



## Newark and Sherwood District Council – Strategic Housing

### Housing Options: Rent Deposit Scheme

Homelessness is a complex issue and the prevention and tackling of homelessness continues to be a key priority for Newark and Sherwood District Council.

Our overall aim is to prevent homelessness wherever possible through the provision of appropriate advice and support to those at risk and by intervening at the earliest possible stage. The Homelessness Strategy aims to improve and develop homelessness services in Newark and Sherwood. Within this, four Core Objectives have been set and the subsequent action plan is framed around these. They are:

1. To prevent homelessness, wherever possible
2. To provide help at the point of homelessness
3. To provide an accessible, modern and effective Housing Options Service
4. To develop effective partnerships, as a vehicle for providing holistic services.

The Rent Deposit Scheme exists to enable households, who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, to gain access to privately rented accommodation by providing a written guarantee by the District Council's Housing Options Service. The guarantee can be used against arrears or damage to the property or its contents, in agreement with the Housing Options Team, and only up to the maximum value of the bond provided at the start of the tenancy.

The deposit is **NOT** a cash payment.

#### **Eligibility Criteria**

1. The applicant is homeless or threatened with homelessness.
2. Applicants would be accepted as statutory homeless or threatened with homelessness under the provisions of the Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and are being made a final offer of privately rented accommodation as per the Housing Act 1996 amended by the Localism Act 2011.
3. The applicant has no savings or access to savings.
4. The applicant is on a low income.
5. The applicant has a local connection with Newark and Sherwood (as defined by the Housing Act 1996)

#### **N.B.**

Applicants who breach either the Rent Deposit Scheme Agreement or Tenancy Agreement may be found intentionally homeless, under the provisions of the Housing Act 1996 as

amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, should they make a statutory application to a Local Authority as a result of becoming homeless.

### **Procedure**

1. Applicant completes the RDS application for assessment and sends it to the Housing Options Team for a decision.
2. The Landlord Liaison Officer makes an initial contact with the applicant to discuss eligibility and any currently available properties.
3. If the applicant meets the basic eligibility criteria, financial checks associated with the Council will be carried out by the Administrative Officer on these applications to ensure no money is outstanding to the Council, should debts be outstanding and unaddressed the application may be refused.
4. The information will then be passed to the Landlord Liaison Officer to verify the completed checks, carry out an affordability assessment and obtain Landlord and Employer references as appropriate; a final decision will be made by the Senior Housing Options Officer as soon as possible after completion of the checks and verification.
5. If unsuccessful the Landlord Liaison Officer will contact the applicant to discuss other housing options. If no contact is made, a letter will be sent explaining this to the applicant.
6. If accepted, the applicant will be contacted by the Landlord Liaison Officer to arrange liaison with the relevant landlord or agent to secure a tenancy as appropriate. If the applicant is able to self-serve, they will be issued a 'Certificate of Acceptance' .
7. If a Landlord is located who agrees to accept the Rent Deposit Scheme, the Landlord Liaison Officer will liaise with the landlord/agent of the property explaining the procedure to follow, including taking an inventory, photographs and signing of agreements .
8. A property inspection will be conducted by the Landlord Liaison Officer to give guidance on suitability of the chosen property prior to the applicant moving to ensure the property is suitable under the Housing Health & Safety Rating Scheme guidelines. The LLO will check with NSDC Environmental Health that there are no relevant action/notices against the landlord.
9. The Landlord Liaison Officer must ensure that Gas safety certificates (carried out each year) and Energy Performance certificates (carried out every 10 years by independent surveyors as instructed by the landlord) are in place and updated if expiry is within the duration of the bond guarantee period. The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 require a smoke alarm on every floor of a private rented property. Carbon Monoxide detectors are only enforceable where there is solid fuel present, but it is seen as good practice to have them in all properties.
10. The Landlord Liaison Officer will carry out a property inventory and take photographs, keeping copies of all documents on file for future reference. All parties must agree and sign the inventory as soon as possible after the tenancy commences.
11. If the applicant is making a claim for housing benefit then the Landlord Liaison Officer will assist in completing the necessary paperwork and verifying for the Housing Benefits Section. An agreement is in place with Housing Benefits to assist with fast tracking claims wherever possible. By agreeing to the Rent Deposit Scheme, an applicant is

agreeing consent for Housing Options Officers to liaise with Housing Benefits to ensure the smooth processing and payment of claims. At this stage the Rent Deposit agreement and the Service Level Agreement should be signed and dated by the landlord, Council and tenant and copies issued to all parties.

12. The Landlord Liaison Officer will contact both the Landlord and Applicant to see if there are any issues and to check that the conditions of the tenancy agreement are being adhered to and make a subsequent home visit within 8 weeks of the tenancy commencement.

13. The District Council has the discretion to refuse any Rent Deposit Applications.

#### Subsequent Support

The Rent Deposit Scheme database includes dates for proposed visits and consequential notes for completion which needs to be kept up to date at all times to fully inform all officers of the current situation with each guarantee. The required dates to carry out a first visit are after 6 weeks. A subsequent visit after 5 months will ensure that either the tenancy is going to be renewed after 6 months, to resolve any issues which may result in homelessness being prevented or a later claim being made against the guarantee or to ensure that a correct notice to quit is being issued if the tenant is not remaining in the property. These visits will be repeated at appropriate intervals depending on the support required or risk to be managed.

The applicant or landlord can contact the Landlord Liaison Officer at anytime for support/ advice or assistance which will be available throughout the tenancy to both tenant and landlord with regard to the sustaining/maintaining of the tenancy agreements or their rights and responsibilities.

#### Length of Rent Deposit Scheme

The rent deposit guarantee will remain available for the duration of the tenancy. If the tenant is in a position to save the money to pay back the deposit, they will be encouraged to do this to give them flexibility to move on as appropriate. The continuation of the Bond Scheme is at the discretion of the Senior Housing Options Officer and Housing Options Team. In some circumstances, the bond may be transferred to another property if the tenant can demonstrate sound reasons for the move. This will be at the discretion of the Senior Housing Options Officer.

#### Claims

If the landlord wishes to make a claim for arrears, loss or damage to the property; they will need to submit evidence to support the claim i.e. pictures of damage, quotes for works or rent statements showing build- up of arrears within 7 days of the tenant ceasing to occupy the property. This evidence should be cross referenced with any original documentation taken. Claims made after that time may not be considered.

#### Repayment of claims

For any claim payments that are made, the applicant will be liable to repay the Council. The relevant officer must contact the applicant to arrange payment, agreeing in writing details of any payment plan. If no payment is made an invoice can be raised through Finance, non-payment will then be chased as a sundry debtor by the finance department.

### Reviewing the Bond Guarantee Scheme

Review of the procedure and the funding made available will be carried out at the beginning of each year by the Housing Options, Energy and Home Support Business Manager, the Senior Housing Options Officer and the Landlord Liaison Officer to inform the services future budget provision for bond guarantees, this will be done in consultation with the Housing Options Officers on how effective the scheme is as a homelessness prevention tool.