



REPORT TO: HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE ON 27 JUNE 2023

SUBJECT: DECORATION ALLOWANCE POLICY

BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND FINANCE)

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the requirement to review the Decoration Allowance Policy, and presents the Committee with an amended Policy for approval.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (G) 3 and 4 of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to the management and maintenance of the Council's housing stock, and dealing with the allocation and letting of houses.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Housing and Community Safety Committee:**
- (i) notes the need to review the Decoration Allowance Policy to reflect changes in operational practice and process as set in Section 3; and**
 - (ii) considers and approves the amended Decoration Allowance Policy as set out in Section 4 and APPENDIX I.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Decoration Allowance Policy was approved by Communities Committee on 19 March 2008 for implementation from 1 April 2008 (Paragraph 6 of the Minute refers). The policy outlined the circumstances under which the Council would help tenants to make good the decoration of their homes following a re-let or major works, by providing decoration vouchers, or by undertaking decoration where a tenant is unable to do so.
- 3.2 On 23 April 2013, the Communities Committee considered a further review of the original Decoration Voucher Scheme (Paragraph 7 of the Minute refers) and agreed to a pilot which aimed to:

- address procurement concerns;
 - achieve better value for money for the Council;
 - reduce administration in comparison to the previous voucher scheme; and
 - provide tenants with an improved level of service.
- 3.3 Following an appraisal of this pilot, which concluded that it was successful and highlighted the positive customer feedback achieved, the Communities Committee approved the Decoration Voucher Scheme on 17 December 2013 and it was adopted on a permanent basis from 1 April 2014 (Paragraph 8 of the Minute refers).
- 3.4 A pilot of the void management process was undertaken in 2019 which aimed to improve void re-let time, reduce void rent loss and allow properties to be allocated quicker and more efficiently. As part of this pilot, decoration to void properties was no longer carried out. These properties were left in a clean condition with basic preparatory work undertaken, and a decoration pack was provided to the incoming tenant to carry out their own decoration. The area housing officer would specify if the tenant had vulnerabilities which would require that the property be decorated for them, before sign up.
- 3.5 The success of this pilot resulted in changes to the Void Management Policy, which was updated, after agreement with the Head of Service, in August 2020 to take into account the changes implemented.
- 3.6 These operational changes mean that the Decoration Allowance Policy requires updating.

4. DECORATION ALLOWANCE POLICY

- 4.1 The revised Decoration Allowance Policy (**APPENDIX I**) sets out the framework required for addressing appropriate standards of decoration within Moray Council housing stock at various stages of a tenancy, to ensure compliance with the Lettings Standard and housing legislation.
- 4.2 The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, (Section 27 and Schedule 4) states that landlords must carry out any necessary work within a reasonable timescale, and make good any damage caused by them in carrying out the work.
- 4.3 The Letting Standard sets out the minimum standard a property should meet upon re-let. It states that the internal decoration will be of an acceptable standard. No decoration is carried out to void properties unless the tenant requires the service due to any specific needs or vulnerabilities or the internal decoration is below that defined in the Letting Standard, for example is either:
- badly marked or smoke stained;
 - painted a dark or strong colour which would be difficult to cover; or
 - in poor condition, for example if the wallpaper is torn.
- The majority of voids will have basic preparation work done and paint packs will be awarded, on a room by room basis.
- 4.4 The Decoration Allowance Policy details the circumstances when decoration packs and compensatory payments will be issued and notes that they are intended:

- as a contribution towards the cost of materials and equipment needed to carry out internal decoration work, but may not always meet the full costs involved in decoration due to tenant choice of aesthetics, etc.
 - to offer the tenant more choice and flexibility when decorating their home.
- The policy specifies the eligibility criteria to be met in order for the Council to provide a decoration service and what it will entail.

4.5 Decoration packs are issued in the form of a decoration voucher. The voucher is valid for six months and can only be used with the nominated approved retailer, Johnstone’s Trade Decorating Centre.

4.6 Compensation payments may be awarded as a result of damage to decoration following repair work, or as a payment towards remedial works following a planned improvement or upgrade. Compensation payments will be based on average trade prices and will increase annually in line with inflation. Compensation allowances for 2023 – 2024 are set out below.

	Decoration Allowance	Flooring Allowance
Kitchen upgrade	No allowance – kitchen will be painted after an upgrade	£100
Heating upgrade	£200	No flooring allowance required
Blinds payment (due to windows upgrade)	£100	No flooring allowance required

4.7 The changes to the Decoration Allowance Policy are required in order to reflect current operational practices and internal processes already in place. There is no requirement to consult with tenants or other stakeholders as there are no proposals which would significantly affect the tenant (Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, Section 54).

5. FUTURE ACTIONS

5.1 Subject to this Committee’s approval of the amended Decoration Allowance Policy, an implementation plan will be developed. This plan will propose a “go live” date of 31 July 2023, and will involve updating supporting procedures and reviewing all information resources to reflect the agreed changes.

5.2 The compensation payments will be updated annually in line with inflation. Operational procedures will detail these costs to support staff in their delivery of the policy.

6. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

The Corporate Plan and the Moray 10 Year Plan (LOIP) identify the need to provide high quality affordable housing, and priority 4 of the Local Housing Strategy aims to improve the condition and energy efficiency of social housing stock.

(b) Policy and Legal

There are no policy and legal implications arising from this report.

(c) Financial implications

The overall increased spend, arising from the higher compensation payments, will be absorbed from the current decoration budget held by the Housing Asset Team.

(d) Risk Implications

There are no risk implications arising from this report.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

(f) Property

There are no property implications arising from this report.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

There are no equalities/socio economic impacts arising from this report.

(h) Climate Change and Biodiversity Impacts

There are no climate change or Biodiversity impacts arising from this report.

(i) Consultations

Consultation on this report has taken place with the Head of Housing and Property, Housing Services Manager, Housing Strategy and Development Manager, Building Services Manager, Officers within the Housing Service, Chief Financial Officer, Georgina Anderson (Legal Services Senior Solicitor) and Lindsey Robinson (Committee Services Officer) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 This report updates the Housing and Community Safety Committee on the requirement to review the Decoration Allowance Policy, which reflects changes in operational processes and practice, and seeks Committee approval of the Decoration Policy.

Author of Report: Janice Heron (Housing Policy and Compliance Officer)
Background Papers: Held by author
Ref: SPMAN-1285234812-1331