



Sustainability Policy

Date of Approval
April 2017

Review due
April 2020

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1. Introduction – The Purpose of the Policy

1.1 Tenancy sustainment is an integral part of service delivery at Elderpark Housing Association. It is important to the Association and wider society for a number of reasons.

- It is necessary in contributing to the prevention of homelessness or repeat homelessness.
- It is essential that the Association understands the varying social and economic needs of its tenants and takes a pro-active approach in assisting tenants as much as possible. Thus the intention being to reduce the incidence of tenancy failure.
- The financial cost to the Association of homelessness and repeat homelessness either through abandonment, eviction or other reasons is potentially considerable. Consequently by adopting a pro-active approach to tenancy sustainment the Association hopes to reduce the costs associated with tenancy turnover.

2. Key Policy Issues

2.1 Elderpark's mission statement is to

“improve the quality of life for the people of Greater Govan by providing high quality housing and associated services in a safe and secure environment”.

Tenancy sustainability therefore plays an integral part in us achieving our mission statement.

2.2 The issue of tenancy sustainment has increasingly come to the fore in both homeless legislation and social policy and has been highlighted as playing a key role in the alleviation and prevention of homelessness (Glasgow Homelessness Network, 2009). Research undertaken by Glasgow Homelessness Network (2009), Glasgow Homelessness Partnership (2009) and Shelter (2009) has identified key preventing factors associated with tenancy sustainment that helps combat homelessness and maximise tenancy success. For example, good family and friendship networks, training, learning and skills opportunities, the accessibility and availability of good advice and assistance, adequate financial resources and support in times of crisis (Glasgow Homelessness Partnership, 2009). Furthermore, there is an eagerness to adopt a person-centred approach focusing on a long-term, co-ordinated support package for those taking up a tenancy (Glasgow Homelessness network, 2009).

2.3 Homelessness legislation in Scotland (Housing (Scotland) Act, 2001) and (Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act, 2003) has also placed a number of duties upon Registered Social Landlords in relation to the prevention and alleviation of homelessness. For example, a duty to house homeless households through Section 5 referrals, to have in place proactive housing management procedures to minimise the risk of eviction and to inform the local authority if repossession is taking place. These responsibilities are given added significance with the 2012 abolition of priority need (Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act, 2003).

2.4 Emphasis has also been put on bodies representing local authorities on providing housing support to homeless households under The Housing Support Services (Homelessness) (Scotland) Regulations 2012. For example, to provide:

- Advice and assistance with budgeting, debt counselling and welfare benefit claims
- Assisting individuals to engage with other agencies and professionals in their own welfare interest
- Advising and assisting an individual to understand and manage their tenancy rights and responsibilities
- Advising or assisting a tenant settle into their new tenancy

2.5 Since January 2016 the Association has adopted a Housing Options approach for both housing applicants and those vulnerable tenants at risk of losing their home. This approach offers a comprehensive approach by looking at individual circumstances, choices and housing and personal needs. Information is provided on social and private rented sector properties as well as owner occupation and homeless services. Tenancy sustainment interviews are also carried out with existing tenants to assess individual support needs and actions that can be taken to assist with tenancy sustainment. For example, making referrals to other agencies such as

Social Work and Health try and assist individuals to stay in their home. In addition, the Association, subject to budgetary constraints may assist with house cleaning and decoration through the Community Benefit clause and the Tenancy Sustainability Budget. For those tenants over 65 years and or disabled the Elderly Helpline Service can also be utilised.

2.6 Tenement sustainment also features in the outcomes for the Scottish Social Housing Charter. It emphasises that social landlords in partnership with other agencies must ensure that tenants get the information and support they require to remain in their tenancy.

2.7 The Association recognises that it must take a proactive approach to tenancy sustainment through its service delivery and procedures. Furthermore, it must ensure that it adheres to legislation and good practice in relation to tenancy sustainment and homelessness prevention.

3. Tenancy Sustainability Policy

3.1 It is the general policy of the Association to promote tenancy sustainment through the use of best practice and by establishing strong links with partner agencies and organisations to ensure that the appropriate advice and support is given to its tenants.

In implementing tenancy sustainment the Association will ensure that:

- No individual is discriminated against on the grounds of sex or marital status, on racial grounds or on grounds of disability, age, sexual orientation, language or social origin or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions, such as religious beliefs or political opinions.
- This document outlines the association's tenancy sustainment policy.

Detailed procedures are also in place to regulate staff practices involved in carrying out this policy. The outcome of this policy will be monitored the Association's management committee by examining the current reports on Voids, New Tenancy Visit Report, Offer and Lettings Analysis Report and Estate Management, anti-social behaviour Report and Housing Options Report. The Tenancy Sustainment Report will also draw on various aspects of the aforementioned reports. Procedures are also available for inspection on request by any member of the public and on the Association's website.

4. Aims and Objectives of the Policy

4.1 This section outlines the main objectives of the tenancy sustainment policy.

- We aim to ensure that policy and practice conforms to law and good practice in the prevention of homelessness. The Association will ensure that it adheres to the duties placed upon it through Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and Section 11 of the Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003.
- We will ensure that eviction is a last resort in arrears recovery when all other means of assistance have been exhausted. The Association's current arrears strategy is based on early intervention and debt prevention. Tenants are offered a tenancy sustainment interview prior to Notice being served to try and prevent further legal action being taken. Tenants are also given comprehensive advice on the consequences of non-payment of rent. Full details are contained in the Association's Arrears Management Policy.
- We will offer pre-tenancy advice on matters such as tenancy responsibility, rent payments and eligibility for housing benefit to prospective tenants when completing a Housing Options form and at offer stage.
- We will endeavour to identify the varying needs of individuals during the Housing Options interview, at offer stage and/or at tenancy sign up stage, thereby, promoting early intervention, joint partnership working and ensuring that the appropriate support and referrals are made. Where an existing tenant is at risk of losing their home or is failing to sustain their tenancy we will carry out a Housing Options Tenancy sustainment interview to ascertain what support if any the Association can provide or if support is required from other agencies.
- We will carry out new tenant visits 6-8 weeks following tenancy sign up to identify and/or tackle any potential tenancy and vulnerability issues that could jeopardise tenancy sustainment.
- We will strive to maximise tenants' income and tackle debt problems through partnership working and referrals to organisations such as Money Matters and EPIC 360 who will provide welfare rights service and financial awareness including budgeting, banking and managing money. In addition, the Association will ensure that tenants receive the most affordable tariff for their utilities through partnership working with other agencies.
- We will ensure that the proper referrals are made to our partner agencies and organisations such as Turning Point, The Advocacy Project and Social Work for vulnerable tenants that are struggling to sustain their tenancy or are at risk of eviction.

- We will aid tenants' with initial set up costs by providing Starter Packs, decoration vouchers and a flooring and blinds package where appropriate. This is achieved through working in conjunction with partner agencies; Starter Packs Govan, Dulux Decorating Centres and Spruce Carpets.
- The Association will continue to strive to improve the neighbourhood as a place to live. By improving the attractiveness of the area we aim to improve tenancy sustainment by seeking to bring new services into the area, providing an effective estate management service, tackling anti-social behaviour and by finding alternative uses for redundant shops.
- Our allocation policy also promotes tenancy sustainment by awarding support, employment and education points to people residing in the Govan area. For example, by awarding support points it is envisaged that both tenancy sustainment and community support networks will be sustained. Likewise by awarding employment and education points the Association is encouraging people from different economic backgrounds to reside in the area.
- Where tenants of the Association receive a prison sentence we will enter into negotiations with the tenant with a view to them terminating the tenancy and being offered another tenancy upon their release. Each case will be looked at on its own merits taking into account previous tenancy conduct and the implications for the wider community.
- We will utilise the community benefit and tenancy sustainability budget to assist vulnerable tenants with cleaning and decoration of their home, subject to budgetary constraints.

5. Measuring Tenancy Sustainment

5.1 Given the multitude of reasons why people move it is difficult to use one statistic or performance indicator to measure the outcome of this policy and procedures. A number of indicators will be used such as those prescribed under The Scottish Social Housing Charter. For example, under charter outcome 11 the Association must provide the following:

- The percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than one year, by source of let
- The turnover of lettable stock in the last year
- Number of applicants on the waiting list for medical adaptations, the number carried out and the average waiting time
- Number of cases during the year in which: Notice of Proceedings issued; court actions initiated; and orders for recovery of possession granted
- Number of and reason for evictions in the last year
- Number of properties abandoned in the last year

The Association also regularly records and presents the following reports to its management committee.

- Void Report
- Offer and Lettings Analysis Report
- New Tenant Visit Report
- Record of the number of tenancy sustainment interviews carried out as per the Housing Options reporting tool
- Number of houses cleaned
- Number of houses decorated
- Record of those tenancies where there is ongoing support provided by the Housing Officer

6. Review

6.1 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years, the next review being due in April 2020. An interim review may take place in the event of changes to good practice, or regulatory requirements.

Appendix One

Glasgow Homelessness Network (2009). *Homelessness Shared Solutions, Report to Glasgow South East CHCP & Partners.*

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Shelter (2009). *Tenancy sustainment in Scotland.* Available from:

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