

Tenancy Sustainment Strategy



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1. Introduction

1.1. What is Tenancy Sustainment?

Shelter Scotland defines Tenancy Sustainment as:

“Preventing a tenancy from coming to a premature end by providing the necessary information, advice and support for tenants to be able to maintain their tenancies”

To encourage tenancy sustainment certain conditions are required including the property meeting the needs of the tenant, the tenant having the ability to maintain their tenancy and to meet their responsibilities as a tenant.

- 1.2. Waverley Housing is committed to achieving the outcomes contained in the Scottish Social Housing Charter and this Strategy is particularly relevant to Outcome 11 Tenancy Sustainment which states that 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.

2. Key Objectives of Strategy

- 2.1. The aim of this strategy is to provide a consistent overview to the issue of preventing tenancy failures and homelessness and to plan and make improvements in this area. This strategy sets our vision, aims and objectives to address and promote tenancy sustainment.
- 2.2. Waverley Housing’s aim is to:
- a) Reduce the number of evictions.
 - b) Reduce the number of voids.
 - c) Reduce the costs of failed tenancies.
 - d) Prevent homelessness.
 - e) Improve our performance in relation to the percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than one year which is reported annually to the Scottish Housing Regulator.
 - f) Mitigate the impact of welfare reform changes.
 - g) Improve tenant satisfaction.
- 2.3. Prevention plays a major role in our efforts to tackle homelessness. Waverley Housing is not just about providing houses, but ensuring these houses become homes to our tenants, encouraging them to stay in them, by providing ongoing support. We aim to work with our tenants and help them sustain their tenancies.
- 2.4. We will continue to build on previous initiatives by working in partnership with Scottish Borders Council (SBC), other RSLs operating in Scottish Borders Council area and support networks to promote best practice. SBC in common with all other local authorities in Scotland is obliged to produce Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans from April 2019 and Waverley Housing has worked closely with SBC to prepare and implement this Plan in relation to the Scottish Borders Council area. The main objectives of these Plans are to prevent homelessness wherever possible but where homelessness occurs to provide settled mainstream housing as quickly as possible. The use of temporary accommodation should

be minimised and where it is needed it should be mainstream, furnished accommodation within a community. A Housing First approach should be the first response for people with complex needs and facing multiple disadvantages.

3. Delivering Our Objectives

- 3.1. It is generally accepted that a “failed tenancy” is a tenancy that ends by:
- a) Eviction.
 - b) Abandonment.
 - c) Terminated within 12 months of commencing.
 - d) The tenant never moves into the property.
- 3.2. The cost of a failed tenancy can be high for both tenant and Waverley Housing. Every failed tenancy represents additional resources in the allocation and lettings procedure, as well as possible additional costs resulting from:
- a) Rent and service charge loss during void period.
 - b) Costs incurred in preparing the property for re-letting.
 - c) Staff resources associated with the lettings and eviction/abandonment procedures.
 - d) Legal costs.
 - e) The costs incurred by other organisations who subsequently take responsibility for accommodating and supporting the former tenant.
 - f) Managing difficulties within communities due to antisocial behaviour.

4. Key Objectives

4.1. Key Objective 1 – Prevention

- 4.1.1. Taking steps prior to, and from the commencement of any tenancy will identify issues and assist in sustainment.
- 4.1.2. Pre-tenancy measures and initiatives which assist in the identification of tenants at risk, will assist Waverley Housing staff in identifying those prospective tenants most at risk of abandoning their tenancies or developing problems in sustaining their tenancies. By undertaking initiatives which identify in advance vulnerable potential tenants, such as Pre-Allocation Interviews, Waverley Housing will be well placed to address issues before they become problematic and provide support and/or management practices to the particular needs of the individual or household concerned. Where appropriate Waverley Housing will obtain references from prospective tenants previous landlords and use this information to assess the suitability of any offer of a tenancy to the prospective tenant.
- 4.1.3. WH will operate proactive work practices in addressing tenancy sustainment by:
- a) Satisfying applicants’ choice of where they want to live and prevent anyone from being housed in an area they do not want, including contacting prospective tenants and explaining exactly where the property is that they bid for, the property details and what amenities are available in that area (applicants bidding for properties who live outwith the Borders area often do not know where the property is).
 - b) Providing new households at commencement of tenancy with information on the importance of rent payment, what advice and assistance is available from Waverley

Housing and the respective responsibilities of both tenant and Waverley. The support available from our Tenant Support Worker and Welfare Benefits Advisor is particularly relevant in this connection.

- c) Providing relevant information at sign-up stage and throughout the duration of any tenancy. Appropriate support should be obtained to assist prospective tenants whose first language is not English.
- d) Assessing risk factors when dealing with prospective tenants and identifying any support needs to help sustain the tenancy. Referring prospective tenants to agencies who can provide relevant support to them.
- e) Where appropriate, ensuring prospective tenants are aware of the option of obtaining white goods and or beds/cots including mattresses to assist them in sustaining their tenancy. If tenants are in receipt of support from another agency, then a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy (SSST) should be given along with a Section 34 Notice pre sign-up.
- f) Providing computers in our office which tenants can use to submit welfare benefit claims to the Department of Work and Pensions and for other purposes which assist them to maintain their tenancy.

4.1.4. WH will offer those tenants who are under-occupying their homes and at risk of accruing rent arrears, priority for a management transfer within our housing stock, as far as is practicably possible.

4.2. Key Objective 2 – Tenancy Support

- a) 4.2.1. We shall provide individually tailored support throughout any tenancy, catering for the changing needs of households. This can take different forms, e.g. arranging for adaptations to be carried out to a property to allow the tenant to continue to live in the property, ensuring a tenant obtains individual energy advice to deal with fuel poverty. We actively welcoming new initiatives from Scottish Government/SBC re grants available to assist tenants with living expenses i.e. fuel poverty contributions, Crisis Intervention Funds to assist with rent arrears etc.

4.2.2. We recognise that continued personal and sustained support for vulnerable and potentially vulnerable individuals is critical to the success of their tenancy. Waverley Housing is committed to providing tenancy support, welfare rights advice and early intervention services to our tenants at any stage of their tenancy should they require it. The role of our Tenant Support Worker is important in undertaking this work and in using support plans to detail the nature of assistance provided and actions to be followed to meet priorities agreed with the tenant. Our Welfare Benefits Adviser also has an important role in providing this type of support to our tenants.

4.2.3. We will use various forms of communication e.g. Tenant Newsletters, targeted letters to provide information on relevant issues e.g. welfare benefit changes, furniture recycling initiatives to tenants.

4.2.4. All new tenants will receive a settling-in visit within 6 weeks of signing up for a new tenancy (2 - 3 weeks if the tenant is deemed vulnerable) which provides an opportunity for our staff to gain an early indication of how tenants are managing their tenancy and where appropriate can allow our staff to take action to support the new tenant. There are other opportunities e.g. when our Trades staff or staff from other organisations visit our tenants to highlight any potential issues which require action by our staff.

- 4.2.5. We will work with Registered Tenant Organisations and any other community organisations to forge a sense of community and assist new tenants to establish themselves in communities. We will seek to implement effective Estate Management practices, e.g. developing stair cleaning services with a view to creating sustainable communities in areas where our housing stock is located.
- 4.2.6. We will maintain regular, personal and sustained contact with 'at risk' householders and work in partnership with specialist support agencies working with vulnerable client groups as well as the statutory authorities. In relation to homeless applicants referred to us from the Council, they may receive a housing support package arranged by the Council.

4.3. Key Objective 3 – Partnership Working

4.3.1. Waverley Housing will continue to establish key partnership arrangements with:

- a) Scottish Borders Council
- b) Police Scotland
- c) Domestic Abuse Advisory Service (DAAS) and MARAC
- d) Other locally based Registered Social Landlords
- e) Community Networks
- f) Voluntary Sector

This will assist in sustaining tenancies, and working positively with them to address homelessness, operating nominations, antisocial behaviour initiatives and joint training events where these benefit the sustainability of tenancies.

4.3.2. Our partnership working is underpinned by a number of protocol agreements including Section 5 Homelessness Duty Protocol, Housing Options Protocol for Care Leavers, Procedures for the Accommodation of Sexual Offenders, Scottish Borders Antisocial Policies and Procedures and Information Sharing Protocols.

We are also committed to the Rapid Rehousing Transition Programme (RRTP) which consists of other initiatives such as:

- The Homeless and Rough Sleepers Actin Group (HARSAG)
- Secure Housing on Release of Incarceration (SHORE)
- Housing 1st

all of which have been introduced to prevent homelessness and repeat homelessness.

5. Tenancy Sustainment At Risk Groups

5.1. It is recognised that some household types may need help or assistance at times in order to sustain their tenancies. Previously identified 'at risk' client groups are:

- a) Households who have previously been homeless.
- b) Those with mental health issues or learning difficulties.
- c) Older people with support needs.
- d) Those with alcohol and/or drug use issues.
- e) Young parents.
- f) People who have suffered previously from domestic or other types of violence.

- g) Households suffering from harassment.
- h) Ex- offenders.
- i) Those with disabilities.
- j) Households with histories of financial exclusion or multiple debts.
- k) Young people setting up home for the first time – particularly those leaving care.
- l) Families with support needs.
- m) Families and individuals who are now affected by changes to Welfare Benefits.
- n) Those with poor references from previous landlords.

5.2. Waverley Housing will provide adequate training to ensure that relevant staff are kept informed of changes to areas which impact upon tenancy sustainment, e.g. Welfare Benefits, personal change in circumstances and are assisted to maintain good working relationships with other agencies who can support tenants to maintain their tenancies.

6. Performance Monitoring

- 6.1. Given the various factors affecting tenants and their abilities to maintain their tenancies it can be difficult to be fully certain about the effects on tenancy sustainment of different initiatives. However, information on the reasons for terminations will be collected. Over time this will allow us to build up historical data which can assist in identifying trends and highlighting areas requiring further attention.
- 6.2. We have to report each year to the Scottish Housing Regulator on the percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than one year by source of let. This will allow us to analyse our performance over time and also in relation to how other Registered Social Landlords have performed in this respect.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1. As detailed above there are financial and reputational risks to the Company where significant numbers of tenants do not sustain their tenancies for more than one year. Implementation of the provisions contained in the Tenancy Sustainment Strategy will assist in reducing these risks.