to Cllr Linda Smith (Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities), Kieran Edmunds (Rapid Rehousing Manager), Carolyn Devenney (Senior Furnished Tenancy Officer) and Richard Wood (Housing Strategy and

Needs Manager) for attending the meeting to present the report and answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities introduced the report. The report sought authority to procure and delegation to award a contract to deliver the Council's Furnished Tenancy Scheme.
4. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the scheme's uptake within Oxford compared to national averages, the flexibility of the contract in accommodating growing demand, and how well it meets the needs of local tenants. Questions also focused on the extent to which the Council could support tenants without placing undue financial pressure on them, particularly given rising costs of living and inflationary pressures on service charges.
5. The Committee sought clarity on items like carpets, which are unique to Oxford's scheme, and on the process for repairs, replacements, and storage of furnished items across tenancies.
6. In discussion, the Committee noted the benefits for tenants and the Council, including the scheme's flexibility to allow tenants to choose from various furnishings, thus promoting a sense of ownership and belonging. Financial advantages for tenants were also noted, particularly that the scheme's service charges are covered by housing benefits, effectively eliminating out-of-pocket expenses for eligible tenants. This set up was noted as being mutually beneficial, given that the scheme operated on a cost-neutral basis funded by the HRA, avoiding additional pressure on the Council's resources. The Committee also noted the economic challenges, which has emphasised the scheme's role in preventing tenants from resorting to high-interest credit sources to furnish their homes.
7. The Committee discussed the disposal and potential wastage of furniture under the scheme, noting that whilst some furniture are recycled or stored for future use such as emergency housing, there are opportunities for local organisations to repurpose those furniture. The Committee emphasised the value of collaborating with external organisations such as charities to minimise waste through creative reuse and recycling channels.

Recommendation 1: That the Council further explores opportunities to establish more formalised relationships with local charities and organisations to enhance the reuse and recycling of used furniture under the Furnished Tenancy Scheme, with the goal of reducing waste by extending life of furniture items that may still hold value for temporary housing or community projects.

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