

Succession policy review - Focus group

9 customers attended

Discussion question - Does our succession policy use clear messaging plain English?	Managers response
Section 1: <i>'This policy sets out the rights a person has to succeed to a tenancy on the death of a tenant, and the principles under which we will grant discretionary succession rights to a person who has no such rights'</i> . - The words 'succeed' and 'succession' could make this unclear for many people. Possibly simplify using 'take over' and 'change of tenant' or something similar.	Approved: The wording in this sentence will be amended to reflect the customers suggestion.
Section 3: <i>'A statutory succession overrides any succession by contract, through will or intestacy, or as specified in this policy, and is applicable to both assured and assured shorthold tenancies'</i> . - What does this mean? Can this be explained within the policy.	Approved: An explanation following this sentence will be included to make this point clearer for the reader.
Contractual succession, point v: <i>'They meet any restricted lettings criteria set out in any planning conditions associated with s106 agreements or Rural Exception Sites'</i> . - It's not clear what rural exception means and what the consequences of this would be. Can this be explained within the policy?	Approved: An explanation following this paragraph will be included to reflect the customers question
Discussion question - Is it clear that we must comply with legal measures, have minimal flexibility	Managers response
Yes, paragraph 2 clearer explains the legalities SH have to comply with.	No action required.
Discussion question - Have you any suggestions on our messaging given succession can be a stressful situation?	Managers response
Its really important that the messaging is easy to understand. Using clearer explanations for legal details.	Approved: A few changes will be made to make some of the legal terms clearer. This will be done sympathetically to ensure the explanation is does not make it harder to read.
Include a preliminary paragraph before section 3 (policy details) to list the types of succession. This will make it easier for the reader to navigate to the relevant section. It also prevents anxiety that they will lose their home, if the first succession type doesn't apply to them. People are unlikely to be in their clearest mind when dealing with this, due to nature of bereavement.	Approved: A list of the types of succession will be included in the first section of the policy, and some changes made to the wording of the policy details section.
Minors: <i>'The proposed successor must be 18 years of age to enable them to hold a tenancy. In the case of minors, the tenancy must be held in trust by an adult or the Executor of the Estate until they reach 18 years of age'</i> . Question: What would happen to the minors if there are no immediate family/executor of the estate? Who would be responsible for rehoming the minors? Could anything be added to the policy to explain this or signposting?	Approved: We will add a section to indicate that social services would take responsibility for representing the children/minors and for their welfare.
It is a very difficult time and people deal with grief differently. It's important the messaging is compassionate. It explains what can and cannot happen. EG: Contractual succession, point v: <i>'they will not be granted the tenancy of the property, but instead they will be offered the tenancy of another suitable property'</i> - Suggestion to include: SH will provide help, support and advice during this time. Or something similar	Approved: We will include additional details to reflect the customers suggestion.
Discussion question - Is the discretionary succession option clear?	Managers response
It was clearly explained in the focus group. It is not clearly detailed in the policy, as it is referred to as <i>'Persons with no rights to succeed'</i> and the paragraph does not mention the word 'discretionary'. Statutory and contractual succession have their own paragraphs, discretionary and survivorship do not.	Approved: The wording will be amended to reflect the customers comments.
Discussion question - Do you think there should be a page on the website?	Managers response
All customers agreed that there should be a page dedicated to succession on the website, but should be easy to identify.	For approval: We will plan time with our communications team to discuss the inclusion of a specific page for succession/bereavement on our website. Update: a new page has been created on the website. The term 'Bereavement' has been used to ensure customers can easily find the information they require.
Many people would not know what succession was so wouldn't be able to find the information, suggestion for the page to be called 'Bereavement' as this would be clearer, it can then explain succession.	

Discussion question - If yes, what information should we include?	Managers response
Explanations for the different types of succession (contractual, discretionary, statutory and survivorship). Include scenarios that would be relatable.	<p>For approval: All points raised will be share with our communications team when discussing a dedicated page on the website. <i>Update: All points raised by customers have been included in the new 'Bereavement' page on the website.</i></p>
Include drop down boxes with easy to navigate headings. EG: My spouse has died - My parent has died (I'm over 18) - My parent has died (I'm under 18)	
Use clear and easy to read what to do next instructions in the drop down boxes mentioned above	
Explanations for sole tenancy and joint tenancy	
Signpost to other useful advice and support agencies for bereavement (local and national)	
Direct to NM for anyone that would like help and advice	
FAQ's including the general principles of succession	
Layout the page in an easy to read, compassionate manner. Making sure the most important information is at the top of the page.	
Other questions/comments	Managers response
Are there any facilities for a sole tenant to make their son/daughter a joint tenant, if they live at the property on a permanent basis?	It is possible but unlikely. This would need to be effected by way of an assignment from sole to joint, with the son or daughter becoming a tenant without having to go through the waiting list process, so this would be viewed as unfair to those patiently waiting on the council's waiting list and who are likely to be in more housing need.