

**Tenancy Sustainment Policy**

**AS WITH ALL OF THE ASSOCIATION'S POLICIES and PROCEDURES, THIS GUIDE, IN FULL AND IN PART, CAN BE MADE AVAILABLE IN SUMMARY, ON TAPE, IN BRAILLE, AND IN TRANSLATION INTO MOST OTHER LANGUAGES –**

**PLEASE ASK A MEMBER OF STAFF IF YOU WOULD LIKE  
A VERSION IN A DIFFERENT FORMAT**

Approved By	Committee at meeting on 3 <sup>rd</sup> February 2016
Next Review	February 2021

## 1 Introduction- What is Tenancy Sustainment?

1.1 Tenancy Sustainment is a term that is used to describe the prevention of a tenancy from breaking down or 'failing'. A failed tenancy is normally a tenancy where the tenant has:

- Never moved in
- Left within 12 months for negative reasons
- Been evicted
- Abandoned the property

Tenancies fail for a number of reasons as shown below but the outcome is the same in terms of losses to the Association, such as rent loss and void repair costs. Additionally there is the human cost as individuals and families face trauma and upheaval.

## 2 What causes tenancies to fail?

2.1 There is well documented information about the risk factors that can lead to failed tenancies. Some factors are related to issues within the household, while others are external factors. Households identified as 'at risk' will require extra support to sustain their tenancies. The list below is not exhaustive but gives an indication of the issues households may face.

On many occasions households may be affected by more than one of the following issues and their support needs can be extremely complex. It is not uncommon for example for someone with mental health issues to use alcohol to try and cope or a household to have different family members with a range of support needs from learning difficulties to physical disabilities.

- Mental health issues
- Young parents
- Older people with support needs
- Families with support needs
- Households with little support
- Learning Difficulties
- Drug and alcohol addiction issues
- Disabilities
- Leaving Care
- Domestic violence
- Vulnerable young people
- Multiple Debt
- Isolation

2.2 The vulnerable groups above often are put at greater risk of failed tenancies and their situation can be compounded by the other external factors as shown below:

- Accepting a house in an area not of the household's choice
- Unable to furnish property
- Isolation in area
- Anti-social behaviour (of household OR experienced by household)
- Dis-satisfaction with property condition
- Poor partnership working to support household

### **3 Why do we need Tenancy Sustainment?**

3.1 There are five main reasons why Whiteinch & Scotstoun Housing Association WSHA has a Tenancy Sustainment Strategy in place:

- ✓ National Context & 2012 Homelessness Target.
- ✓ Regulatory Requirements & Guidance
- ✓ WSHA Wider Role Plan
- ✓ Good for Association Business
- ✓ Good for Tenants

#### **3.2 National Setting & 2012 Homelessness Target**

The Scottish Executive introduced the Homelessness (Scotland) Act 2003. This piece of legislation set the '2012' target. From 2012 anyone presenting as homeless in Scotland will be accepted for rehousing. The Executive therefore want the numbers of people who present as homeless to be reduced.

In order to ensure that Social Landlords have homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment strategies in place, the Scottish Executive has issued guidance and delegated authority to the Scottish Housing Regulator to monitor their performance in this regard.

#### **3.3 Regulatory Requirements & Guidance**

The Scottish Social Landlord Charter

The Scottish Social Housing Charter was established on 14 March 2012. This was in accordance with section 31 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 and it replaces Performance Standards for Social Landlords which had previously guided registered social landlords (RSLs').

The Charter states what tenants and other customers can expect from RSLs' in terms of service outcomes and performance and it provides a basis for the Scottish Housing Regulator to assess performance through the Annual Report to the Charter (ARC) returns submitted by all RSLs. It sets out a number of standards and outcomes that RSLs' should deliver and amongst these are three standards and outcomes that directly apply to tenancy sustainment, as follows:

**(i) Outcome 1: Equalities**

Social Landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:

- *every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services*

This **outcome** describes what social landlords, by complying with equalities legislation, should achieve for all tenants and other customers regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. It includes landlords' responsibility for finding ways of understanding the needs of different customers and delivering services that recognise and meet these needs.

**(ii) Outcome 6: Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes**

Social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure that:

- *tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.*

This outcome covers a range of actions that social landlords can take on their own and in partnership with others. It covers action to enforce tenancy conditions on estate management and neighbour nuisance, to resolve neighbour disputes, and to arrange or provide tenancy support where this is needed. It also covers the role of landlords in working with others to tackle anti-social behaviour.

**(iii) Outcome 11: Tenancy sustainment**

Social landlords 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.*

This outcome covers how landlords can help tenants who may need support to maintain their tenancy. This includes tenants who may be at risk of falling into arrears with their rent, and tenants who may need their home adapted to cope with age, disability, or caring responsibilities.

### 3.4 WSHA Wider Role Plan

The Scottish Government has set out a strategy, promoting a vision whereby disadvantaged communities are supported and where all places are sustainable and promote wellbeing. This is a 'Thriving Places' approach.

Whiteinch & Scotstoun Housing Association supports this approach which is set out in detail in its 'Wider Role Plan'. The aim of this approach is to ensure that residents of Whiteinch & Scotstoun can enjoy good health and wellbeing and have opportunities to help them meet their full potential. To achieve this WSHA has a key role in working closely with partners to pro-actively reverse economic, physical and social decline.

The Tenancy Sustainment Strategy forms one part of the Wider Role Plan. It aims to sustain individual tenancies by working closely with existing partners while introducing new services into the area where gaps have been identified.

Details of our current partners are contained in Appendix 1

### 3.5 Good for Association Business

As stated earlier, Tenancy Sustainment is good for business because the cost of failed tenancies is high in terms of financial losses and staff resources to the Association and negative and often traumatic for the individuals who face homelessness.

Failed tenancies cost the Association:

- In eviction cases, legal costs
- Lost rent while the property is empty
- Void repairs costs
- Staff costs involved in administrating tenancy end
- Staff costs to re let the property
- Unsettled communities/bad reputation

This Tenancy Sustainment Strategy aims to reduce the amount of failed tenancies and the associated costs in relation to income, reputation and human cost.

### 3.5 Good for Tenants

Failed tenancies are more often than not negative for all involved. The landlord has financial losses and the tenant and members of their household face homelessness or overcrowding in shared family accommodation. Children have to change schools and families need to change G.P. and dentists.

Equally, sustained tenancies tend to have an overall positive effect on the tenant and impacts positively on the community. Sustained tenancies leads to lower turnover and more stable and settled communities where local services thrive and use of community facilities are maximised.

## 4 **Equality and Diversity**

The Association operates an Equality and Diversity Policy under which it is committed to promoting an environment of respect and understanding that aims to eliminate discrimination by and towards members of the public, committee members, contractors and staff.

The Association will at all times endeavour to ensure that in all its activities, primarily in the provision of services, the principles of the Equality & Diversity Policy will be fully applied.

In accordance with the Association's Equality and Diversity Policy, the Tenancy Sustainment Strategy has been consciously considered to judge whether there is any likelihood that its presentation or operation could in any way lead no matter how inadvertently, to discrimination. The conclusion of this exercise is that it is believed that the Tenancy Sustainment Strategy will operate in a non-discriminatory way.

## 5 **Tenancy Sustainment Service in practice**

### 5.1 Prevention and Early Identification – New Tenants

Whiteinch & Scotstoun Housing Association aims to prevent early tenancy breakdown by taking a proactive approach to identifying when new tenants could be at risk. Staff have a number of opportunities to identify potential support issues

- The pre allocation visit
- The accompanied viewing
- The sign up
- The welfare rights/benefit check
- The new tenant visit
- Energy advice visits
- Financial inclusion appointments

### 5.2 Prevention and Early Identification – Existing Tenants.

Sometimes existing tenants who were previously coping well in their tenancies experience life changes that lead to difficulties with the tenancy. This can be brought to staff attention in a variety of ways, for instance

- Rent Arrears and non-engagement
- Anti-social behaviour
- Persistent 'no access' for gas service
- Poor Property Condition
- Unusual Change to Tenant Behaviour
- Neighbour expressing Concerns
- Concerns raised by other third parties

### 5.3 Types of Help Available

Once a tenant has been brought to the attention of Association staff there is a wide range of assistance that can be provided by Association staff directly, *referral to* partners of the Association or to external support agencies. Examples of which are:-

- The provision of practical assistance, for instance, with carpeting, décor, furniture and basic household items (e.g. through vouchers directly supplied by the Association, through assistance with applying for a Community Care Grant, etc)
- The Association's Welfare Rights Service which aims to ensure tenant and rental income are maximised
- The Association's Energy Advice Service which aims to reduce tenants' fuel bills and outstanding fuel debt
- The Association's Money Advice and Financial Inclusion Service which aims to support tenants through budgeting and money advice as well as debt counselling and negotiation with *creditors*
- Tenancy Sustainment Officer who can work with tenants to identify support needs and put appropriate support in place

- Assistance with form filling or making phone calls
- Referrals and signposting to partner services and support agencies

## **6 Training**

Association staff and committee are aware that there are many and often complex issues that lead people to be vulnerable and at risk of losing their tenancies. The Association is committed to providing appropriate guidance and training to staff and Committee on these issues.

## **7 Performance Monitoring and Reporting**

Tenancy Sustainment is a new type of service and Social Landlords are still developing ways of monitoring its success. It will take time to be in a position to fully evaluate the range of work involved; however, improvements in the following areas will be monitored.

Reduction in:-

- Tenancy failures( these will be defined in reporting)
- Void rent losses
- Void repairs
- Legal costs
- Arrears

Additionally the following will be monitored and reported bi-annually to the Tenancy Sustainment Line Manager.

- Total number of referrals
- Application Source of Referred Household
- Household Type
- Age
- Legal Stage at time of Referral
- Reasons for Referral
- Length of Tenancy
- Outcomes of Referral
- Outcomes of the introduction of furniture packages
- Wider Role Activities



## **8. Policy Review**

The Tenancy Sustainment Policy will be reviewed and submitted to Committee for approval every five years or sooner, if necessary, due to changes in legislation, regulatory requirements or best practice guidance.

## Appendix 1

### Whiteinch & Scotstoun Housing Association Tenancy Sustainment Policy

#### Whiteinch & Scotstoun Current Partners

- Working Rite who support 16/17 year olds into employment
- Aberlour YouthPoint who provide street work in order to divert young people from into positive activities, education, training and employment.
- The Whiteinch Centre which provides a variety of activities for all members of the community.
- Dumbarton Road Environment Trust
- Glasgow Wood Recycle
- The feasibility of a Furniture Reuse Initiative is currently being investigated. The aim of this initiative would be to help people on low income furnish their homes with low cost, good quality goods.