

## Briefing Notes



# Exploring the vital role of lettings standards: Flooring and tenant wellbeing



Monday 13 November 2023

## Introduction

- Presentation given by Anne Marie from Altair.
- Altair has been commissioned by Longleigh Foundation to conduct research on the provision of floor covering across mainland UK.
- Purpose of this piece of research is that Longleigh is a grant maker and they found that a lot of their grant was being used on provision of floor coverings.

## Topics discussed

Letting standards in particular floor coverings in social housing. Particularly relevant because there has been a lot of speculation about whether there will be anything in floor standards in the new decent home standards. Speculation because on one side everyone appreciates that letting standards need to be better but there are also cost implications as well.

In particular, it has been made mandatory in Wales so likely it will come in England as well.

## How do we better impact?

- Altair commissioned to do the work and has been very much focused on delivering the works and focused on engaging works.
- Two reports so far
- A Steering group set up – representing organisations who support social housing sector to make sure that they have a really care steer as to how to influence things.

## Key statistical findings:

First learning report focused on current picture (The Provision of Floor Coverings in Social Housing).  
Published in May 2023.

- 760,000 people living in social housing w/o floor covering in the UK.
- 80% social homes let w/o floor covering.
- 90% general needs accommodation w/o floor covering.
- 61% landlords don't have processes in place to reinstall floor coverings.
- 17% landlords remove floor coverings each time they relet.

## Understanding barriers to floor coverings:

- Main barriers: financial costs to the organisation, ongoing maintenance of floor coverings, unnecessary delays to the void process, lack of clarity between landlord/tenant responsibilities for ongoing maintenance.
- Other barriers: risk of fleas, pest infestations, difficulty obtaining floor fitters, organisational capacity to deliver flooring projects, not a regulatory requirement, inability to cater for tenant choice, supply line challenges.

## Learning Report 2: Tenant Perspectives:

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Tenant's experience/perspective:

- 6 interviews conducted with tenants who had different experiences –
- 6 focus groups (face to face) – with those who had floor coverings and who didn't.
- MRI Software survey – quantitative data to understand impact of lack of floor coverings and experiences. This is a validating element.

From MRI Software Survey:

- Debts and costs: Takes over 50% people to repay costs of floor coverings when they move in.
- Noise – attendees discussed the impact e.g. damages relations.
- Feeling of home – doesn't feel homely.
- Community integration – 57% people found it difficult to integrate into the community (more prevalent amongst young people and those have dependants).
- Heat – lack of floor covering causes more cold.
- Environmental
- Impracticalities – installing carpet after having furniture installed.
- Stigma – “poor” word used by tenants.

## Cost impact

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- Easier to move in
- Cost of floor covering
- Quality

## Points from discussion

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- Noise – something covered by new Ombudsman.

- Always felt that relaxing standards need to improve. Puts the onus on the incoming tenant to try and resolve the outstanding issues. Floor coverings and furnishings need to be considered – we saw consequences of people being unable to undertake tenancies and budgeting. Negative impact on the tenant in terms of self-worth and housing associations in terms of turnover. We considered risk assessment on incoming tenant and how doing floor coverings made people feel grateful and that they had a good fresh start. If you start better, more likely to start and retain better and people will value property more greatly as well. MSVT offers furnishing packs.
- If you do retain floor coverings – how do you manage the standards? E.g. do you take them out?
- How would cost saving work out for landlords who are retaining?
- If you look at other elements apart from floor coverings – e.g. wash machine etc you start to think about building blocks required for a home but we do stigmatise them. We are building in obstacles for people to have a home rather than aiding them. The right thing to do varies on your stock, the tenants etc. Taking a tailored approach to better support people and their needs is what needs to happen when it comes to relet and having a void standard. The objective is to create a sense of creating a home for someone.
- Longleigh is kind of like a segmentation due to their grant giving.
- South London – ‘no brainer’ that we should be offering floor coverings. Their organisation is including vinyl floor coverings as a standard. New built – provide floor coverings, not just relets. London – the regulator said there are more v2 and v3 and doesn’t see them going v1.
- Conversation re role of Housing Officer and tenancy support started but nowhere near complete.
- Decent home standards are the minimum requirements. Choice and tailored approach are really important.
- Cost benefit analysis – reductions to lead of reletting, expectation of an average cost of property £1000. Improvement of void relets.
- Estimate that a high percentage of low level ASB cases relating to noise nuisance are exacerbated by lack of floor coverings etc.. If floor coverings are given, need to consider and be clear on liability for on-going maintenance/replacement.

## Next session

### What do Executive Directors want boards to know and do about working with customers and communities

A conversations with Michelle Dawson, former Director of Housing and Communities at Abri, Board Member at HACT, and Trustee of Gosport and Fareham Multi Academy Trust

Leadership of all organisations is about collaboration, between Executive and Non-Executive Director, with their customers, communities and wider stakeholders. The demands on social landlords are forever growing, changing and evolving. Keeping abreast of all the new regulatory developments, good practice and opportunities is everyone's responsibility, but none more so than the Directors leading Customer and Community services. Understanding what is in their inbox and how best to provide effective challenge and support is important for any NED. This session will explore this important relationship in any Housing Association.

Speakers: Director of Housing and Communities at Abri, Board Member at HACT, and Trustee of Gosport and Fareham Multi Academy Trust

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