

TENANCY SUSTAINMENT POLICY 2017

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Tenancy Sustainment is a generic term for the prevention of tenancy breakdown or a 'failed tenancy'. Failed tenancies are a waste of resources because each additional property becoming empty incurs significant costs. It can also have negative effects for the tenant who may become homeless or find it difficult to secure another tenancy because of issues relating to their former, failed tenancy

1.2 We consider that a tenancy has not been sustained if it ends within 12 months and we use the definition set out by the Scottish Housing Regulator in Scottish Social Housing Indicator 20 (Percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than a year) to assess our effectiveness in this area. However are particularly concerned to prevent tenancies ending by

- ✓ Eviction – at any time
- ✓ Abandonment – at any time
- ✓ Early termination (a tenancy which lasts under 12 months)

We recognise that there may be other less obvious reasons why people give up their tenancies such as domestic abuse and other forms of harassment. We also recognise that people may terminate their tenancy early for positive reasons such as purchasing a home, finding a new job or moving in with their partner.

1.3 The cost of a failed tenancy is high for both the tenant and the Association. Every failed tenancy represents:

- ✓ Abortive resource commitments
- ✓ Rent loss during the time property is empty
- ✓ Costs incurred associated with the re-letting of a property

In some cases:

- ✓ Legal Expenses
- ✓ Costs incurred by other agencies or authorities who subsequently take responsibility for accommodating the former tenant
- ✓ The cost to the person who again finds themselves in need of accommodation and may now have additional issues to overcome, such as former tenancy debt or rechargeable repairs

1.4 There are known risk factors in relation to early tenancy failure, and particular household types may need help or assistance in sustaining their tenancies. The following list is not exhaustive:

- ✓ Mental health issues

- ✓ Learning difficulties
- ✓ Drug and alcohol addiction problems
- ✓ Disabilities
- ✓ Leaving care
- ✓ Domestic violence
- ✓ Poverty & fuel poverty
- ✓ Being under 25 or in a first tenancy
- ✓ Young parents
- ✓ People with support needs
- ✓ No established local networks
- ✓ History of homelessness
- ✓ History of rent arrears, abandonment or antisocial behaviour in a previous tenancy
- ✓ Previously failed tenancy or eviction

1.5 Other causes of tenancy breakdown are:

- ✓ Allocations in unwanted areas
- ✓ Dissatisfaction with property condition
- ✓ Antisocial behaviour
- ✓ Debt problems
- ✓ Inability to secure adequate furniture and equipment
- ✓ Lack of support with resettlement and setting up home Isolation
- ✓ Insufficient information sharing and partnership working

1.6 Tenancy sustainment is not a new concept for Ochil View, and our staff are experienced in assisting tenants to sustain their tenancies and preventing homelessness. This policy recognises that it is not currently our role to carry out detailed assessment of needs or to case manage tenants with specific needs, but that we must be proactive in signposting and referring tenants to both external agencies and our Tenancy Sustainment Staff who have the expertise to assist.

2.0 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 The Scottish Social Housing Charter sets out the results that tenants and other customers should expect social landlords to achieve. It covers housing activities only and details 16 Outcomes and Standards. We comply with all relevant Outcomes including Outcome 11 'Tenancy Sustainment' which states:

'Social landlords must ensure that tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations'

3.0 AIMS & OBJECTIVES

3.1 It is a Strategic Objective of Ochil View to provide a comprehensive and responsive customer service to tenants, sharing and factored owners which supports sustainable tenancies and delivers customer satisfaction

This Strategic Objective is further supported by a number of related Departmental Objectives:

- ✓ To provide a range of quality housing and maintenance services to tenants and other customers (CS1)
- ✓ To participate positively in the creation and maintenance of balanced, sustainable communities (CS3)
- ✓ To achieve consistently high levels of customer satisfaction from the delivery of services (CS4)
- ✓ To work with customers, local groups and partners to develop accessible and inclusive services which assist tenants to sustain their tenancies and live independently in their homes (CS5)
- ✓ To maximise the level of income generated by our housing stock and minimise rent arrears by sensitive and supportive interventions with tenants (CS6)

3.2 By implementing a Tenancy Sustainment Policy we seek to prevent tenancy failure and homelessness by:

Prevention

Taking steps prior to and from the commencement of a tenancy which will identify issues and assist in sustainment.

Tenancy Support

Being proactive in identifying prospective and existing tenant vulnerability issues and ensuring the appropriate support is put in place to sustain a tenancy.

Partnership Working

Developing networks and partnership working with other agencies to address vulnerabilities and assist in sustaining tenancies.

4.0 TENANCY SUSTAINMENT IN PRACTICE

4.1 Prevention

We operate a choice based lettings system which reduces the risk of applicants accepting an inappropriate tenancy through offers of property being made that the applicant does not want, but then may feel pressured to accept. We aim to identify support needs at the point of registration and at the pre- tenancy interview, and to ensure that, wherever possible, any appropriate support is in place at the start of the tenancy.

We carry out accompanied viewings to all of our empty properties. This provides an opportunity to explain the characteristics of the property and the local area, and for the prospective tenant to raise any concerns or issues. It also provides another opportunity to ensure that any support needs are identified and addressed to allow the tenant to move in and be able to live in the property.

All of our empty homes must meet our Lettable Standard when they are relet. We provide assistance with decoration costs where the standard of decoration is poor at the beginning of a tenancy.

We aim to ensure that our new tenants fully understand their tenancy obligations at the time of signing their agreement and highlight some of our key housing management policies which emphasise early intervention and prevention and adopt a customer centred approach.

All new tenants should be seen by the Tenancy Sustainment Officer at the beginning of tenancy.

Housing Services Officers will carry out New Tenancy visits within six weeks of the beginning of a new tenancy. Follow up visits will be programmed as necessary following that initial visit, where it is apparent that the tenant may require support to keep to the conditions of tenancy. We will prioritise New Tenancy Visits where tenants are considered to present a high risk of tenancy failure.

Housing Services Officers should refer tenants in arrears for interview by the Tenancy Sustainment Officer when arrears arise and at any point where they feel that a significant change of circumstances has occurred.

We ensure that all information provided to applicants and tenants is in plain English, easy to understand and in a format suited to each individual. Our quarterly newsletters include regular information about support agencies and services in our area of operations

We provide a Tenancy Sustainment Service for our tenants and will ensure maximum take up of benefits wherever possible.

Our Rent Arrears policy emphasises the importance of arrears prevention and encouraging tenants to seek help before debt becomes unmanageable. Eviction is always a last resort.

4.2 Tenancy Support

We provide a Tenancy Sustainment Service to assist new and existing tenants to successfully remain in their tenancies.

We do not provide an independent Financial Inclusion Service. Instead, our Tenancy Sustainment staff can signpost tenants to a wide range of information, support and advice in confidence; and can help with budgeting, benefits, debt repayment, energy efficiency and grants & loans.

We will ensure that, wherever possible that the required support is in place at the start of a new tenancy and if we cannot help, we will refer tenants to the appropriate support provider as issues are identified. For example we may make referrals to the following agencies if required:-

Furniture

Clackmannanshire – ACE Furniture Recycling Centre and The Valley

Fife – Castle and Furniture Plus

Fuel Advice

Clackmannanshire – HEAT

Fife – Cosy Kingdom

Money Advice & Debt Management

Clackmannanshire – Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice

Fife – Citizens Advice & Rights Fife

Food Parcels

Clackmannanshire – The Gate, Soup Kitchen and starter packs

Fife – Citizens Advice & Rights Fife

Families With Young Children

Homestart for all areas

Dependency Issues

Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon and Signpost all areas

Forth Valley Family Support Service for Clackmannanshire

Domestic Violence

Womens Aid

4.3 **Partnership Working**

We work in partnership with a range of organisations skilled to provide the appropriate support to our tenants and this includes the agencies set out above and

Clackmannanshire Council

Fife Council

We participate in various Welfare Reform Working Groups in Clackmannanshire and West Fife to ensure, as far as reasonably possible, the smooth transition to a new Benefit System.

5.0 **STAFF TRAINING**

We will ensure that appropriate staff are trained to identify potentially vulnerable households.

6.0 **PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

6.1 We carry out post allocation / exchange satisfaction surveys to gauge levels of satisfaction with our services and identify any areas where tenants feel we could do better. Exit interviews, when tenants decide to end their tenancy, are another valuable source of information. The information gathered is used to identify where we may need to improve our services to applicants and tenants.

7.0 **POLICY REVIEW**

This policy will be subject to review at least every 3 years.

November 2017

Policy Review Consultation Process

Policy Considered by Involved Residents' Group	To be inserted
Policy Considered By the Customer Services Committee	16 th November 2017
POLICY APPROVED BY THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ON	30 th NOVEMBER 2017
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW	November 2020

Approved