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The Provision of Floor Coverings in Social Housing

Learning Report 3: Landlord Perspectives

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About Altair

Altair Ltd is a specialist consultancy operating across the social housing sector. We have been providing varied and creative solutions to our clients for over ten years. Our consultancy and advisory services include supporting leaders on governance, regulation, transformation and change, strategy, policy and research, and property development strategy and delivery.



A grant-making partner for the social housing sector

About The Lingleigh Foundation

Lingleigh is a grant-making charitable foundation dedicated to supporting the individuals and communities served by the social housing sector.

Our mission is the reason why we exist. It is our purpose, our cause and it is: to support transformation in the lives of residents and communities, becoming the charity partner to the social housing sector.

Foreword

I am pleased to present Lingleigh Foundation's latest learning report into the provision of floor coverings on social housing. Having explored the tenant experience in a previous published report, this iteration is focused on the landlord perspective.

We at Lingleigh knew it was vital to understand the position of landlords in this research as landlords have the power to set the housing standard for their tenants, and so Altair has been commissioned to explore all stakeholders in this topic.

Throughout our research, the team at Altair have engaged with landlords across the social housing sector. This report voices the views and experiences of these social housing landlords, who provide just short of 5 million homes across England, Scotland, and Wales. It follows on from earlier learning reports on the wider context and the tenant perspective of floor coverings.

Our first learning report told us about key barriers landlords face around the provision of flooring, including financial costs, delays to void processes, ongoing maintenance and a lack of clarity about the responsibilities between landlord and tenant. Our latest report, based on discussions with landlords, explains these pressures in more detail and explores how organisations have overcome them.

We find that landlords are clear on the moral case for the provision of floor coverings, with most saying they know it's the right thing to do for their tenants. But we can also conclude that the financial cost is a significant barrier for landlords, with the net cost of providing floor coverings, on average, £1.85 per week for a flat and £2.50 per week for a house.

Landlords have also shared their experiences of a challenging operating environment, with reduced income alongside multiple competing pressures. This naturally affects an organisation's ability to prioritise or focus on their standards and approaches to provision of flooring in social housing.

Despite the financial impact, our research shows that some landlords are committed to setting high standards for voids and cite many benefits from doing so. These include improved satisfaction rates for tenants and lettings staff, a reduction in turnover rates and a reduction in responsive repairs.

Finally, I am happy this report shares a key regulatory update from Wales, where the new version of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard sets an expectation that social landlords provide floor coverings for their tenants at point of let. This regulatory change was influenced by the Tai Pawb and TPAS Wales 'Floored' report, which also inspired our current research project.

With the current review of the Decent Homes Standard in England by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, I hope our research will give policy makers a stronger understanding of the costs and benefits of the provision of floor coverings by social landlords. Ultimately, I want it to inspire a change in standards. I want social housing tenants to be able to walk into their new homes on appropriate coverings rather than bare floors. In the meantime, I will continue to challenge landlords on their social purpose and question whether they are doing all they can to provide a home that both tenants and staff can be proud of.

Aileen Edmunds
Chief Executive, Lingleigh Foundation

Executive summary

This report is the third and final learning report produced by Altair Consultancy and Advisory Services (Altair) and commissioned by Lingleigh Foundation (Lingleigh), a grant making partner for the social housing sector.

Our first learning report¹, published in May 2023, set the scene for the provision of floor coverings in social housing. Our second learning report,² published in September 2023, focused on the experience and perspectives of tenants. This learning report is focused on the perspectives of **landlords**.

For clarity of our reporting, when we describe a 'lack of' floor coverings, we are describing homes that are let without floor coverings in all rooms aside from the Kitchen and Bathroom, which are currently captured under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS³) requirements.

In this paper, we will share the experiences of landlords alongside their rationale for both providing and not providing flooring at the point of let. This paper seeks to share the challenges faced by landlords in relation to the provision of flooring at the point of let.

This paper is focussed on landlord experience around the barriers we identified in our learning report and during our discussions with landlords as follows:

- financial cost,
- delays to void and lettings processes,
- ongoing maintenance and responsibility,
- customer choice,
- fleas and other infestation, and,
- supply line, in terms of goods and skilled labour.

This report also provides three case studies of organisations providing floor coverings at the point of let, Teign, Monmouthshire and B3Living. This is in addition to Thirteen Housing Group, of which there is a case study in our first learning report.

¹ [Learning Report 1: Scene Setting | Altair \(altairltd.co.uk\)](#)

² [Learning Report 2: Tenant Perspectives | Altair \(altairltd.co.uk\)](#)

³ [Housing health and safety rating system \(HHSRS\): guidance for landlords and property-related professionals - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The experiences of these case studies, and other landlords providing floor coverings at point of let, has shown the benefit of the provision of floor coverings in a variety of ways, such as:

- Decrease in void turnover rate
- Higher customer satisfaction
- Higher employee satisfaction
- Reduced arrears rates
- Reduced ongoing maintenance costs
- Less pressure on housing officer's workload

We also provide an update in this report on a change in the Regulatory landscape in Wales, where the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (2023)⁴ sets the expectation that floor coverings be provided at the point of let.

Next steps

This report is the third and final of our learning reports. The next phase of our research is to bring together the wider landscape in the context of our learnings from our previous reports.

In our focus on wider landscape, we intend to consider other factors at play, specifically the role of regulation, government policy and the role of the charitable sector. We also intend to explore funding streams that are currently being used for the provision of floor coverings.

⁴ [Welsh Housing Quality Standard \(2023\) welsh-housing-quality-standard-2023.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

Introduction

About this project

Longleigh commissioned Altair to conduct a research project which investigates the impact of, and opportunities for, UK (Wales, Scotland and England) social housing provider's floor covering standards, keeping tenant voice at the heart of the research.

The overall research piece seeks to:

- Engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including social housing tenants, social housing landlords, grant making organisations, regulatory bodies and charities serving social housing tenants.
- Keep tenant voice at its heart.
- Build on the findings from Tai Pawb's Floored Research⁵ and House to Home, research commissioned by JRF and conducted by Altair in 2018⁶.
- Make practical recommendations to the sector that have the greatest meaningful impact on provision of floor coverings to tenants.
- Articulate a business case that considers the financial, economic and social benefits alongside the costs of any proposals versus maintaining the status quo.

The main purpose of the overall research piece is to ultimately raise the profile of the lack of floor covering provision in social housing and create an opportunity to effect policy change on floor covering provision in social housing in the UK.

This report is our third report of five reports. This report focusses on the perspectives and experiences of tenants. Our reports are:

- Learning Report 1: Scene Setting⁷
- Learning Report 2: Tenant Perspectives⁸
- Learning Report 3: Landlord Perspective

A Steering Group has been recruited to oversee the research project. Steering Group members have been selected based on their role and experience of the social housing sector alongside their ability to influence change. A full list of Steering Group members and their biographies is available in Appendix 1 of this report.

⁵ [Floored \(2020\) TPAS Cymru and Tai Pawb \(2020\) Floored.](#)

⁶ [House to Home \(2018\) House to home: giving social housing tenants a place to call home | JRF](#)

⁷ [Learning Report 1: Scene Setting \(2023\) Learning Report 1: Scene Setting | Altair \(\[altairltd.co.uk\]\(https://altairltd.co.uk\)\)](#)

⁸ [Learning Report 2: Tenant Perspectives \(2023\) Learning Report 2: Tenant Perspectives | Altair \(\[altairltd.co.uk\]\(https://altairltd.co.uk\)\)](#)

Aims of the third report

This third learning report aims to:

- Share the barriers that landlords experience in the provision of floor coverings.
- Share how some landlords have overcome the barriers mentioned.
- Share the cost implications of the provision of floor coverings at the point of let.
- Ultimately, ensure that our research is in collaboration with the sector.

Our third report is based on the findings from:

- Our first and second learning reports, including a survey of social landlords.
- Any new literature published between our previous learning report(s) and the drafting of these findings.
- A series of roundtables held with landlords (Board Members, Executives, Asset Leads and Lettings Leads) between September 2023 and October 2023.
- A series of individual interviews held with landlords between September 2023 and October 2023.

In total we engaged with 34 social housing landlords for our third learning report.

A key regulatory update

Within our first report, scene setting, we set out the regulatory environment for the provision of floor coverings in social housing. In October 2023, Welsh Government released a new version of the Welsh Housing Quality Standard which sets out the expectation that social landlords provide floor coverings at the point of let for their tenants.

Research by Tai Pawb and TPAS Cymru, [Floored](#), was fundamentally important to this change. Three years on from the publication of their research, they have published a new paper highlighting practice amongst social landlords across Wales. It contains many case studies on piloting and adopting new practice in the provision of flooring.



Landlord experiences

Barriers to providing flooring at point of let

Scene setting

- 1.1. In our first learning report, we highlighted that the provision of floor coverings in social housing is not as common as expected. Instead, homes in the private rented sector are much more likely to be let with some form of floor covering than social housing in the UK.
- 1.2. Our research found the current provision of floor coverings at point of let for general needs accommodation is around 10% of homes, with floor coverings more likely to be provided in affordable and intermediate rent (21% of homes), older persons and supported housing (26% of homes) and shared ownership (28% of homes).
- 1.3. Where social landlords do provide flooring beyond legislative requirements, they told us that when they do, they:
 - Install floor coverings in hard-to-let properties.
 - Gift the previous tenants floor coverings to the new incoming tenant.
 - Provide floor coverings in homes on a means-tested basis.
 - Introduce a new void standard that includes floor coverings.
 - Provide floor coverings in new build homes only.

How Social Landlords are funded

- 1.4. Housing organisations have their rental increases tied to rent settlements agreed by each of the three nations' government, which has an impact on their main income stream. Housing organisations therefore have finite resources from which to prioritise their spending.
- 1.5. Housing associations were historically largely funded by a combination of government grant and long-term bank loans. But with tighter capital requirements post the financial crash of 2008 and capital cover requirements, banks became less willing to lend over long-term periods under either a variable or fixed rate basis.
- 1.6. Grant rates from government have also been falling year on year, compensated by an increase in private borrowing by organisations and the development of a cross-subsidy model, involving the development of open market, for sale properties to generate surpluses, to be reinvested in the provision of rented homes.

- 1.7.** The main funding options available to landlords now are:
- Primary form of lending available from major UK banks.
 - Capital Markets funding (bonds and private placements) provided by institutional investors such as insurance companies and pension funds for maturities of 30 years or longer.
 - Capital Markets funding sourced through bond aggregators such as THFC, MORHomes, bLEND and GB Social Housing for maturities of 20 to 30 years or longer.

Barriers to providing floor coverings

- 1.8.** During this phase of the research, we sought to understand the experience of landlords, specifically focusing on the barriers of providing floor coverings at point of let.
- 1.9.** From speaking with landlords and building on our findings from our first learning report, our research identified the key barriers to providing flooring at the point of let. Landlords told us the factors that they feel hold them from providing floor coverings include:
- financial cost
 - delays to void and lettings processes,
 - ongoing maintenance and responsibility,
 - customer choice,
 - fleas and other infestation, and,
 - supply line, in terms of goods and skilled labour.
- 1.10.** In this section of the report, we will explore each barrier in turn, drawing on what landlords told us both in term of the challenges to providing floor coverings and how some landlords have overcome those challenges.

Financial cost

- 1.11.** The most prominent barrier landlords spoke with us about was the financial costs associated with providing floor coverings at the point of let:

We've done our calculations, and it adds approximately £1,000 to each of our voids.

We would love to be able to consider providing flooring in our social rented properties, however, as a local authority we have zero funds to go towards this.

- 1.12.** Landlords spent time discussing how organisations are in a difficult operating environment, where they are making trade-offs in relation to the quality of homes as well as investing in new supply of homes. Key points landlords raised were the expectations around net zero, a renewed approach to damp and mould, and improving services in line with new regulatory expectations.
- 1.13.** The majority of landlords we spoke with told us that providing floor coverings in all their properties would be a financial challenge, likely impacting finances for other strategic priorities, such as net zero, home supply and improvements to services.

If all properties required flooring, a one-size-fits-all would cripple some RPs. What is the Regulators view, what happens if interest cover is strained between investment and financial statement? We would certainly have to look at reprofiling some of our other investment programmes.

- 1.14.** Landlords discussed the approach for rent increases within the social housing sector, specifically the inability to increase rent for higher quality accommodation.

The private rented sector (PRS) raises rents beyond local housing rates and funding is a massive issue for our organisation. If we had stacks of money, we wouldn't think twice about providing the same (floor coverings) as the PRS.

- 1.15.** Equally, landlords we spoke to fully understood and recognised that for some of their tenants, the cost of flooring is just too much. To help tenants with costs, they funded welfare and wellbeing grants that tenants could apply to for financial support.

Our Wellbeing Fund when introduced during covid had a high number of applications made for carpets so there is definitely a need within the sector, however RP's are struggling to hit financial golden rules at present, not least of all because of inflationary pressures so we have to prioritise.

Our customers are struggling now more than ever and we are making a very high number of referrals to our Sustainable Tenancies team for help and sign-posting when setting up home.

- 1.16.** Landlords also told us they felt providing floor coverings in all their properties as a blanket approach, regardless of need, would not represent value for money.

We do not know how many customers have or need flooring, we are still in the discovery phase. If we were to fit flooring into all our properties, we would have to spread the pot more thinly, meaning our tenants might receive worst quality flooring fitted and there may be a reverse stigma.

Overcoming the barrier: financial cost

- 1.17.** Social landlords who provide floor coverings at the point of let did acknowledge that there was a significant cost to doing so, but felt other financial benefits were achieved by providing flooring, in both the short-term and long-term, that offset the upfront costs.
- 1.18.** In the short-term, we heard that responsive repairs had significantly reduced after the void period. One housing association told us that the number of average responsive repairs in the 3 months after the void period was previously over 4 per property before they introduced flooring in their void standard. This decreased to an average of less than one repair after flooring was provided as standard. Officers we spoke to felt that tenants had more pride in their home when they had flooring provided and therefore felt more responsibility to look after their home.
- 1.19.** In the longer-term, landlords who provide floor covering all described the decrease in their void turnover rate. One of the larger landlords we spoke to highlighted that their void turnover rate reduced from 11% to 7.8% in the 5 years they have been providing floor coverings. In this instance, the landlord did acknowledge that they did have to “front load” the costs of providing floor coverings before they were able to achieve savings and financial benefits to their organisation.

A lot of people ask ‘how do you afford it?’ and the simple answer is through a reduced turnover rate. The reduction on 3%-4% on turnover per year saves us about £1.6 million. That is effectively the amount of money we spend on our voids for carpet and decorating. We had to front-load that i.e. we had to spend it before we saved it... We are now starting to reap the rewards of continuing to maintain the voids at a level that is better than where we were but, longer term, more manageable for our staff.

- 1.20.** The same landlord also reported to us that its arrears rates have come down every year since they enhanced their void standard to include floor coverings. The theory being that, given the cost of carpeting a home, if residents need to save for carpets, they are going to be less likely to afford their rent, and vice versa.
- 1.21.** We were also told that by one landlord there they had a peak cohort of residents that moved out of their properties 1-1.5 years in their tenancy. But after they began delivering floor coverings at the point of let, they found that this cohort stayed longer, therefore reducing ongoing costs.

Me and my family rented a property and we wouldn't go into the property in the PRS without floor coverings, we need to raise the standard in the sector.

- 1.22.** Beyond financial benefits and challenges, landlords providing floor coverings all believed that no matter the cost to the organisation, providing floor coverings was the right thing to do for its residents and would not see their organisations ever going back to not providing flooring, despite the financial costs.

Having a standard that includes flooring is what we're about in terms of our vision and mission statement. I think we'd be doing a backward step if we ever got rid of it.



Delays to voids processes

- 1.23.** Installing floor coverings takes time and often landlords focus on getting a new tenant moved into their property to ease the pressure of waiting for housing and to reduce the amount of rent loss on a property whilst there is no one occupying it. Considering the expectations on landlords to have efficient void processes under the Consumer Standards⁹, Landlords discussed that void delays and efficient void processes are complicated by an expectation to install or retain existing quality floor coverings:

It is another complexity and delay to the void process.

- 1.24.** Asset staff we spoke to told us that floor coverings would typically be installed as the last step of a void process, after other repairs and improvements to the property.
- 1.25.** As this report will go on to discuss, fitters of floor coverings are often sole traders. Landlords weren't able to offer this in-house as they can't compete with the salary and flexibility that sole trader fitters have. This means they have to outsource jobs. Given landlords can't control the availability of fitters, this has the potential to delay the voids process further.

Access to any and all trades workers is very difficult currently, but access to carpet suppliers in more rural areas is even more challenging.

- 1.26.** Another challenge that landlords told us about is that not all landlords know early in the void process who the property has been allocated to and therefore are not able to consult with incoming tenants about retaining existing floor covering, and if they do then this further delays the void process.
- 1.27.** In the same vein, landlords raised the concern that for the installation of new floor coverings offering tenants choice in terms of colour or style could potentially delay the void process.

Overcoming the barrier: delays to voids processes

- 1.28.** Similarly, to financial costs, landlords acknowledged that increased void times was a key concern about providing floor coverings but was counteracted by some of the benefits achieved to the organisation in the longer-term.

Void time and associated cost are understood as the biggest barrier but if you let properties quicker in the first place and sustain tenancies, the costs are offset in the longer term.

⁹ [The Tenancy Standard \(April 2012\) Tenancy Standard - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-tenancy-standard)

- 1.29.** Although the landlords we interviewed did experience teething issues with the operational practicalities of providing flooring as part of their void standard initially, they all noted how the process had gotten progressively more efficient and is now business as usual.

We found that decoration and flooring added a day or two to our turnaround time and that flooring could occur concurrently with other works.

- 1.30.** One landlord we spoke to who was piloting floor coverings in some of their properties found that by bringing floor covering contractors into the empty properties early in the process helped reduce the delay to void turnarounds as the contractor was able to identify the size and amount of work required.
- 1.31.** A benefit of reduced turnover rates from providing flooring was landlords undertaking less lettings annually. One landlord we interviewed told us that it had been making c.30% less lettings per year since introducing flooring as part of their void standard. Not only was this a benefit for the organisation, including a reduction in the workload of its housing officers, but it also meant communities benefitted from being more settled.
- 1.32.** Landlords also highlighted that staff across the housing and property services teams felt more pride in delivering homes with flooring to residents before they moved in which led to higher staff satisfaction.

Before they would almost be a little bit ashamed to leave the tenants in a property like that (without floor covering), give them a decorating voucher and off they go. After we started providing flooring, stories were coming back anecdotally with tenants crying at the sign up, not because they were upset but because they were overwhelmed with how lovely the properties were. My team were saying 'oh my God, this is amazing. I'm now proud to show somebody around and not be embarrassed going you're going to have to sort this and that out.'

Ongoing maintenance and responsibility

- 1.33.** Landlords we have met with discussed their concerns about ongoing maintenance to floor coverings. Specifically, if there was wear and tear to floor coverings that they would be required to repair, similarly to obligations for flooring in the kitchen and bathroom(s) at present. One landlord raised that this should be considered as within the social housing sector tenancies tend to be sustained for longer periods of time on average compared to the private rented sector.

We have very long tenancies, decades and lifetimes long; so a key issue for us would be how to replace carpets in occupied properties when those became worn, if as landlord that was our responsibility.

- 1.34.** Equally, some landlords with properties that are considered harder to let or experience higher tenancy turnover were equally concerned about the need to replace or install new flooring on a more regular basis than counterpart higher demand properties.

Would that mean that we would have to maintain or provide new floor coverings at the start of each tenancy? Would you do a mix and match, leaving some floor coverings or would you start from scratch each time?

- 1.35.** There was also some uncertainty about who would be responsible for any floor coverings in the property, the landlord or the tenant. For example, apart from the maintenance another barrier raised by landlords was the role of health and safety of floor coverings, specifically in relation to hazards, slips, and trips that may result from floor coverings being poorly installed or damaged.

Where does the liability and accountability sit with? Flooring for kitchens and bathrooms all come back to us. If we lay the carpets and it becomes a hazard, we are responsible for.

Overcoming the barrier: ongoing maintenance and responsibility

- 1.36.** In our first learning report we provided advice from Devonshires in relation to gifting floor coverings. We've reiterated this advice below:

Devonshires' view – gifting floor coverings

There has been an upturn in RPs exploring the possibility of gifting carpet and other flooring upon re-let, rather than removing the flooring, often at their own cost. This can be both economical and environmentally friendly but can also help alleviate financial hardship for the new tenant. The barriers to leaving flooring in place usually relate to infestations or poor condition, and confusion about who is responsible for maintaining the flooring. It would, of course, never be reasonable for a landlord to leave an infested, damaged or soiled carpet in place and this is something that would obviously have to be inspected before offering the flooring to the new resident. However, providing the flooring is in adequate and safe condition, RPs can leave the flooring in place without fear of being required to maintain it by gifting the floor coverings to the new tenant.

When gifting any items, a gifting agreement should be used to document that the specified flooring is being given to the tenant, and they accept it, upon which ownership passes to the tenant and they are then responsible for the maintenance, replacement or repair of the floor coverings gifted. The agreements do not have to be overly complicated and should be completed at sign up to the tenancy.

Samantha Grix, Partner, Devonshires

- 1.37.** The Welsh Government has just approved the Welsh Housing Quality Standard, which sets an expectation for social landlords to provide floor coverings in social housing at point of let. This approach considers the ongoing maintenance as follows:

Welsh Housing Quality Standard¹⁰

6b At change of tenancy all habitable rooms (bedrooms and living rooms), staircases and landings located within the home should have suitable floor coverings.

Floor coverings must be present at change of tenancy. However, floor coverings do not need to be replaced if they are suitable, appropriate and in good condition. When deciding on whether floor coverings are suitable and appropriate, consideration should be given to the specific needs of the tenant, and the durability and maintenance requirements. Choice should be offered where possible. The exact detail of the flooring (e.g. loose lay or glued down) is for the landlord to determine. The landlord can 'gift' the flooring to the tenant to remove ongoing maintenance obligations. The following British Standard BN EN 1307:2014 'Textile floor coverings' may be useful in the assessment of textile floor coverings.

- 1.34.** Landlords we spoke with advised that they have used gifting to ensure that ongoing repairs and maintenance needs were avoided. Anecdotally, landlords told us that residents who had been gifted carpets, more often than not, tended to leave the carpet in the property when they left.
- 1.35.** One interviewee described how they felt there is stigma within the social housing sector from a perception that residents might steal, damage or act irresponsibly with any flooring that was gifted to them by their landlord. Yet, despite having let thousands of homes with flooring to their residents, the interviewee said that this had never happened once. By holding back on providing floor coverings to residents on the assumption they would damage them, this is only further fuelling negative stigma towards social housing residents.

When we said we we're going to do this, there was a perception that people were going to pinch the carpets and take them with them when they left.... We have never had one resident take a carpet when we have put it in. So, it's about perception vs reality. People will believe a lot of things probably from hearsay or from a scenario where it happened 15 years ago and has become folklore. When in fact the practice is very different.

¹⁰ [Welsh Housing Quality Standard \(2023\) welsh-housing-quality-standard-2023.pdf \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/welsh-housing-quality-standard-2023.pdf)



Customer choice

- 1.40.** At present the majority of landlords we spoke to said that floor coverings are provided on a case-by-case basis. If floor coverings have been left by the previous tenant and deemed in good condition during the void inspection, most landlords will offer tenants the choice to leave to floor coverings in situ or remove them. However, this practice appears to have developed over time within the sector, in our first learning report we found that 17% of landlords removed floor coverings for every void.
- 1.41.** Landlords told us that the outcome will vary depending on each property and each tenant's decision.

At the moment if we see the carpets are in good condition we talk to the incoming customers. Its swings and roundabouts, some tenants want the carpets left in but some tenants who you would expect might benefit from flooring being left want it to be removed. They rely on the lenders because they want new flooring to their own taste and why shouldn't they.

- 1.42.** When discussing flooring at point of let, there was a lot of uncertainty about which type of floor covering would be considered most appropriate.

Is there an expectation that people will have the choice, will there be a particular standard for flooring set out, will it be carpet or laminate or can carpet tiles be fitted?

- 1.43.** Customer choice was a key concern. Landlords explained they felt customer choice was very important and were mindful of this. However, there were concerns about how choice could be implemented and managed across their organisations effectively.

The more choice you introduce, it creates more complexity in how it is managed.

- 1.44.** One landlord noted that decoration vouchers, in their experience, gave tenants greater options and a sense of ownership because tenants were able to make the decision.

There needs to be a balance between landlords and tenants, something similar to a decoration allowance to allow tenants to do their own decorating with a sense of ownership and choice and give landlords an element of control in the standards of flooring used in their properties.

- 1.45.** Landlords also spoke about the importance of customer choice and not making sweeping assumptions about what tenants would want in their properties. For example, one landlord recounted how previously the sector painted all walls with magnolia paint as standard but tenants were not happy with this decision being made on their behalf in their homes.
- 1.46.** Landlords agreed that engaging with and incorporating the views of tenants would be crucial but that they have concerns about the practicalities of how this would work in practice.

During the voids process, we should be talking to customers about what they want, there are a number of priorities and factors that come into it. What is more important to the customer?

Overcoming the barrier: customer choice

- 1.47.** A landlord we interviewed highlighted that they had piloted providing a choice on the colour of their carpets to residents, but it was administratively and logistically challenging to do so. Instead, the landlord chose a single colour for all carpets that was in line with fashion trends at the time of implementing the provision of floor coverings at the point of let. The landlord noted how they have not received any comments or complaints from customers about the colour of carpets despite having delivered them to thousands of homes. This also meant that sourcing carpets for properties was quicker and easier to do, which meant a larger and more effective supply chain could be built.

We know choice is necessary, but we need to make sure it is operationally scalable and appropriate for the majority of our customers.

- 1.48.** The same landlord also told us that their customer satisfaction has gone up by 10% since they introduced floor coverings in their void standard.
- 1.49.** We also heard many anecdotes from landlords about how overwhelmingly pleased and grateful residents were that were provided with carpets. One interviewee told us how there has been a clear shift in residents' lettings experience and their perceived value of their home when floor coverings were provided. Please note that we haven't spoken to any tenants as part of this report, however, our discussions with tenants were reported in our last report *Tenant Perspectives*.¹¹ This provided us with a strong commentary that floor coverings improved their relationship with their home.

When tenants view a house without flooring, they are often shocked that we will not cover the floorboards, but tenants who move in with flooring already in place describe their house feeling like home when they move in.

¹¹ [Learning Report 2: Tenant Perspectives | Altair \(altairltd.co.uk\)](#)

Fleas and other infestations

- 1.50. The way that social landlords address infestations and other pests has become a prominent discussion in the social housing sector over the last few years. Landlords we spoke to expressed concerns about how floor coverings can exacerbate instances of fleas and pests.
- 1.51. Landlords were particularly concerned about how carpeted flooring can potentially increase the risk of flea infestations, as fleas can lay their eggs in the carpet, leading to a continuous cycle of infestation.
- 1.52. Some landlords told us that, as part of their voids process, if it was known that a pet was part of the family composition then the floor covering would be removed to avoid any potential instance of fleas and other infestations.

We look into whether a tenant had animals and whether all flooring should be removed as a result. A carpet doesn't have to look dirty to have infestations.

- 1.53. Others told us that, for inspected properties suspected of having infestations, treatments are undertaken and continued as needed to address the problem.

In the past, we have had to deploy monitoring equipment in a property after the initial treatment was not successful. The ongoing treatment was difficult to manage compared to if we just removed the flooring.

- 1.54. Where fleas and other infestations occurred, and landlords wished to retain carpets, this resulted in a delay to their void processes. One landlord discussed that sometimes fleas continued to be present once a tenant moves in and associated this to the complexities in treating carpets given the complex flea life cycle.¹²
- 1.55. However, the number of cases in which fleas and other infestations occur appears to be low and infrequent, even if they can present a difficult challenge to the landlords we spoke with.

I do not feel this should be a barrier to landlords providing flooring because this can sometimes be an issue regardless of if the tenant or landlord fits the flooring.

¹² [U.S Centre for Disease Control and Prevention – Getting Rid of Fleas \(2020\) Fleas Home | Fleas | CDC](#)

Overcoming the barrier: fleas and other infestations

- 1.56.** Of the landlords who provided floor coverings that were interviewed and attended focus groups for this report, none of them had experienced issues with infestation but described this as a myth that needs to be busted in the sector about providing flooring.
- 1.57.** The lack of instances of infestations in carpets that landlords told us about suggests that the rare cases have led people to believe that it is a common and frequent challenge when it appears to be the opposite.



Supply chains

- 1.58.** The supply chain for floor coverings, like any other product, involves a complex network of manufacturers, distributors, retailers, and labour resources. Landlords we spoke to were most concerned about if their supply chain would be able to facilitate and deliver against the requirement of floor coverings in all properties at the point of let.
- 1.59.** The two most common concerns in relation to the supply chain centred around the storage and installation of floor coverings as well as the availability of skilled labour.
- 1.60.** Landlords told us that they found contracting and retaining floor covering fitters, similarly to most trades very difficult. The majority of landlords we spoke to who had DLOs (direct labour organisations) informed us that they do not have in-house floor fitters and depended on contractors for installation.

Pipeline and availability in the supply chain is a really concern, especially in rural areas, as we already struggle with some trades. We have some in-house staff that have skills to lay carpet but not many.

- 1.61.** Many landlords we spoke to were also concerned about not being able to store carpet, as well as whether there was enough floor coverings within the supply line.

Where would we store the rolls of carpets, because we do not have anywhere to store the flooring?

- 1.62.** From our research, and speaking to landlords for this report, the majority of organisations assumed they would have to store their own floor covering, presenting a significant barrier. As some landlords recognised, however, there is more the sector can do to leverage its position in the supply chain and overcome this barrier.

Are there opportunities to disrupt the supply chain or create our own supply chain.

Overcoming the barrier: supply chains

- 1.63.** A large landlord who provides floor coverings at point of let highlighted how they overcame some of the supply chain barriers. To make floor coverings economically viable, they accepted that they could not match the salaries of fitters, who were mainly self-employed, to bring a fittings service in-house. Instead, they decided to appoint an SME who coordinated local fitting contractors to undertake fittings across their properties. The benefits of this approach meant that they could manage deliverability and sickness in a different, and more efficient, way to having DLO employees.

We outsource fitters and keep it within the supply chain as it enables us to join up all those parts in the most cost effective way.

- 1.64.** Approaches to sourcing flooring varied between the landlords we spoke to. It was dependent on the size and geography of their stock. Some of the smaller landlords were able to source through small, local sole traders, whilst larger providers sourced directly through regional and national wholesalers.





Case Study – Monmouthshire Housing Association

Monmouthshire Housing Association (MHA) are based in South-East Wales and have been providing carpets in all of their all newly-let properties since 2018. MHA initially piloted this initiative on some of their hard-to-let properties in 2017, expanding into flats the following year before eventually rolling out across all their properties.

Providing carpets links back to MHA's core vision to 'provide high quality homes' and is intrinsic to their values as an organisation. This combined with the positive buy-in across the organisation from staff, tenants and the board has contributed to its successful delivery.

From the introduction of the standard, feedback from residents was extremely positive, with residents highlighting how happy and proud they were of their homes. Equally, feedback from staff across departments was also very supportive of the new standard:

"The decorators teams said they were feeling as though they had the pride of leaving the property in a really good standard"

and;

"Our staff are proud to show new tenants around their new home rather than leave them with an empty shell and a decorating voucher. Our tenants tell us how happy they are with the standard by consistently providing us with fantastic feedback."

Although MHA have encountered budgetary challenges and extended void periods, they described how "from start to finish it has only been positive" and believe that "it would be a backward step if we ever got rid of it".

The cohesion between the housing, property and voids teams has been a key contributing factor to delivering the void standard across MHA's homes, particularly with a challenging turn-around time of 28 calendar days.

Case Study – B3 Living

B3 Living are a 5000-home housing association based in Hertfordshire. Having witnessed a fall in their customer satisfaction and an increase in residents leaving for the private rented sector (PRS), B3 undertook some research and found that residents were leaving for the PRS because they could get a property with white goods, flooring and decoration, as standard.

B3 Living assessed what they could do to address this and decided to launch a pilot which included carpets in the void standard. The pilot was a success, with satisfaction increasing by 20% and turnover rates falling, and was eventually rolled out across all B3 Living's voids in April 2023.

B3 Living found that the voids time hasn't been significantly impacted because of the carpet standard. The cost of flooring per void has also decreased since the introduction of the pilot from £2000 per void down to £1700 following a procurement exercise.

Some of the key aspects of B3 Living's delivery of the carpets to residents includes offering a choice of two colours and contracting out the fitting services.

Case Study – Teign Housing

Teign Housing is a charity and registered social landlord that manages over 3,700 homes across South Devon. It is dedicated to providing high-quality customer services and making the local area a better place to live by creating sustainable communities and working in partnership.

Teign Housing undertook a broader review of its voids process and identified that carpets with a good underlay would reduce the impact on noise nuisance in flats and minimise low-level noise nuisance complaints. As such, it introduced a new void standard in 2020 that included fitting carpets in all flats and sheltered accommodation, along with good quality underlay to improve soundproofing. Over half of Teign Housing's voids have carpets and underlay fitted each year.

As part of the new void standard, the resident is responsible for the care and upkeep of these, including cleaning and any treatment required. Residents are able to replace the carpets at any time, but any replacements have to remain in the property.

With nearly 200 voids per year, Teign Housing extended their void timeframe by three days to ensure the full remit of their standard could be delivered before the resident moved into their new home.

The morale of the voids teams has noticeably increased since the introduction of the new void standard because, in the words of Teign Housing's Chief Executive, "they feel they now walk away from a job that they can be really proud of".

Teign Housing anticipates that by investing more initially and providing a better-quality property at the beginning, it will help keep the standard of the property and reduce the repair and maintenance costs over the life of the tenancy. They also anticipate a lower turnover of residents as a result of the new standard.



Cost analysis

The cost impact to landlords

Cost of providing flooring per property

- 2.1.** In our last report, the Resident Voice Index survey showed that 1% of respondents (without floor covering provided at point of let) stated that their landlords provide support with floor coverings.
- 2.2.** End Furniture Poverty, a campaign and social research group, found that 760,000 adults living in social housing have no carpet or flooring in their bedrooms and living areas.¹³ This is 9% of all adults in the sector.
- 2.3.** We also showed previously that the cost of providing floor coverings in all rooms except the kitchen and bathroom ranges between £535 and £1,300 depending on the number of rooms and property type i.e. flat compared to a house.
- 2.4.** In this section, we have carried out some analysis on the cost impact to landlords. For this analysis, we have used data from England as this provided the largest dataset out of the three nations (England, Scotland and Wales) with an assumption of similar operating environments across the three nations.
- 2.5.** Data on stock from the Regulator of Social Housing in England – registered provider stock and rents 2022/23 dataset¹⁴ – shows that 84% of low-cost rental units owned by RPs are general needs units with between one and three bedrooms, with the average size being 2.1 bedrooms. For the purpose of our analysis, we have assumed that the average size of a flat / house is two bedrooms.
- 2.6.** We have also made the assumption that an organisation can benefit from up to 20% savings in the material costs achieved from working closely with suppliers and leveraging on their purchasing power through the volume of work. Organisations may not have the skillset in-house to carry out the fitting and therefore we have assumed that this is outsourced.
- 2.7.** The cost to the landlord for providing flooring and outsourcing fitting costs is shown in the table below.

	Flat	House
Total cost per property for a 2 bedroom unit	£885	£1,090

- 2.8.** Taking an average of £1,000 per property based on the figures above, these costs are broadly in line with what we found when speaking with landlords.

¹³ End Furniture Poverty (2023) The Extent of Furniture Poverty in the UK.

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/registered-provider-social-housing-stock-and-rents-in-england-2022-to-2023>

- 2.9.** Whilst the cost must be front-loaded at time of let, the carpets will not need to be replaced frequently. While the English Housing Survey finds that social renters lived in their home for an average 12.2 years,¹⁵ we make the assumption that carpets would need to be replaced every six years. This is because we have modelled for budget carpets that often have a lifespan of between five and seven years, based on various articles and discussion forums found online.¹⁶
- 2.10.** Based on the assumption that carpets are to be replaced every six years, the cost per week for providing flooring is shown below:

	Flat	House
Cost per week (assuming carpets are replaced every six years) per property	£2.85 per week	£3.50 per week

Total costs over time

- 2.11.** The table below shows the costs borne in Year 1 by landlords of differing size. We have made the assumption that providing flooring for the properties that do not currently have carpets is phased over a three-year period to allow organisations to put measures in place and to relieve pressure on the supply chain.

Costs in Year 1	1,000 unit landlord	10,000 unit landlord	100,000 unit landlord	Total Sector including England, Wales and Scotland (4.8 million units)
Number of properties without floor coverings <i>(assumed to be 16% of total stock based on the research conducted by End Furniture Poverty¹⁷. We have assumed these to be phased over a three year period)</i>	53	533	5,333	256,000
Number of void properties that are hard-to-let <i>(assumed 1% of properties fall into this category)</i>	10	100	1,000	48,000
Remainder properties that require carpet replacements <i>(With a lifespan of 6 years and a rolling schedule of properties that require carpet replacement, we assume a 1/6 of properties require replacement in any given year)</i>	138	1,383	13,833	664,000
Total Properties that require floor covering	201	2,016	20,166	968,000
Average cost per property	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000
Total cost in Year 1	£201k	£2.02m	£20.2m	£968m

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/chapters-for-english-housing-survey-2022-to-2023-headline-report/chapter-3-housing-history-and-future-housing>

¹⁶ <https://www.homestyle-carpet.co.uk/blog/2020/2/28/how-long-should-carpet-last>

¹⁷ The End Furniture Poverty data relates to the number of adults living in social housing. In the absence of detailed data on households and dwelling, we have assumed that the number of adults represent the number of dwellings.

2.12. The table below shows the costs borne in Years 2 and 3 by landlords of differing size:

Costs in Year 2 and 3	1,000 unit landlord	10,000 unit landlord	100,000 unit landlord	Total Sector including England, Wales and Scotland (4.8 million units)
Number of properties without floor coverings <i>(assumed to be phased over a three-year period)</i>	53	533	5,333	256,000
Number of void properties that are hard-to-let <i>(assumed 0.75% of properties fall in this category, a slight reduction from Year 1 due to the positive impact of flooring on these properties)</i>	8	75	750	36,000
Remainder properties that require carpet replacements <i>(With a lifespan of 6 years and a rolling schedule of properties that require carpet replacement, we assume a 1/6 of properties require replacement in any given year)</i>	138	1,383	13,833	664,000
Total Properties that require floor covering	199	1,991	19,916	956,000
Average cost per property	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000	£1,000
Total cost in Year 1	£199k	£1.99m	£19.9m	£956m

2.13. To provide some context to the overall costs, using the data published by the Regulator of Social Housing¹⁸ on housing associations operating in England that have over 1,000 properties and using the same assumptions listed in the table above, the total cost of providing flooring in Year 1 (£570 million) would be c. 16% of total spend on repairs and maintenance (£3.6 billion) and 13% of the total operating surplus (£4.4 billion). We note that this does not include data from organisations that are smaller than 1,000 units, organisations operating in other nations or stock owned by local authorities. However, this analysis provides some context to the total costs.

Costs accounting for improved arrears and void losses

2.14. We have also seen that providing flooring has a benefit on turnover rates and rental arrears.

2.15. Using the latest set of Global Accounts (2022) published by the Regulator of Social Housing in England, the rental arrears for the sector stand at 3.3% on average, which translates to £752m. Void losses in the sector were £282m.

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2022-global-accounts-of-private-registered-providers>

- 2.16.** If we make the assumption that rental arrears improve by 0.5% as tenants no longer need to save for flooring costs, this leads to an increase in rent collection of £0.75 per week per property.
- 2.17.** Speaking with landlords as part of this research showed that providing flooring led to a 30% decrease in turnover rates. However, adding flooring to the void standard could lead to delays in letting the property. Therefore, taking a conservative assumption of void loss decreasing by 10% as a result in the fall in tenant turnover, this leads to an increase in rental income of £0.25 per week per property on average.
- 2.18.** The total benefit of reduced rental arrears and lower void loss comes to around £1.00 per property per week.

	Flat	House
Cost per week (assuming carpets are replaced every six years) per property	£2.85 per week	£3.50 per week
Savings from lower rental arrears	£0.75 per week	£0.75 per week
Savings from lower void losses	£0.25 per week	£0.25 per week
Net costs	£1.85 per week	£2.50 per week

Value of providing flooring

- 2.19.** Providing flooring to tenants has wider benefits, some of which cannot be measured in a monetary way. For example, flooring could lead to tenants feeling more invested in their homes, which could lead to lower repairs and maintenance works for the landlord. This has a direct impact on costs faced by the landlord.
- 2.20.** It could also lead to an improvement in customer satisfaction levels, which has other wide-reaching benefits for the landlord.
- 2.21.** Landlords should therefore look beyond just the financial savings realised from providing flooring.



Our conclusions & next steps

Our conclusions & next steps

Our conclusions

- 3.1.** Social landlords work within a challenging operating environment. Income from social housing rents is fixed, which means that social landlords have to make difficult decisions about what they can and cannot invest in.
- 3.2.** We know that currently, social landlords are focussing on how best to balance the books with consideration of movements in the policy landscape about net zero, building safety and improving home and service quality, alongside inflationary pressures and rent caps.
- 3.3.** We can conclude that the barrier of financial cost to an organisation is a sound concern for social landlords and our financial analysis supports this. We also know that, from our research so far, the social impact of floor coverings is powerful and that providers who, in the main, seek to improve lives for tenants, should also consider the social value alongside the financial costs.
- 3.4.** This paper provides some strong evidence of when landlords have been able to overcome most of the specific barriers, yet being able to support a strong approach to tenant choice hasn't been achieved with the landlords we've met with.
- 3.5.** The landlords who have spent time with Altair for this research have, in the main, been bought into the moral case for the provision of floor coverings in social homes. This has been regardless of whether they provide floor coverings or not.

Next steps

- 3.6.** This report is the third and final of our learning reports.
- 3.7.** The next phase of our research is to bring together the wider landscape in the context of our findings from our learning reports. In our focus on the wider landscape, we intend to consider the other factors at play, specifically the role of regulation, government policy, the role of the charitable sector, welfare benefit support as funding streams that are currently being used for the provision of floor coverings.



Engagement with the research – next steps

Throughout our research, we've welcomed views from landlords, tenants, and stakeholders. We welcome those who are interested in discussing this research to reach out to the research team.

Steering group



Claire Donovan – Chair

Claire Donovan is the Head of Policy, Research and Campaigns at End Furniture Poverty, the campaigning arm of FRC Group, former Social Enterprise of the Year. FRC Group has been providing support to people in furniture poverty for 34 years with the provision of both new and preloved furniture.

A former journalist, Claire joined FRC Group as Communications Manager, before taking over the delivery of the End Furniture Poverty (EFP), campaign, which raises awareness of the issue of Furniture Poverty; carries out research to highlight the consequences and reality of living in Furniture Poverty; and develops solutions to ensure that everyone has access to the essential furniture items that they need to participate in society and lead a secure life. Flooring is one of EFP's essential furniture items and one of the hardest items for people to access so Claire was very keen to be involved in this key project. Claire is also a trustee of the Reuse Network, the membership body supporting furniture reuse charities across the UK.



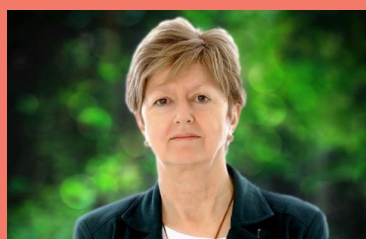
Alison Inman

Alison Inman is Past President of the Chartered Institute of Housing. She currently sits on the boards of Saffron Housing Trust, Tpas and Housing Diversity Network and is a former Chair of the National Federation of ALMOs. She is a co-founder of SHOUT, the social housing campaign group and has written extensively in the housing press.



Alicja Zalensinka

Alicja is the Chief Executive Officer of Tai Pawb – an organisation working to advance equality and social justice in housing in Wales. Alongside colleagues from TPAS Cymru, she has led on the development and implementation of recommendations of FLOORED report, which highlighted the lack of appropriate flooring in social housing in Wales.



Anne Dokov

Anne is a trustee of two charities that work with people in the social housing sector, one being the Loughborough Foundation which is funding this study and the other which helps people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. She is also a Board Member of a housing association that provides specialist quality housing and support services in the Midlands and North West.

Prior to that she spent nine years as a Board Member with a large Housing Association where she had a particular interest in Customer Care, Housing Operations, Governance and People issues.



Brian Robson

Brian Robson is Executive Director (Policy and Public Affairs) at the Northern Housing Consortium, a membership body for 140 councils, housing associations and ALMOs across the North of England. Brian also serves on the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' Decent Homes Review Sounding Board. Prior to joining the NHC, Brian led the housing policy and research programme at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for four years, where he commissioned Altair to develop policy and practice proposals on furnished tenancies as a way to mitigate and relieve poverty in the social rented sector.



Fayann Simpson OBE

Fayann, who joined the L&Q's Group Board in 2018, has devoted nearly 20 years to working as an involved resident. For two decades she has worked tirelessly with L&Q and the wider social housing sector to drive continuous improvement in the quality of homes and services. Following the Grenfell tragedy, she has also taken a place on Industry Safety Steering Group chaired by Dame Judith Hackitt's. Fayann is also a board member at Sustainability for Housing. Her expertise sees her taking part in various high-profile debates with stakeholders and industry experts, and she is a regular media commentator.

Fayann is pleased to be involved in this work as she thinks it is so important for the sector to understand the impact of flooring provision for residents and how residents feel in their homes. Fayann hopes this research will really improve our understanding of the significance of floor covering and help the sector make better decisions on how to invest in homes.



National Housing Federation

The National Housing Federation (NHF) are the voice of England's housing associations. The NHF support our members to deliver that social purpose, with ambitious work that leads to positive change.



Glossary of terms

Social housing landlords

A provider of social housing as defined by:

- The Regulator of Social Housing (England)
- The Scottish Housing Regulator (Scotland)
- The Welsh Ministers (Wales)

Social rent

The rental charge for sub-market rent products including:

- Social rent properties
- Affordable rent properties
- Intermediate rent properties

Social housing

Housing provided by social housing landlords. This includes:

- Housing association properties
- Local authority properties (including those rented at a social rent and managed by Arms-length management organisations)

Floor coverings

A material to cover the floor of a room including carpets and hard floor coverings i.e., laminate and floor tiles.

Tenants

The named tenant living in a property provided by a social housing landlord. Our terminology throughout this report includes:

- Shared owners living in shared ownership homes.
- Temporary and licensees tenants living in supported accommodation

General needs accommodation

Social housing that is not purpose-built, adapted or managed for a specific group.

Sheltered accommodation

Historic housing type specific to the social sector where apartments or homes are clustered usually around a shared communal space. A scheme manager may or may not be on site. Care services may be offered to tenants through the landlord or a separate agency.

Supported accommodation

Accommodation which is provided alongside support, supervision or care to help people live as independently as possible in the community.

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