

Appendix A

Tenant Rent Workshop Report

Date: 18 June 2025

Location: Atkins Building, Hinckley

Attendees: Tonia, TPAS Senior Consultant. Tenant volunteers: Linda, Jean, Paul, Elizabeth, Pete, Kathy, Graham and Angela.

Organised by: Housing Service, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.

Facilitators: Madeline Shellard, Head of Housing and Environmental Services. Kim Fearn, Tenancy Management and Anti-Social Behaviour Manager. Lois Hodgkins, Performance and Service Development Team Leader. Elaine Gernon, Service Development Officer. Victoria Rayment, Housing Support Officer - Tenant Engagement

Purpose of the Workshop

The workshop was convened to engage tenants in shaping the updated Rent Policy. The aim was to ensure the policy is fair, transparent, and supportive, reflecting the real needs and concerns of tenants. TPAS, the tenant engagement experts, supported the session to ensure meaningful participation.

Overview of the Rent Policy Presentation

The presentation covered key aspects of the proposed Rent Policy, including:

- **Purpose of Rent:** Rent supports services for 3,226 homes, including repairs, tenancy support, and older persons' services. It also sustains the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- **Policy Coverage:**
 - How rent is set (aligned with government policy: CPI + 1%)
 - Payment methods and due dates
 - Service charges (actual cost recovery only)
 - Arrears management and support for tenants in hardship
 - Former tenant arrears
 - Monitoring and performance tracking

Breakout Session Feedback Summary

Session 1: What Tenants Value in Rent

- **Repairs:** High priority; tenants want better availability and quality.

- **Security:** Feeling secure in their homes is a key value. Tenants mentioned that they did feel secure as a tenant of HBBC. Stability and predictability was important for financial planning and preparation.
- **Affordability:** Many noted they can afford council rent but not private rent.
- **Transparency:** Clear information on service charges and only charging for actual costs.
- **Communal Services:** Clean and well-maintained shared spaces are important.
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Session 2: Rent Policy Fairness and Support

- **Concerns:**
 - Sudden, high rent increases (above inflation) were flagged as unacceptable.
 - Weekly rent payments create 52 opportunities for arrears; monthly payments preferred and examples of why 12 months is likely more manageable.
 - Statements showing weekly arrears are daunting. It makes tenants think they are getting into trouble, especially for monthly payers where 4 and 5 week months can cause small fluctuations in balances.
- **Suggestions:**
 - Introduce a handyperson service via the council. This was considered a service that tenants would pay for, it would be a trustworthy service where they do not fear the person coming into their home to carry out work. Types of work suggested were putting up curtain poles, decorating and tackling gardens that may be overwhelming to start on.
 - Clear intervention points for arrears management. The policy should point out what we will do first, second, third etc. It should also point out what the tenant should do, perhaps as a guide.
 - Early, polite reminders and flexible support.
 - Opt-in text notifications for payment reminders and balance checks.
 - Online account access - tenants found this could often be out of date by 2-3 weeks.
 - A comprehensive tenancy handbook.
 - Consideration of the cost-effectiveness and fairness of using collection agencies. Support for using collection agencies where appropriate. Suggest being clear in the policy that we will use them when former

tenants are not engaging with us or have perhaps abandoned their property with no information about forwarding address details.

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Session 3: Communication and Engagement

- **Communication Preferences:**

- Clear, polite, early notifications about arrears.
- More accessible customer service (current wait times of 20–30 minutes are too long). “We try to get through to the council and either wait too long or get cut off, or the ‘system isn’t working’ so we then get punished for not paying our rent, but we tried”
- Easier access to the rents team, and housing in general, via phone.
- Include information on the work tenants are doing, in the 6monthly tenant newsletters.

- **Support Needs:**

- Early conversations and support before arrears escalate. Making it obvious that we will help and work with tenants.
- Better awareness of available support services to tenants.
- Examples of not engaging early enough and tenants felt let down when we haven’t told them about arrears early enough. Some system issues didn’t help with this process.
- Community champions to oversee shared spaces.

Next Steps

- Feedback from this workshop will be incorporated into the draft Rent Policy.
- The updated policy will be presented to the Council’s Executive Committee for approval.
- A wider tenant consultation will follow to ensure all tenants have the opportunity to contribute.
- Final sign-off is expected by the end of 2025.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all tenants who participated and shared their views. Your input is vital in shaping a rent policy that works for everyone.

Action Items from the Workshop

Action	Description	Status
Rent increase policy	Consider tenant concerns about sudden, above-inflation increases.	
Introduce monthly payment option as default option	Explore offering monthly rent payments to reduce arrears risk as standard.	
Revise arrears communication	Make statements less daunting; clarify weekly vs. monthly amounts.	
Improve repairs service	Address concerns about quality and responsiveness.	
Explore handyperson service	Consider scoping this possibility with tenants, and launching a pilot scheme.	
Enhance customer service access	Reduce wait times and improve access to the rents team. Consider options for housing specific services, as council tenants have different needs to members of the public contacting the council.	
Clarify arrears intervention points	Define when and how support is offered.	
Evaluate use of collection agencies	Assess fairness and cost-effectiveness.	
Launch opt-in text alert system	Provide early, polite reminders for rent payments.	
Develop existing online rent account access	Improve transparency and self-service.	

Action	Description	Status
Create/update tenancy handbook	Provide a clear, accessible guide for tenants.	
Explore community champion role	Investigate feasibility and scope.	

Next Steps

- Incorporate feedback and action items into the draft Rent Policy.
- Present the updated policy to the Council's Executive Committee.
- Conduct wider tenant consultation.
- Final sign-off expected by the end of 2025.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all tenants who participated and shared their insights. Your feedback is instrumental in shaping a rent policy that reflects your needs and priorities.