

Review of Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council's Correspondence with Tenants requesting access for a landlord inspection by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel - DRAFT September 2024

Authors:

Jean Collins
Sheena McCallion,
Linda Rawlings

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Synopsis:

This scrutiny was proposed at the Tenant Scrutiny Panel meeting with council officers on 27 June 2024 as a suitable subject for a first scrutiny project. The council writes letters to tenants when it is necessary to undertake inspections of the tenant's home. Jean and Sheena examined three template letters and presented their findings at the Tenant Scrutiny Panel meeting on 5 September 2024 with suggested revised wording. The template letters were considered to be bureaucratic, may be perceived as hostile and perhaps confusing as the nature of the inspection (e.g. gas safety) may not be included. These letters and the revised wording are presented in Annex 1. Subsequent work has considered more general comments on the process and making recommendations on inspection visit correspondence.

There is no council procedure covering the correspondence for an inspection visit. There is no information on council tenants' rights and landlord inspections but there is a page on private let tenants' rights and landlord inspections. It may not be clear to tenants where to find information on this.

The following is a summary of the recommendations of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel

1. Create a simple procedure document for correspondence for all inspection visits. Define the minimum notice period for a non-emergency inspection and include all document templates.
2. Create an information sheet, to be sent with all letters regarding an inspection, containing a list of all the types of inspection with a simple description of what each inspection entails. After this list, a statement of the council's needs to carry out inspections and a reference to the relevant section of the tenancy agreement. At the end of this list, a statement of action the council may take if the tenant fails to accommodate a request for an inspection. This information sheet should be included in the procedure.
3. Explicitly identify the nature of the planned inspection with reference to the information sheet.
4. Provide a named contact for the tenant to discuss the inspection or to change the time/date of the inspection.
5. Identify the contractor or name(s) of council officer to carry out inspection

1 Introduction

At the tenant scrutiny Tenant Scrutiny Panel meeting on 27 June 2024 an informal discussion on what would be a manageable first scrutiny task. It was suggested that the letters sent to tenants regarding a (compulsory) home inspection would be not too complicated and would allow for a successful first tenant scrutiny task.

The council has a number of (Word) templates for correspondence with tenant and three templates were provided:

- 1) Letter requesting access for a tenancy safety inspection (e.g. gas inspection);
- 2) Second letter (after tenant failed to allow access);
- 3) Letter requesting access for a new (secure) tenancy inspection.

Jean and Sheena met and reviewed the letters and found issues with the tone of the letters and the wording. Their marked-up letters and proposed alternative wordings were presented at the Tenant Scrutiny Panel meeting with council officers on 5 September 2024. In discussion, it became clear that further issues may exist.

Lois Hodgkins suggested that a report be prepared to identify all issues with these letters. Linda Rawlings volunteered to help Jean and Sheena prepare a report.

2 Scrutiny of Template Letters

Jean and Sheena made a number of hand written comments on the template letters and prepared an alternative text for each of the template. These documents are presented in Annex 1.

2.1 Templates

Template 1 comments (annotations):

1. Is it from council or a contractor?
2. Safety inspection?
3. Layout changes

Template 2 comments (annotations):

4. Who called?

Template 3 comments (annotations):

5. Rephrasing

3 Further issues

Discussion at the Tenant Scrutiny Panel meeting on 5 September 2024 added further items:

6. Could be one of several inspections as listed in section 4.8 quoted, not just safety

4 Is it necessary to quote the section from the tenancy agreement in the letter?

7. The letters may be seen as officious and may not help the tenant understand what is happening

Further scrutiny identified:

8. The object of the inspection should be explicitly stated to describe the contents of letters and timescales
9. There should be a procedure for demanding inspections identifying a single point of contact within the council
10. There should be information for tenants on inspections – this could be a sheet provided with any letter and a page on the council's web site

5 Recommendations

These recommendations are best practise.

6. Create a simple procedure document for correspondence for all inspection visits. Define the minimum notice period for a non-emergency inspection and include all document templates.
7. Create an information sheet, to be sent with all letters regarding an inspection, containing a list of all the types of inspection with a simple description of what each inspection entails. After this list, a statement of the council's needs to carry out inspections and a reference to the relevant section of the tenancy agreement. At the end of this list, a statement of action the council may take if the tenant fails to accommodate a request for an inspection. This information sheet should be included on the council's web site and in the procedure.
8. Explicitly identify the nature of the planned inspection with reference to the information sheet.
9. Provide a named contact for the tenant to discuss the inspection or to change the time/date of the inspection.
10. Identify the contractor or name(s) of council officer to carry out inspection

Annex 1

The three letters provided for the initial scrutiny and proposed alternative text.

Letter 1:

①

Please ask for: Housing Officer Name
Direct Dial: 01455 258141
Direct Fax: housing@hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk
Email: housing@hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk
Our ref:
Date:
[Redacted]

*Contractor:
in house.*

Dear *Safety*
RE: Tenancy Inspection

I write on behalf of Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.
I would like to visit you at your property on Wednesday 18th January 2024 between 3.00pm & 3.30pm. *to check all services provided*

The purpose of my visit is to complete a full inspection of all rooms and outbuildings and offer advice in relation to your tenancy. *by us 9.00am-4.00pm*

It is important that you make yourself available for this visit in line with your Tenancy Agreement.

Please note Section 4.8 of your tenancy agreement states: -
You must provide access to the Property for the purpose of carrying out a tenancy check or gas safety check, electrical check or to carry out essential repairs on request of the Landlord.

Please call me on 01455 255606 if this time and date is inconvenient.


Yours sincerely

Housing Officer Name
Tenancy Management Officer
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

10-11-24

Bill Cullen MBA (ISM), BA (Hons) MRTPI *Chief Executive*

Letter 1


Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

Please ask for: [Redacted]
Direct Dial: 01455 251172
Direct Fax: housing@hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk
Email: housing@hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk
Your Ref:
Our Ref: TE200
Date:
Name:
Address:
Dear , *not just safety*

Tenancy Safety Inspection

I would like to visit you, on behalf of your Landlord, to complete a property Safety Inspection on **DATE / TIME**. During the visit I will be inspecting all rooms and offering advice in relation to your tenancy.

Please arrange to attend this visit as it is in line with Section 4.8 of Tenancy Agreement with your landlord and yourself.

Please note Section 4.8 of your tenancy agreement states: -

USING THE PROPERTY

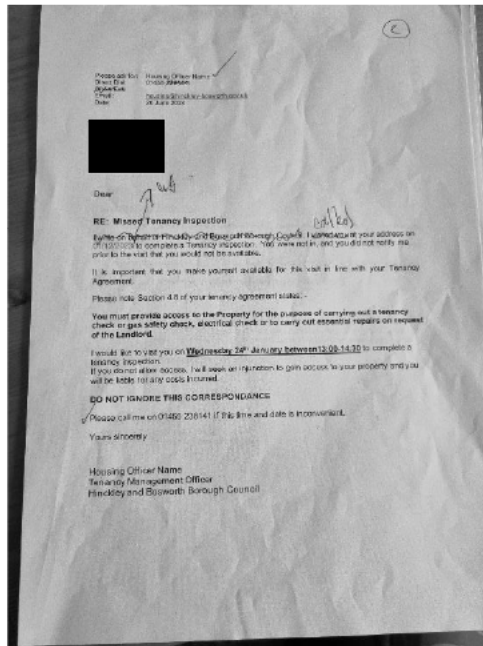
4.8 You must provide access to the Property for the purpose of carrying out a tenancy check or gas safety check, electrical check or to carry out essential repairs on request of the Landlord.

Please call me on 01455 265402 if this time and date is inconvenient.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]
Tenancy Management Officer

Letter 2:



Bill Cullen MBA (ISM), BA (Hons) MRTPI Chief Executive



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

Letter 2

Please ask for: [Redacted]
Direct Dial: [Redacted]
Direct Fax: 01455 251172
Email: housing@hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk
Your Ref: TE200
Our ref: [Redacted]
Date:

Name
Address

Dear ,

RE: Missed Tenancy Inspection

I called at your address on DATE to complete our Tenancy check. This appointment had been arranged by letter on DATE. No-one was in, and I had not been notified prior to the visit that you would not be available.

I would like to offer a new appointment to visit you on DATE / TIME so your landlord can complete their compulsory tenancy inspection. Please arrange access for me.

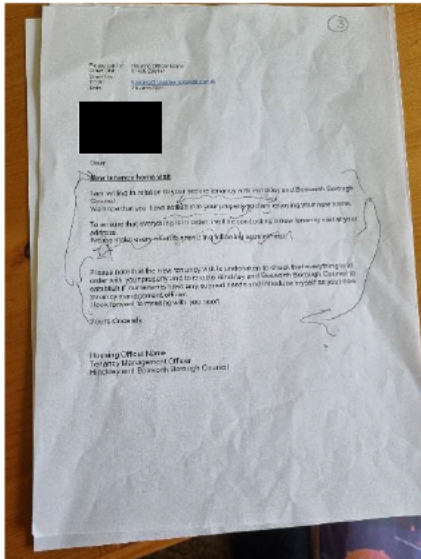
This Inspection is Section 4.8 of your Tenancy Agreement where the Council must agree you have a Safe home. (Gas, Electricity and any repairs requested by them have been completed)

If access is not available on this occasion, I could seek an injunction to gain entry to your property but as this will incur a cost, which will be billed you, I hope not to have to do this.

PLEASE DO NOT IGNORE THIS CORRESPONDANCE.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]
Tenancy Management Officer



Bill Cullen MBA (ISM), BA (Hons) MRTPI Chief Executive



Hinckley & Bosworth
Borough Council

Letter 3

Please ask for: [Redacted]
Direct Dial: [Redacted]
Direct Fax: 01455 251172
Email: housing@hinckley-bosworth.gov.uk
Your Ref: [Redacted]
Our ref: TE200

Date:

Name
Address

Dear

New Tenancy Home Visit

Please note that this visit will be undertaken by me, your new Tenancy Manager, on behalf of your Landlord, HBBC, to find out if you, our Tenant, have all that is needed in your new home.

This letter is because you have a Secure Tenancy with Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council (HBBC). We hope you have settled in your property and enjoying your new home with any support needs in place.

To ensure everything is as it should be, I hope to visit (ADDRESS) on (DATE & TIME). I look forward to meeting you at this appointment. Please contact me (DIRECT NUMBER) to confirm or rearrange.

I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Yours sincerely

Housing Officer Name

Tenancy Management Officer

Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council.