Research into provision of floor coverings in social housing

Altair

Longleigh Foundation
A grant-making partner for the social housing sector
Intro – Altair, Longleigh and me
Quick overview of social housing

- 4.9 million social rented homes in Britain as at March 2020 (with 4m in England)
- Majority owned by private registered providers (2.9m) with remainder local authorities

- More likely than other tenures to be in lower income brackets - 37% social rented households have gross income less than £400 per week (19% PRS, 25% owned outright, 5% buying with a mortgage) (FRS 22/23)
- In UK, 70% social renters received one or more income-related benefits, over three times higher than for all households (mainly housing benefit and council tax reduction) (FRS 22/23)
- In England, 43.3% of social rented households are in full or part-time work (English Housing Survey, 21/22)
- Due to scarcity of social housing, it is allocated to those in greatest housing need, meaning tenants more likely to have vulnerability when compared to other tenures

Source: English Housing Survey, 21/22
About the research
Aims and method

Investigate the impact of, and opportunities for, social housing provider’s flooring standards in Wales, Scotland and England, keeping tenant voice at the heart.
Outputs

Three learning reports and one final report.
Floor coverings practice
Disparity in standards

Wales – standards and funding

Scotland – funding

England – limited standards and no funding

Altair’s survey of social landlords found that 90% of general needs homes do not have floor coverings in all rooms at point of let.
How many people are affected?

Our survey with MRI Software found almost four in five tenants move into a home with no or partial floor coverings (77%, n=7,955) – 9% still living without floor coverings in all rooms.

Bedrooms, living room and hallway were most likely to not have any floor covering.

An estimated 760,000 adults in social housing may be living without floor coverings (End Furniture Poverty).

n= 7,955. Source: MRI Software, Resident Voice Index.
Why don’t landlords provide floor coverings at point of let?

**But...**

1. The financial cost to the organisation: 9.21
2. Unnecessary delays to the void process: 7.79
3. Ongoing maintenance of floor coverings: 7.61
4. Lack of clarity between landlord/tenant responsibilities: 6.66
5. The risk of fleas/pest: 6.58
6. Difficulty obtaining floor fitters: 6.27
7. Organisational capacity to deliver floor coverings: 5.88
8. Not a regulatory requirement: 5.50
9. Inability to cater for tenant choice: 4.95
10. Supply line challenges: 2.71

Barriers ranked by respondents (n=28)
Source: Altair survey of social landlords
• Four grant making organisations told us that during 2021/22 they made 501 grants for flooring to social housing tenants. The cost of this was just under £174,000, representing 6% of their total grants for the year.
Average cost of flooring in social rented homes

- **Average cost to landlord is £1,000** (takes account of material cost savings through volume work)
- **Average cost to household is £920** (assume that don’t need to cover whole home as partial flooring)
How do households pay?

FRS data tells us that social renters are least likely to have savings when compared to other tenures – 28% no savings (next highest is PRS at 18%, all households 14%)

The Resident Voice Index survey found that 28% of respondents paid for their floor covering by taking out a loan. Over half of those who took out loan (54%, n=2,267) took between 1-3 years to repay.

For households, it could take an average of **20 months to fund floor coverings for those on Universal Credit and 8 months for low-income households** not on Universal Credit.

Source: FRS, 2022/23
Available funding for households

- **Scottish Welfare Fund** – In the 12-months from October 2022, 32% of Community Care Grants were for carpet/lino/floor coverings (cost of £11m) – nearly 2,000 repeat applications from social renters for CCG for flooring since 2013
- **Welsh Government Emergency Assistance Payments**
- In England, some local authorities offer **local welfare assistance** (perhaps 29%)
- **Household Support Fund**
- **Budgeting advance** or budgeting loan for those on benefits
- **Grant makers**
- **Charities**

Source: Ad hoc request to Scottish Government, Scottish Welfare Fund statistics (thanks, Ian!)
Impact
Impact

For households

- Lack of floor coverings linked to debt, stigma, less community integration, noise, reduced feelings of home and perception of warmth, environmental impact from disposing of carpet, and disruption.
- Floor coverings, as part of essential package of furniture provides a social return on investment of £7,480.
- Prevent domestic abuse survivors returning to perpetrators.
- Prevents homelessness.
- Improves community safety.
- Better for child development.
- Important consideration for health.

For landlords

- Reduced void turnover – Thirteen saw a reduction from 600/year to 200/year and Citizen saw an 8% reduction in one pilot and between a 30% and 50% reduction over a 12-month period in another.
- Reduced void costs as tenants felt happier in home and more likely to maintain tenancy – Thirteen saw void costs reduce by, on average, £500 per property.
- Reduction in void rent loss.
- Increased staff and tenant satisfaction.
- Reduced refusal rate.
- Improvements in tenant health and wellbeing from better quality.
- Reduced likelihood and severity of falls.
- Fewer complaints concerning noise.
Recommendations
What we are calling for

- Funding
- Improved standards
- Stop removing good quality floor coverings
- Test
- Talk
Thank you to our steering group

Claire Donovan, End Furniture Poverty
Alison Inman, Past President of Chartered Institute of Housing and Tpas Chair
Alicja Zalenskinka, Tai Pawb
Anne Dokov, Longleigh
Brian Robson and Joanne Wilson, Northern Housing Consortium
Fayann Simpson, Tenant
Katie Hipkiss, National Housing Federation