



# Tenancy Sustainment Policy

Board Approved:

22 May 2024

Next Review:

May 2027

## 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 ARC Indicator 16 (Percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than a year) to assess our effectiveness in this area. However, they 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 HfL, 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 Homes for Life Partnership 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 services so that every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, and is treated fairly and with respect, with fair access to housing and housing services
- To ensure that tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with us and get the information they need about us including how and why we make decisions and the services we provide
- To provide a range of quality housing management services to tenants and other customers and to provide and assist tenants to access services which

enable tenants to sustain their tenancies and live independently in their homes

- To work with other landlords to provide information and services to current tenants looking to move and housing applicants including homeless people to make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them
- To work with local authorities to ensure that the risk of homelessness is minimised

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 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 are visited within 8 weeks of the commencement of tenancy by the Community Housing Officer (CHO). Follow up visits may be programmed as necessary following that initial visit, if 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. If it is deemed during the initial or follow-on visits that further support is required for the tenant to sustain their tenancy then consideration will be given to a referral to our Tenancy Sustainment Officer.

The CHO will monitor the rent account and if the rent account falls within one month's rent arrears then consideration will be given as to whether a referral is made to supporting agencies:

- East Lothian Council Financial Inclusion Service
- CAB- East Lothian

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 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 by referring to the appropriate advice agency.

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**

When required we will provide a Tenancy Sustainment Service to assist new and existing tenants to successfully remain in their tenancies.

We have excellent relationships with East Lothian Council's Financial Inclusion Service and Citizen Advice Bureau and referrals can be made to these services when required. We can also signpost tenants for money advice to these services. The CBHO can assist tenants with a wide range of information, support and advice in confidence; and can help with budgeting, benefits, energy efficiency and grants & loans by referring to the appropriate agency as and when required. .

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 (See Appendix 1). For example, we may make referrals to the following agencies if required, using the appropriate referral form if required:

- ✓ Recycling First
- ✓ Changeworks
- ✓ Fuel Advice
- ✓ Home Energy Scotland
- ✓ Money Advice & Debt Management
- ✓ East Lothian Citizen Advice Bureau
- ✓ CAP Independent Advocacy

- ✓ Food Parcels
- ✓ 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 East Lothian Council

#### **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**

7.1 This Policy will be reviewed in 3 years or earlier if trends in complaints, customer feedback, or legislative changes necessitate this.