Dorset Council Tenancy Strategy 2026 to 2031

Contents

Introduction

Registered providers of social housing grant over 1000 tenancies each year in the Dorset Council area.

Housing allocation procedures decide who is offered a tenancy, many are nominated by the council to registered providers of social housing, to help meet local housing need. Households we nominate include (but are not limited to) people owed a homelessness duty by us, people requiring accessible housing, and people living in under-occupied or overcrowded housing.

A tenancy sets out the terms under which a person has a right to live in their home, including the length of time they're able to live in their home. The main aspect of a tenancy is the agreement, which is a legal contract that outlines the rights and responsibilities of both a tenant and a landlord and confirms legal rights and responsibilities.

This tenancy strategy has been formulated and published at a time when changes are being made to the tenancy system. The Renters' Rights Act 2025 removes fixed term tenancies. Instead, all tenancies will be periodic, with tenants being able to stay in their home until they decide to end their tenancy by giving two months' notice.

We want to collaborate with registered providers, to support them to achieve regulatory outcomes and expectations concerning tenure. Taking action to sustain a tenancy is important to registered providers and tenants, as both wish to avoid unnecessary evictions.

It is also important to offer advice and assistance about housing options before a tenancy comes to an end helps people to move on in a timely way.

This tenancy strategy includes a range of actions that can be taken to help make tenancies a success.

By publishing this tenancy strategy, we are meeting our legal obligations under the Localism Act 2011 providing clear expectations for the management of social housing tenancies within the local authority area.

Gill Taylor
Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health

1. Purpose and aims of this tenancy strategy

The purpose of this tenancy strategy is to fulfil a legal duty to outline our objectives for social housing tenure. It aims to ensure that the types of tenancies granted meet the needs of social housing tenants in the Dorset Council area.

Registered providers of social housing (registered providers) that own or manage social housing within the Dorset Council area are required to consider the contents of this strategy when formulating their own tenancy policies.

Dorset Council shall consider this tenancy strategy when formulating a tenancy policy for any social housing we might own as a local authority registered provider.

This tenancy strategy relates to lettings of all social rented housing. This includes general needs and supported housing, let at social rent rates or affordable rent rates.

The strategy objectives are –

- to ensure that tenants are provided with the most secure form of accommodation available to encourage sustainable communities.
- to help provide housing to those in greatest need.
- to optimise the use of social housing stock in the Dorset Council area.
- to minimise and prevent homelessness.
- to ensure that housing is provided in a fair and consistent manner across the Dorset Council area.
- to encourage registered providers to develop tenancy policies that adhere to this tenancy strategy and legislative requirements.

2. Preparation of this tenancy strategy

We prepared and published this tenancy strategy to outline the matters registered providers that own social housing in the Dorset Council area, should consider when formulating their own tenancy policies. This includes –

- the types of tenancies that should be granted.
- the circumstances for granting specific types of tenancies.
- the length of term for certain tenancies.
- the circumstances for granting further tenancies upon the end of an existing one.

Our tenancy strategy summarises and explains our expectations of registered provider tenancy policies.

We will consider our tenancy strategy when carrying out our own housing management functions for any social housing we might own and manage.

We will keep our tenancy strategy under review and may modify or replace it.

If we modify our tenancy strategy, we will publish the modifications or the modified strategy.

A copy of our tenancy strategy will be available at our principal office for inspection at all reasonable hours (County Hall, Colliton Park, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1XJ). It will be available to members of the public without charge. We will provide copies to anyone who asks for one.

Before adopting this tenancy strategy, we held a workshop with some registered providers that own social housing in the Dorset Council area. We also sent a copy of the draft tenancy strategy to all registered providers that own social housing in the Dorset Council area and gave them a reasonable opportunity to comment on those proposals. Feedback from registered providers was strongly in favour of –

- granting the most secure form of tenure when allocating social rented housing.
- granting fixed term tenancies only when necessary and when the initial fixed term comes to an end, always seeking to grant another fixed term or a secure tenancy.
- working collaboratively to develop deliverable policies concerning tenancy sustainment, preventing evictions, and tackling tenancy fraud.

We also held interviews with officers from across Dorset Council including those responsible for social housing allocations, homelessness and housing advice, private sector housing standards, spatial planning, and adult social care. They all indicated a preference for the most secure form of tenancy to be granted but appreciated there were occasions when a fixed term tenancy might be necessary and even beneficial. They were all equally enthusiastic about the prospect of joint working to deliver improved outcomes around tenancy sustainment, preventing evictions and tackling tenancy fraud.

In the preparation of this tenancy strategy, we have taken into consideration our homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, housing allocation scheme, and housing strategy. The objectives of this tenancy strategy include minimising and preventing homelessness by providing secure tenancies and facilitating the allocation of social housing to those in greatest need.

3. Social housing tenure background

This tenancy strategy is being introduced at the same time as the Renters Rights Act 2025, which amends the law on rented homes, including abolishing fixed-term and ‘no fault’ evictions, and for other purposes.

3.1. Housing Act 1980 and Housing Act 1988

The Housing Act 1980 introduced long-term security of tenure for most social housing tenants. The Housing Act 1988 introduced the assured tenancy regime for most new tenancies since 15 January 1989. These tenancies, often called ‘lifetime tenancies,’ offer limited exceptions to eviction if tenants breach the terms of their agreement.

3.2. Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act 2011 allowed local authority registered providers and private registered providers (registered providers of social housing) in England discretion to offer fixed-term tenancies to all new tenants after 1 April 2012 and removed the previous requirement for the ‘most secure’ form of tenancy, mostly ‘lifetime’ assured tenancies.

The UK government aimed to give registered providers greater freedom to manage their housing stock, ensure social housing is allocated to those in need, and provide fixed term tenancies for tenants whose circumstances may change.

The Localism Act 2011 also required local authorities, irrespective of whether they own social housing stock, to publish a tenancy strategy setting out the types of tenancies they wish registered providers to grant, including the circumstances for granting them, the length of fixed term tenancies and when further tenancies are given. A tenancy strategy acts as a framework for registered providers when setting their own tenancy policies.

3.3. Use of fixed-term tenancies by registered providers

This section explains how fixed term tenancies have been used by registered providers. Take-up of fixed-term and flexible tenancies has been limited. In 2014/15, only 15% of social housing tenancies were let on a fixed-term basis, as reported in the Equality Impact Assessment on Lifetime Tenancies (May 2016).

There is very little research on social housing tenure. A 2018 study by Heriot Watt University on fixed-term tenancies in social housing revealed varying opinions on their purpose. Analysis of the research report shows –

- three-quarters of registered providers and 42% of local authority registered providers used fixed-term tenancies for new lets. Many regions including the South of England saw the highest adoption, while the North of England had the lowest.

- reasons for using fixed-term tenancies included efficient stock use, reducing under-occupancy, and targeting ‘in need’ tenants. A perceived expectation from the UK government also influenced local authority registered providers.
- decisions against fixed-term tenancies stemmed from local political and organisational commitment to ‘lifetime’ tenancies, along with worries that fixed term tenancies created uncertainty for tenants and communities, plus concerns about the administrative burdens of issuing lots of fixed term tenancies and then having to carry out numerous renewal reviews.
- some registered providers offered fixed-term tenancies as their standard offer, while others targeted specific properties or tenants. It had been hoped that fixed term tenancies would make a beneficial difference to anti-social behaviour, under-occupation, rent arrears, and overcrowding, while also strengthening contractual obligations and efficient use stock. However, many registered providers have not been able to realise these benefits despite using fixed term tenancies.
- registered providers deploying fixed-term tenancies reported rare non-renewals and anticipated this pattern.
- most registered providers were undecided about fixed-term tenancies’ effectiveness. Those who commented were split, with some seeing positive impacts on tenant behaviour and stock efficiency. Others saw neither benefit despite the implementation workload.
- many registered providers thought fixed term tenancies negatively affected tenants, reducing their sense of security and belonging in their homes and communities, especially vulnerable ones and families with children.
- there were also concerns about potential work disincentives. One initial ambition for fixed term tenancies was that they would be offered to people until their earnings and savings exceeded an agreed threshold. At which point the fixed term tenancy would come to an end and a person would have to rent or buy a home from the commercial housing market. Registered providers were concerned that tenants might choose to limit their earnings so they remained below a threshold from which a fixed term tenancy would come to an end so they could remain in their social rented housing and be offered another fixed tenancy or a secure tenancy.
- while a third of registered providers considered fixed term tenancies ethically appropriate due to their ability to meet household needs, another third saw them as deeply problematic, hindering the sector’s long-term stability and connectedness. The remaining third were

undecided, waiting to see the impacts of fixed term tenancies as more households renew in the coming years.

The research shows at best a limited appetite for the use of fixed term tenancies. Reluctance to use fixed term tenancies is born out in statistics published subsequent of this research, which are explored in the next section of this strategy.

3.4. Renters Rights Act 2025

The Renters Rights Act 2025 will have a minimal impact on social housing initially, as the key reform of abolishing fixed term tenancies is focused on the private rented sector. Social housing tenants will not be directly affected by the changes until the reforms are extended to the social housing sector, which will be a separate process.

The UK government is aiming to do this as soon as possible, but beforehand, it's important that the Regulator of Social Housing refreshes its tenancy standard. This will explain exactly what registered providers need to do under the new tenancy system. Since this involves a statutory consultation, it's expected that the new system for social tenancies will be rolled out later.

Fixed-term tenancies are usually used in the social rented sector when people expect a tenancy to be short-term. So, most social tenants already have secure assured tenancies, which offer more security and don't allow the use of 'no fault evictions.

3.5. Updating the Tenancy Standard of the Regulator of Social Housing

The Tenancy Standard of the Regulator of Social Housing is one of five consumer standards that all registered providers must comply with. It was first published in 2012, updated in 2015 and again in 2024. The Tenancy Standard sets out required outcomes and specific expectations for all registered providers concerning, allocations and lettings, tenancy sustainment and evictions, mutual exchange, social housing tenure.

The UK government's new national plan to end homelessness in England, was published in December 2025 and includes a commitment to update the tenancy standard of the regulator of social housing. The tenancy standard will include clear expectations of registered providers, that they are transparent with tenants about their approach to granting and ending tenancies as well as how they will support tenants to find alternative accommodation before eviction takes place.

Other commitments in the cross-government homelessness and rough sleeping strategy action plan that are relevant to this tenancy strategy, include:

- a review of how effectively registered providers use their properties, updating statutory guidance on social housing allocations.

- a consideration to require registered providers to rehouse statutory homeless households referred by a local authority.
- publication of best practice guidance to reduce tenancy failure.

4. Tenancy statistics

4.1. Social housing stock in the Dorset Council area

Official statistics published by the Regulator of Social Housing show that 50 registered providers owned 24,083 units of social housing stock in the Dorset Council area, on 31 March 2025.

Dorset Council as a local authority registered provider owned 160 (0.7%) units of social housing stock in the local authority area.

Four registered providers each owned more than 1,000 units and collectively owned 19,523 (82%) units –

- Aster Group – 7,360 (31%)
- Magna Housing – 5,936 (25%)
- Sovereign Network Group – 4,965 (21%)
- Stonewater – 1,262 (5%)

The first three registered providers listed above each received a large-scale voluntary transfer of social housing stock from Dorset Council's predecessor district local authorities, explaining why the ownership of social housing stock is concentrated across a small number of registered providers.

45 registered providers owned 4,400 (18%) social housing units.

Three held their total stock in the Dorset Council area, collectively owning 57 social housing units (0.2%).

- Dorchester Almshouses – 19 (0.1%)
- Sturts Community Trust – 35 (0.1%)
- The Maragret Jane Ashley Almshouses Charity 3 (0.0%)

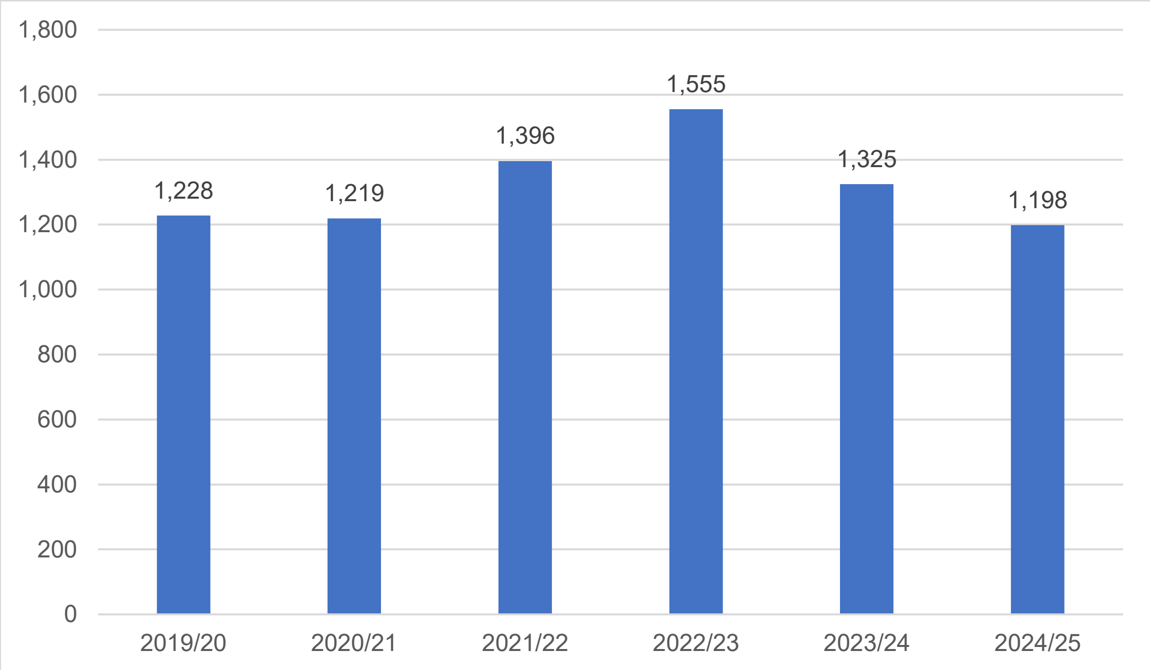
17,409 (72%) units were general needs social rented housing, 4,733 (20%) units were supported housing (including housing for older people) and 1,941 (8%) units were low-cost home ownership (rent to buy housing or shared ownership housing).

4.2. Social housing lettings in the Dorset Council area

For each letting made, a tenancy (or occasionally a licence) is granted.

7,921 lettings have been made by registered providers that own social housing in the Dorset Council area, since the local authority was established over a six-year period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2025.

Chart 1. Social housing lettings, registered providers in the Dorset Council area, 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2025



1,320 lettings on average have been made per year. After increasing by 22% over three consecutive years to a record high of 1,555 in 2022/23, letting rates have reduced by 23% over the past two years to a record low of 1,198 in 2024/25.

Lettings rates are influenced by the overall amount of social housing stock, which changes depending on the number of units disposed of and new social housing built. Furthermore, eviction and tenancy sustainment rates also determine the amount of existing social housing being available to re-let.

The four registered providers that own the majority of social housing stock in the Dorset Council area, are responsible for the majority of social housing lettings made in the Dorset Council area, with most lettings being made to general needs provision at the social rent rate, which is consistent with the social housing stock and rent rates in the Dorset Council area.

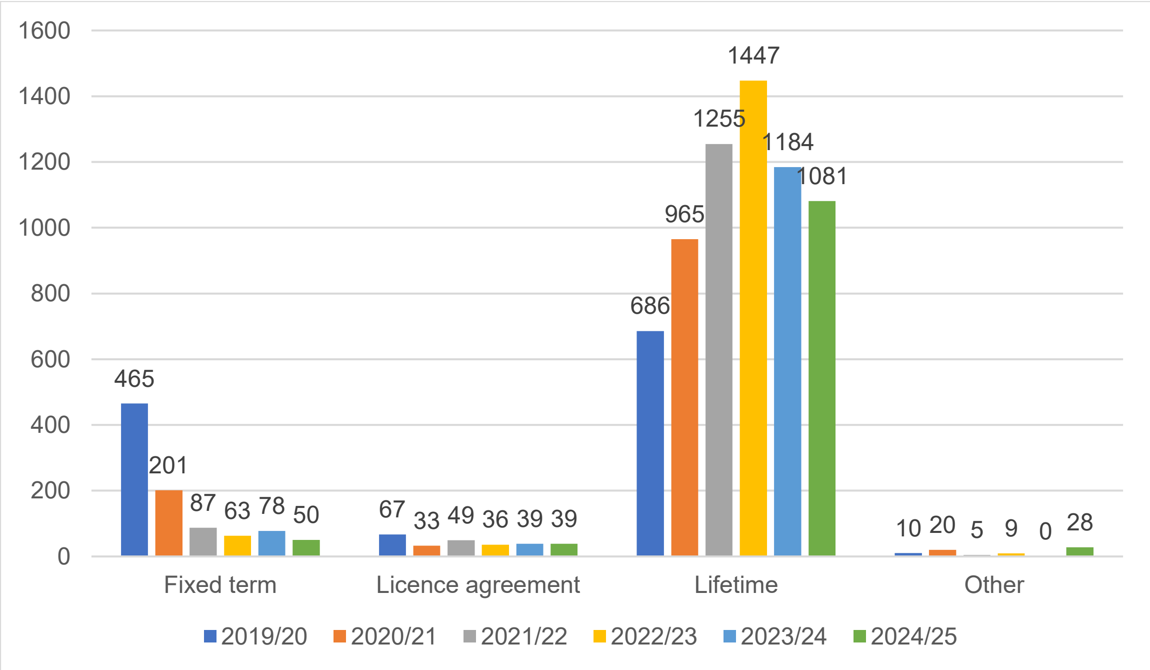
4.3. Social housing tenancy terms granted in the Dorset Council area

Registered providers that own social housing stock in the Dorset Council area, consistently grant lifetime tenancies more often than any other type of tenancy. The proportion of lifetime tenancies granted has increased over the past six years (1 April 2019 to 31 March 2025), from 55% to an average of 90%. Consistent with this, there has been a reduction in the number of fixed term tenancies granted from 36% down to 6%, license agreements granted are from 5% down to 2%, and other types of tenancies granted are from 1% down to zero.

The number of license agreements granted over the past three years has remained consistent, although numbers are approximately half of those granted six years ago.

Other types of tenancy terms granted have remained low, with none being granted from April 2023 to March 2024 and then 28 being granted from April 2024 to March 2025, a significant increase and a record high. These were all periodic assured tenancies, 93% (26) were granted primarily by East Boro Housing, with Aster granting the others.

Chart 2. tenancy terms granted by registered providers in the Dorset Council area, 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2025 (note: data is not available on tenancy terms granted for every letting made, so there will be a difference between the statistics in the chart below and the overall number of lettings made in any given year).



The four registered provided owning the largest amount of social housing stock in the Dorset Council area grant the largest number of lifetime tenancies, for general needs provision at the social rent rate, which is consistent with the social housing stock and rent rates in the Dorset Council area.

Seven registered providers have granted license agreements over the past six years.

Just under one third (32%) of license agreements were granted by Bournemouth Churches Housing Association, with just over one-quarter (28%) granted by Magna Housing Group. Magna Housing Group is a large, registered provider which has just over two-thirds (70%) of its social housing stock in the Dorset council area and is one of four that owns the majority of social housing stock in the Dorset Council area. Bournemouth Churches Housing Association is also a large, registered provider, more than four-fifths of its social housing stock is owned outside the Dorset Council area and the stock it does own in the Dorset Council area represents less than 1% of the total social housing stock in the Dorset Council area.

The two aforementioned registered providers, along with Stonewater (another one of the four registered providers that owns the majority of stock in the Dorset Council area), granted license agreements in each of the past six years.

Three registers providers collectively granted three licenses, one each, during the six-year period.

Seven registered providers have granted other types of occupancy agreements.

One registered provider has granted just over one third (35%) of all other types of occupancy agreements, East Boro Housing (part of the Aster Group, but a separate legal entity, registered separately with the Regulator of Social Housing), which is a small provider that owns the majority of its social housing stock in the Dorset Council area although counts for less than 2% of all social housing stock in the Dorset Council area.

4.5. Fixed term tenancies granted in the Dorset Council area
23 registered providers have granted 944 fixed term tenancies over the past five years.

Four registered providers collectively granted three quarters (73%, 703) of fixed term tenancies:

- East Boro Housing – 111 (12%)
- Magna Housing – 176 (19%)
- Sage Homes – 132 (12%)
- Sovereign Network Group – 284 (30%)

Two of the above registered providers (Magna Housing, and Sovereign Network Group) collectively own nearly half of all social housing stock in the Dorset Council area (25% and 21% respectively), The other two registered providers listed above (East Boro Housing Trust and Sage), collectively own less than 2% of the total social housing stock in the Dorset Council area,

Eight registered providers collectively granted eight fixed term tenancies over the past six years (one each):

- Abri Group
- Advance Housing & Support
- Bespoke Supportive Tenancies
- Golden Lane Housing
- Hastoe
- Hilldale
- Inclusion Housing
- The Guinness Partnership

All the above registered providers are large, registered providers, all operating in multiple local authority areas. They collectively own just under 6% of the total social housing stock in the Dorset Council area, but each holding less than 1% of their total stock in the Dorset Council area.

Only three registered providers have granted fixed term tenancies each year over the past six years:

- Bournemouth Churches Housing Association – 52, an average of 8.6 per year
- Sovereign Network Group – 284, an average of 47.3 per year
- Stonewater – 24, an average of 4 per year

The other two registered providers listed above own just over one-quarter of all social housing stock in the Dorset Council area (Sovereign Network Group, 21%, Stonewater 5%). The other registered provider listed above, Bournemouth Churches Housing Association, is a large, registered provider operating in nine local authority areas and owns 185 units in the Dorset Council area (just under 1% of the total stock) representing 16% of the organisations total stock.

Three registered providers, all recipients of large-scale voluntary transfers of social housing from Dorset Council's predecessor district councils, and holding the largest amount of stock in the area, granted most of their fixed term tenancies between 1 April 2019 to March 2020:

- Aster Group – 72 (97%), compared to 74 for the whole five years.
- Magna Group – 147 (83%), compared to 176 for the whole five years.
- Sovereign Network Group – 196 (69%), compared to 284 for the whole five years.

Further statistical analysis of fixed term tenancy trends can be found in an appendix to this report.

5. Tenancy types, terms and renewal

Typically, registered providers currently grant two types of tenancies:

- lifetime tenancies (assured tenancy by registered providers or secure tenancy by local authority registered providers). Lifetime tenancies give tenants greater security, as it can be lifelong and only ends if the tenant chooses to leave or is evicted for a valid, legal reason. An assured tenancy usually continues indefinitely and does not have a fixed end date unless a tenant gives notice or they are evicted for a legal reason. A notice of eviction must be given and a court order for possession must be obtained before an eviction can take place. A periodic assured tenancy is a type of lifetime tenancy. There is no fixed end date, and the tenancy continues from one rent period to the next. These tenancies have greater security for a tenant compared to a fixed term tenancy, as there needs to be a specific reason and a court order to end the tenancy.

- fixed term tenancies. A tenancy for a set period, with a clear start and end date, during which time, legally binding terms, with the tenant responsible for the rent until the end date unless they can negotiate to end the tenancy early (sometimes there may be a break clause that allows for a fixed term tenancy to end early under specific conditions). When the fixed term expires, the tenancy can either end, be renewed with another fixed term, or transition to a rolling tenancy or a lifetime tenancy.

Additionally, registered providers sometimes grant a residential license to occupy. A license agreement is generally for a short term, on a non-exclusive basis. These agreements must be used in limited circumstances, such as when a person will be temporarily (for a few weeks or months, but not years) occupying a property, or when they don't have sole occupation of their home (due to sharing a bathroom, kitchen, or front door with one or more other household).

The Renters' Rights Act 2025 will eliminate fixed term assured tenancies. Instead, all fixed term tenancies will become periodic assured tenancy, allowing tenants to stay until they give two months' notice. Once a date has been confirmed for fixed term tenancies to be abolished in the social rented sector, and after the Regulator of Social Housing has updated its tenancy standard, we shall update this section of this tenancy strategy.

The Regulator of Social Housing expects registered providers to publish their own tenancy policies, that have regard to the Dorset Council tenancy strategy, and explain –

- the types of tenancies they will grant
- the circumstances when they will grant specific types of tenancies
- the length of term they will use when fixed term tenancies are granted
- The circumstances in which they will renew tenancies

We want to support registered providers with their tenancy policies, as these policies contribute towards the aims of our homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, our housing allocation scheme and our housing strategy. Our expectations about social housing tenure are explained below.

5.1. Lifetime tenancies

Enabling tenants to have the most secure form of tenure appropriate helps create stable and sustainable communities. When registered providers are determining the tenure to offer, we expect them to offer the longest tenancies feasible and grant assured tenancies. This is particularly important for tenants with children.

We expect registered providers to grant assured tenancies to the following groups –

- individuals who were previously tenants under an assured tenancy (for the same or a different property), where someone in the household has been a victim of domestic abuse, and the new tenancy is granted as a result.
- households containing individuals over the age of 55 years.
- households containing one or more person who are vulnerable by reason of age, disability or illness, and households with children.

5.2. Fixed term tenancies

The UK Parliament has approved legislation to abolish fixed term tenancies and replace them with periodic assured tenancies in England. No date has been set for when this will happen for social rented sector. Until then, registered providers are permitted to continue to grant fixed-term tenancies.

We expect registered providers to grant fixed-term tenancies where it aligns appropriately with the intended purpose of the housing, the sustainability of the community, the household’s needs, and the efficient utilisation of stock.

An example of when a fixed term tenancy might be best is for social housing provision that is for people who have undergone a specific adverse experience, to allow them an opportunity to recover and to transition towards general needs social rented housing. (An example of this, is the UK government’s rough sleeper’s accommodation project 2021 to 2024, which required people allocated homes provided through this project be given a fixed term tenancy of two years).

When registered providers offer fixed term tenancies, we expect them to consistently grant fixed terms of at least five years. This should follow any initial probationary period (which typically spans twelve months but can be extended if the tenant breaches the tenancy).

People who have been offered a fixed-term tenancy can ask the registered provider to review the decision regarding the specific term length. We expect the registered provider to maintain the original offer open until the review is completed.

In exceptional circumstances, registered providers may grant fixed-term tenancies for a term less than five years in general-needs housing (subject to any probationary period). In these cases, we expect registered providers to always first assess whether the reason for the shorter term offered can be effectively addressed through a probationary period or an assured short-hold tenancy.

We expect such exceptional circumstances to be extreme in nature and infrequent.

Fixed term tenancies may more commonly be granted for supported accommodation types that are designed for people who are transitioning to independent living.

Any fixed-term tenancies granted in exceptional circumstances must be for a minimum of two years and we do not expect them to be used where –

- the applicant requires substantial adaptations to their home (for instance, works worth more than £3,000 or equivalent to a flat floor shower).
- applicants have vulnerable adults (including older persons) or children residing within their household.

Fixed-term tenancies for a minimum of two years may also be granted where necessary to –

- comply with a legislative directive or UK government requirement
- comply with other recommendation (including funding requirements)
- due to the nature and construction of the premises necessitating the use of short-term tenancy.

We expect affordable rent tenancies to initially be granted as fixed-term tenancies, until registered providers are required to replace these with periodic assured tenancies. Upon the conclusion of the initial tenancy, we expect registered providers to carefully consider all circumstances to determine whether to grant another affordable rent tenancy or an alternative type of tenancy.

We expect registered providers to offer the most secure tenure possible, and consider the following factors –

- the purpose of the accommodation
- the needs of the person and their household, including any reasonable or additional preferences they may be entitled to under our housing allocation scheme
- the sustainability of the community
- the efficient use of their housing stock

5.3. Tenancy Renewal

When a fixed term tenancy comes to an end, we want registered providers to decide what might be the most appropriate tenancy to issue. If there are matters concerning breach of tenancy conditions, these should be dealt with outside of and ideally before any decisions about the most appropriate type of tenancy a tenant should be granted. Actions concerning breach of tenancy conditions should not be delayed until a decision must be made about whether a tenancy is renewed.

We expect all registered providers to ensure that all fixed-term tenancies are renewed at the expiry of their fixed term, to become another fixed term tenancy, or a lifetime tenancy. We expect the tenancy renewal process to allow sufficient time for consideration of all relevant issues and for appeals to be made. We expect registered providers to initiate tenancy reviews at least nine months prior to the end of the fixed term, and ideally twelve months prior to the end of the fixed term.

We expect registered providers to give written notice to the tenant, stating either that they propose to grant another tenancy on the expiry of the fixed term or that they do not propose to grant another tenancy.

From the outset when a registered provider issues a fixed term tenancy, we expect them to assume that they will grant a new tenancy, which will either be a lifetime tenancy or a fixed-term tenancy for a term at least equivalent to the current fixed term.

We expect that when a registered provider is considering whether to renew a fixed term tenancy the needs of the whole household, neighbours and community, will be assessed. If a registered provider decides there is a valid reason not to extend a tenancy for at least the same term, we expect them to provide the tenant a clear and full explanation. We expect that this includes information about available alternative tenancies (including lifetime tenancies). Decisions are expected to adhere to the registered provider’s own tenancy policy, be in the interest of good housing management and be proportionate to the tenant’s personal circumstances.

Examples of valid reasons for not renewing the tenancy for the current property include:

- the home is under-occupied in accordance with the social sector size criteria.
- there are unused, substantial adaptations.

If a registered provider does not renew a tenancy, we expect them to consider on a case-by-case basis –

- providing or finding an alternative suitably priced and sized home.
- offering financial or other incentives to encourage tenants to relocate.
- working with us or another registered provider that owns or manages dwellings in the Dorset Council area to provide a suitable home.
- supporting the household into affordable or market rent or owner occupation if appropriate to their social and financial circumstances.

We expect registered providers to avoid including tenant rent arrears in decisions on tenancy renewals. We expect registered providers to prioritise other methods to resolve rent arrears.

We also expect registered providers to avoid including complaints due to antisocial behaviour in decisions on tenancy renewals. We welcome an approach where any breaches of tenancy are dealt with under the normal possession process, allowing a court to consider the case. In exceptional circumstances, if registered providers do consider non-renewal of tenancy because of antisocial behaviour, we expect that community care needs (e.g. social care needs, domiciliary care needs, health care needs, etc) are included in any assessment.

We acknowledge that sometimes, tenants with fixed term tenancies do not engage with the registered providers' tenancy review. We expect a registered provider to explore whether the tenant has any vulnerability affecting their ability to engage and to make reasonable adjustments. Where this is complete, we expect a registered provider to consider not renewing a tenancy.

We expect registered providers to maintain their rules on tenancy renewal for at least 2 years after their policies are published. This offers some security to tenants about renewal criteria.

6. Tenancy decisions

The Regulator of Social Housing requires registered providers to publish tenancy policies that explain:

- how tenants can ask for a review of a decision not to renew a fixed-term tenancy.
- how tenants can make a complaint about a fixed term tenancy decision.
- how they will provide advice and assistance to tenants on finding alternative accommodation when they decide not to grant another tenancy.

6.1. Reviews and complaints against tenancy decisions
We expect registered providers to publish their renewal and appeals processes in a form that is clear and accessible. Timescales should be clear and start early enough to ensure homelessness is prevented.

We expect registered providers to include information about statutory reviews in their tenancy policies. We expect tenants to be aware of their right to get independent advice and support in seeking a review of any decision about their tenancy. This includes decisions not to renew fixed-term tenancies.

When sending formal notice of the decision not to grant another tenancy, we expect registered providers to advise tenants to seek independent advice on requesting a review.

Furthermore, we accept that registered providers have the right to review a decision they make not to renew a tenancy or to serve notice seeking possession.

6.2. Finding alternative accommodation
Before registered providers conclude their decision regarding a tenancy review, we expect them to explore potential housing alternatives to prevent homelessness.

We expect registered providers to offer guidance and assistance to all tenants whose tenancies are not being renewed. We expect registered providers to assist tenants in locating suitable alternative accommodation that meet the specific requirements of their household.

We expect assistance to include:

- ensuring they adhere to statutory guidance on suitability.
- discussing with tenant’s alternative, affordable housing options.
- understanding and considering the tenant’s income and capital resources.
- using the opportunity to connect the household with any additional necessary support, such as employment assistance.

7. Tenancy management

The Regulator of Social Housing requires registered providers to publish tenancy management policies that cover:

- tenancy sustainment
- preventing evictions
- tackling tenancy fraud

We want to support registered providers to successfully deliver the above policies, as they contribute towards the aims of our homelessness and rough sleeping strategy, housing allocation scheme, and housing strategy. Our expectations about these matters are explained below.

7.1. Tenancy sustainment
Tenancy sustainment includes a range of activities designed to reduce the risk of tenants getting into difficulties and to increase their overall well-being. This reduces the number of evictions and abandonments from social housing tenancies.

We expect registered providers to have an effective approach to tenancy sustainment. We want to support registered providers to have tenancy sustainment policies that includes the following types of activities:

- early identification of support needs including sharing information with relevant organisations that might be able to provide appropriate support to the tenant. Examples of support needs include mental health, substance issues, learning disabilities or physical disabilities, (this list is not exhaustive).
  This would include using sensitive lettings of properties for vulnerable tenants. It would be at the lettings stage after a nomination has been made by the council and accepted by the registered provider. The council will always share relevant information about a person we are nominating to a register provider for an allocation of social housing, whenever we are permitted to share it.
- early establishment of relationships when welcoming new tenants and helping them settle into accommodation including working with the whole range of council departments, services and commissioners.
- help furnishing and equipping their home, where needed.
- Consider waiving rent in advance for new tenants who do not have the funds to pay it or would have to pay rent on two homes.
- Make sure that all practice, including communication with tenants such as letters, text messages and online information, is equality sensitive. This includes for example, people experiencing domestic abuse, people with learning disabilities, young people, care leavers, and refugees.

- use effective methods to identify risks and intervene early. This includes improving knowledge and understanding of tenants and carrying out home visits.
- working with and creating networks to support tenants to maintain their tenancies, including agencies that can help with debt advice.
- working collaboratively across multiple agencies to address issues and escalate safeguarding concerns, particularly where Dorset Council's services, including housing, adult social care and children's services, are involved.
- tackling anti-social behaviour and abandonment, including working collaboratively with other agencies. In cases of harassment and anti-social behaviour this includes responding to complaints, providing support and making use of transfer where appropriate. In cases of abandonment, spotting and responding to risk of abandonment and having procedures for suspected abandonments.
- building positive tenant and community connections, by engaging and supporting tenants, and connecting into local communities and services.
- supporting arrears and debt and the use of pre-eviction protocols. This includes income maximisation such as helping tenants with the benefits system, and debt advice. It can also include helping to avoid arrears and debt and managing finances such as arrears and rent repayment plans, early identification of difficulties and responses to missed payments, providing support and using enforcement as last resort.

7.2. Preventing evictions

Tenant evictions are a major cause of homelessness, primarily due to unpaid rent. Other factors include nuisance, improper use of housing, financial risks like unemployment, lack of financial skills, and sudden income loss which can lead to unpaid rent and eviction.

Other risks include underusing subsidies and assistance due to knowledge, shame, or past negative experiences. Unstable housing and insufficient social support also increase the risk. Addiction, physical and mental health problems, and ineffective coping styles can contribute. Housing policies, market conditions, and homelessness prevention policies can also affect eviction rates.

Evictions are traumatic for all, especially families. Registered providers face high costs, and evictions strain homelessness services, increasing overall costs.

Over the past 25 years, policy has shifted from housing the homeless to preventing homelessness and the high costs of evictions has been a consideration. Preventing tenant evictions is a vital part of our homelessness strategy.

We expect registered providers to have effective interventions in place to prevent evictions. We want to support registered providers to have eviction prevention policies that include the following types of activities:

- debt advice, both by telephone and in person, with information to help tenants manage their debt. Face-to-face sessions should include income and expenditure assessments and action plans.
- an intensive multi-method intervention approach for tenants at risk of eviction due to antisocial behaviour. (Good practice examples include help lasting from a few months to over 2 years that provides a systemic approach combining individual, couple, family, and group work to prevent evictions, and workers who can focus on a small number of cases at a time, providing intensive support).
- help for tenants to find organisations that can provide them legal assistance, advice, and representation from a paralegal, solicitor, or barrister or other qualified and authorised legal practitioner.
- support in place for hoarders at risk of eviction (good practice examples include using personalised methods, support groups, workshops, educational materials, referrals, home visits, emotional support, and signposting to legal services and individual counselling).
- mediation that is available for tenants at risk of eviction within two months due to personal, financial, or social circumstances.
- providing information about accessing welfare benefits and grants to help tenants resolve issues leading to eviction.
- one-off financial assistance package for self-sufficient tenants at risk of homelessness due to sudden financial crises (for example case by case assistance that may or may not be required to be repaid and might collaborate or compliment measures the local authority makes available).

7.3. Tackling social housing tenancy fraud

Social housing tenancy fraud is the illegal or fraudulent occupation of a registered providers' home. It causes significant social harm, can lead to antisocial behaviour and deprive legitimate tenants of affordable homes. Common examples include providing false information to let or buy a property, applying for multiple properties when a person is already a social housing tenant, receiving payment to give keys to an unentitled occupant, renting out property without permission, or moving into a property without a legal tenancy when the legal tenant is deceased or has moved away.

Social housing fraud deprives vulnerable people of social housing. With the need for social housing exceeding the supply of existing and new social housing, protecting the stock and taxpayers' investments from fraud is vital. Prevention is more cost-effective than ending tenancies or taking legal action against tenants, employees, suppliers, or others.

We expect registered providers to act against tenancy fraud. We want to support registered providers to have tenancy fraud policies that include the following types of activities:

- a clear policy that is shared with staff, tenants and others on subletting, application, succession, key-selling, right-to-buy and right-to-acquire fraud.
- carrying out their own checks on new applicants before a home is let that includes identity, residency status and tenancy history.
- ensuring that all new tenants completing a housing application form and sign relevant declarations, regardless of how they obtain the tenancy.
- getting colour photographs of new tenants and/or their signatures during the lettings process and reviewing them during tenancy audits.
- conducting annual, risk-based or rolling tenancy audits to check that the authorised tenant is living at the property. They should combine this with other planned visits, such as annual gas safety checks or property valuations.
- training frontline staff to spot fake and forged documents and warning signs of fraud throughout the tenancy lifecycle.

8. Monitoring and reporting

We will monitor the impact of this strategy, to ensure that this tenancy strategy achieves the objectives set out at the beginning of this strategy.

At least annually, we will review official statistics reported by registered providers to the UK government, which are published by the regulator of social housing, and include data on the number of and types of tenancies granted in the Dorset Council area. We shall share and discuss these with registered providers.

Additionally, we will review registered providers tenancy policies whenever they are renewed, to ascertain whether they are incorporating the aims of this tenancy strategy. We shall discuss our findings with them.

We have developed an action plan to support the delivery of our priorities set out in this tenancy strategy.

We shall revise and re-publish this tenancy strategy following the enactment of legislation that abolishes fixed term tenancies and replaces them with periodic assured tenancies.

Action Plan

We intend to deliver the actions in this plan collaboratively with registered providers that own social housing stock in the Dorset Council area.

What	When	Why	How
Review official statistics on types of tenancies granted in Dorset Council area and publish findings.	Autumn/Winter, annually.	To ascertain if types of tenancies granted are consistent with registered provider tenancy policies.	Statistical analysis.
Review contents of tenancy policies.	Ongoing, whenever a tenancy policy is reviewed and republished.	To ascertain how aims of Dorset Council's Tenancy Strategy are being incorporated. To ascertain how required outcomes and specific expectation in Tenancy Standard are being fulfilled. To ascertain consistency with Code of Practice.	Interviews, literature review, comparative analysis.
Review approach to how decisions are made to issue fixed-term tenancies, licences, and lifetime tenancies.	2026	To prepare for forthcoming changes to tenure law in social rented sector, arising from the Renters Rights Act 2025.	Interviews, focus groups, literature review, comparative analysis.
Revise Dorset Council's Tenancy Strategy when fixed term tenancies are replaced with period assured tenancies.	2027	To ensure tenancy strategy is consistent with revisions made to tenancy standard following changes to social housing tenure.	Literature review, report writing.
Review approach to tenancy sustainment.	2028	To help fulfil required outcomes and specific expectation in Tenancy Standard.	Focus groups, literature review, comparative analysis.
Review approach to preventing evictions	2029	To help fulfil specific expectations in Tenancy Standard.	Focus groups, literature review,

			comparative analysis.
Review approaches to tackling social housing tenancy fraud.	2030	To help fulfil specific expectations in Tenancy Standard.	Focus groups, literature review, comparative analysis.

9. Terminology

Dorset Council means the local authority.

Dorset Council area means the area of the local authority.

Registered provider of social housing means the landlord of social housing that is on a register of providers of social housing established by the Regulator of Social Housing. There are two types of registered providers –

- local authority registered providers, these are local authorities that own and manage social housing.
- private registered providers, these are commonly known as housing associations and are also often charitable organisations and for-profit organisations.

Social housing means low-cost rental accommodation that is made available for rent below the market rate, for people whose needs cannot be met by the commercial housing market.

General needs social housing means the bulk of social housing. It includes both self-contained units and non-self-contained bedspaces. It is stock that is not designated for specific client groups or delivered under specific investment programmes.

Supported housing means social housing that is made available only in conjunction with the supply of support. It is made available exclusively to households that include a person who has been identified as needing that support. It falls into one or both of the following categories –

- accommodation that has been designed, structurally altered or refurbished to enable residents with support needs to live independently, and
- has been designated as available only to individuals within an identified group with specific support needs.

Social rent means social housing that is provided by a registered provider (which constitute a majority of rented social housing properties) have been set based on a formula set by the UK government, calculated on the relative value of the property, relative local income levels, and the size of the property to ensure that similar rents are charged for similar types of social housing properties.

Affordable rent means social housing that is provided by a registered provider according to an agreement between that registered provider and Homes England. The social housing is permitted by that agreement to be let at an affordable rent, provided by a registered provider according to an agreement with The Secretary of State and is permitted by that agreement to be let at an affordable rent. The rent for affordable rent housing (inclusive of property related service charges) must not exceed 80% of gross market rent of an equivalent property.

Fixed term tenancies are tenancies of a set length, provided by both local authority registered providers (secure flexible) and registered providers of social housing (assured shorthold). For general needs social housing, the minimum length is five years (though may be shorter in exceptional circumstances) and the maximum length is 20 years.

Lifetime tenancies mean tenancies given for the lifetime of the tenant. When provided by registered providers they are known as assured tenancies, when provided by local authority registered providers they are known as secure tenancies.

Licence agreement means an informal tenancy. They have no set length or end date and are mainly used for supported housing.