

Homes and Neighbourhoods  
222 Upper Street, London, N1 1XR

Report of: Executive Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 5th September 2024

Ward(s): All wards

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## Subject: Fair, Inclusive and Accessible Services Commitment

### 1. Synopsis

- 1.1. Islington Council is committed to delivering fair, inclusive and accessible services to residents as part of the council's commitment to creating a more equal future for Islington's residents and delivering high quality housing landlord services. This service commitment relates to our Homes and Neighbourhoods Services, where we continue to work towards making our standard services suitable for a wide range of our residents, whilst recognising that differential support based on need, is sometimes required to achieve the right outcome. However, we recognise that fair access requires services that can be flexible to individual needs when our standard service offer does not meet the needs of a resident or their household, because of their particular circumstances, mental or physical health conditions or communications needs.
- 1.2. Ensuring our services are fair, accessible and flexible to the needs of residents is something both the Regulator of Social Housing and Housing Ombudsman also require of social landlords, as part of the standards that the Regulator has set and the spotlight report recommendations that the Housing Ombudsman has been make for the whole industry.
- 1.3. Our 'Fair, Inclusive and Accessible Services Commitment' sets out our approach, as a landlord, to adapting our services to meet specific needs of our residents and their households, where residents have individual needs or experience specific barriers.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To recommend the approval of the Fair, Inclusive and Accessible Service Commitment for implementation in the delivery of the council's housing services.
- 2.2. To delegate to the Acting Corporate Director of Homes and Neighbourhoods, the agreement of a reasonable adjustments procedure, which will compliment this commitment in describing how services will deliver the objectives of this commitment.

## 3. Background

### 3.1. Overview

### 3.2. Purpose

- 3.2.1. A dedicated policy providing a solid foundation for all housing policies and procedures which addresses fairness, inclusivity and accessibility to housing services for residents and their households.
- 3.2.2. Islington Council are committed to delivering fair, inclusive and accessible services to residents as part of the council's commitment to creating a more equal future for Islington's resident and delivering high quality housing landlord services. We continue to work towards making our standard services suitable for a wide range of our residents. Delivering the Council's mission for a safe place to call home for Islington residents. However, we recognise that fair access requires services that can be flexible to individual needs when our standard service offer does not meet the needs of a resident or their household, because of their particular circumstances, mental or physical health conditions or communications needs.
- 3.2.3. Our 'Fair, Inclusive and Accessible Services Commitment' sets out our approach to adapting our services to meet specific needs of our residents and their households, where residents have individual needs or experience specific barriers. There will be limits in our ability to adapt our services, related to available resources, such as money, availability of alternative or temporary accommodation and support services for vulnerable people, as local government, and the voluntary sector work within a limited financial setting.

### 3.3. Design

- 3.3.1. The policy has been created with residents, services across Islington Council, partnership services, Islington Tenant Management Organisations, registered housing providers in Islington and the voluntary and community sector. This includes workshops, benchmarking, forums, research, case studies and

complaints, Community drop-in sessions, Let's Talk Islington online platform, and the Housing staff newsletter.

3.3.2. We have conducted a range of engagement including online consultation, virtual meetings and in-person sessions to make sure there are multiple ways residents can get involved and feedback on the policy. (Appendix 6.1.)

3.3.3. The structure of the policy:

- Aim
- Introduction
- Context and legal framework
- Protected characteristics and personal circumstances
- Policy objectives
- Providing fair, inclusive and accessible services (definitions of vulnerabilities and accessibility)
- Identifying when support is needed and household circumstances
- Recording information
- Services delivered to residents
- Examples of how this policy works in practice
- Capacity (the Mental Capacity Act 2005)
- Implementation

3.3.4. The review of this policy is set to the first six months and then yearly. This is because we want to make sure that the policy and implementation actions are suitable and are making a difference. During engagement of the policy colleagues and partners have suggested this timeframe as well.

#### 3.4. **Governance timelines**

- October 2023 – March 2024, Internal and partnership engagement
- March 2024, Resident engagement
- 13th May 2024, Housing Scrutiny Committee
- 27th June 2024, Executive

### 3.5. **Context**

- 3.5.1. Islington Council manage approximately 25,000 tenanted properties and 10,000 leasehold properties.
- 3.5.2. Approximately there are 56,800 people living in the tenanted properties and approximately 12,700 leaseholders (who are named on the lease).
- 3.5.3. There are approximately 15,700 people on the council's waiting list to be housed in Islington. Demonstrating high levels of unmet need for homes or alternative homes within the borough.
- 3.5.4. Islington Council is committed to creating a more equal future for Islington's residents and delivering high quality housing landlord services. The council's mission to provide for a safe place to call home for Islington residents, aims to provide excellent landlord services and within this we recognise the there is a need to, at times deliver differential services based on the more complex needs of our residents, to achieve the right outcomes.
- 3.5.5. The Regulator of Social Housing is in consultation on the Consumer Standards, the final set of standards are anticipated to be applied from April 2024. "The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard – requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints when necessary, influence decision making and hold their landlord to account."
- 3.5.6. The Housing Ombudsman published their report - Spotlight on: Attitudes, respect and right. Relationship of Equals in January 2024, highlighting the need for social landlords to set out their approach to better supporting the needs of their residents. This followed from determinations and paragraph 49 investigations into landlords (including Islington Council', where landlords were falling short of their expectations.
- 3.5.7. Housing Ombudsman states "Landlords must comply with the Equality Act 2010 and may need to adapt normal policies, procedures, or processes to accommodate an individual's needs. Landlords must satisfy themselves that their policy sets out how they will respond to reasonable adjustments requests in line with the Equality Act and that complaints handlers have had appropriate training to deal with such requests."

- The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty.
- Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Housing Act 2004 - Health and safety standards for rented homes
- The Care Act 2014
- Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- Mental Capacity Act

### 3.6. **Research, benchmarking and engagement**

- 3.6.1. We have researched policy papers available online, the various related Acts, Government guidance, the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards, the Housing Ombudsman spotlight reports and have taken into consideration their Special Investigation into our services when developing this policy.
- 3.6.2. Complaints and case studies where resident's vulnerabilities or support needs feature have been reviewed and considered as part of the design of this policy.
- 3.6.3. We have held workshops and have shared the draft policy with internal services and partners including Homes and Neighbourhoods Services, Partners for Improvement Islington (PFI), Tenant Management Organisation management forum (TMOs), Public Health, Adult Social Care, Children Social Services, Single Homeless Project (SHP) Islington Borough Partnership (North Central ICB, University College London Hospitals, Healthwatch, Islington Safeguarding Board, Public Health, Age UK Islington, Primary Care Network, Islington GP Federation, Camden and Islington Foundation Trust). (Appendix 6.2.)
- 3.6.4. Presented and shared the policy with the voluntary and community sector Octopus Communities Network. (Appendix 6.2.)
- 3.6.5. Attended and discussed the policy with other local authorities and registered social housing organisations including Hammersmith and Fulham Council, Waltham Forest Council, Kingston Council, Hackney Council, Haringey Council, Newlon Housing Trust, Clarion Housing, Barnet Homes, Havering Council and Westminster Council.
- 3.6.6. Furthermore, we presented the policy to the Islington Housing Group whose membership includes, Islington Council, Newlon Housing Group, Clarion Housing Group, Hyde Housing, One Housing, Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association, One Housing, SHIAN Housing Association, L&Q Group, Guinness Trust, Barnsbury Housing Association, Peabody Housing Association, Southern Housing.
- 3.6.7. The policy has been shared with Housing Quality Network, who are our critical friend, and have provided feedback. (Appendix 6.3.)
- 3.6.8. The policy has been shared with the Housing Ombudsman.

- 3.6.9. An online resident forum was held, and residents were invited from the Resident Involvement Register which is maintained by Homes and Neighbourhoods. (Appendix 6.1.)
- 3.6.10. We attended Community Drop-in and Tenancy Drop-in sessions and spoke with residents in person. (Appendix 6.1.)
- 3.6.11. A survey and the policy have been published on the Let's Talk Islington platform for resident feedback (Appendix 6.1.). The survey includes questions related to language, lived experience, communicating with housing services and accessibility. (Appendix 6.4.)

## 4. Implications

### 4.1. Financial Implications

- 4.1.1. This policy sets out a commitment towards ensuring that Housing services are delivered in a fair, inclusive and accessible way.
- 4.1.2. There are no direct financial implications arising from this policy. However, cost is one of the key existing considerations influencing our ability to adapt services to every individual needs. As noted in section 1.2 of this covering report and section 2.4 of the policy. This will continue to be the case.
- 4.1.3. It should be acknowledged that in launching this policy, the associated publicity may result in increased approaches to the service and an increased demand on certain service areas, for example aids and adaptations. Communication will need to be managed carefully to ensure that expectations are managed, and we do not see a significant pressure on budgets in these areas.

### 4.2. Legal Implications

- 4.2.1. This policy sets out the framework to ensure the Council complies with the Equalities Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty which is set out under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.
- 4.2.2. The protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010 are: age, disability, being married or in a civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.
- 4.2.3. Under the Public Sector Equality duty requires landlords to make "reasonable adjustments" to enable a disabled person/resident to live in the property. This could involve adjustments to a physical feature or auxiliary aids. Failure to comply with the duty could constitute discrimination under section 21 Equalities Act 2010.
- 4.2.4. The Council officers are required on occasion prior to commencing action against a tenant to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment.

4.2.5. A failure by the Council to take account of a tenant's vulnerability in its decision making or enforcement action could lead to legal challenge or could impact on the outcome of proceedings.

#### 4.3. **Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030**

4.3.1. This policy covers all the services that the council as a landlord offers residents and therefore, some adjustments we are able to make for residents may include those that relate to climate change and climate action such as:

4.3.2. If a resident presents with issues related to damp and mould and mentions difficulty with keeping their home warm, staff will refer them to the SHINE service, who can help them with a range of advice and small measures to keep heating costs down and their home feeling warmer.

4.3.3. We offer residents who are vulnerable to the electric heaters to help them stay warm whilst communal heating systems are repaired – this service is accessed through housing direct and can help residents vulnerable to cold weather due to health, age or mobility issues to keep warm through cold snaps. For extended periods of use, compensation can also be provided.

4.3.4. The council's housing strategy commits the council to considering the environmental impacts and the energy efficiency of our homes, consider how we can invest in homes to improve energy efficiency and therefore reduce the costs for our residents, many of whom find the costs of heating their homes challenging.

4.3.5. This may have negative environmental implications e.g. increases energy use, but the social benefits outweigh such and are an important contribution to creating a fairer Islington'

#### 4.4. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

4.4.1. The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take

account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

- 4.4.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed on 19 April 2024. The main findings are that the policy will provide benefit for residents with protected characteristics and those with other vulnerabilities as it seeks to deliver an equitable service for all residents, flexing wherever possible to the needs of residents and their households, providing an empathetic and adjusted service, where it is feasible to do so within the resources available to those services. The full Equalities Impact Assessment is appended.

## 5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1. The Fair, Inclusive and Accessible Services Commitment has been developed to capture the council's commitment to support residents, many of whom experience periods of additional need or experience specific challenges in their lives. This aligns with the council's ambition for a more equal future and ensuring we achieve the right outcomes for our residents.
- 5.2. The service commitment sets out how we will deliver services to ensure fair, inclusive and accessible and our plans for achieving this, meeting the expectation on us as a social landlord from the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman.

### **Appendices:**

- Proposed Homes and Neighbourhoods – Fair, Inclusive and Accessible Services Commitment
- Equalities Impact Assessment on this policy

### **Final report clearance:**

Authorised by: Executive Member for Homes and Neighbourhoods

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