



TENANCY SUSTAINMENT POLICY

POLICY NO. 35

Date Reviewed:	April 2024
Date of Next Review:	April 2029
Regulatory Standards of Governance and Financial Management	<p>Regulatory Standard 2</p> <p>The RSL is open about and accountable for what it does. <u>It understands and takes account of the needs and priorities of its tenants</u>, service users and stakeholders. And its primary focus is the sustainable achievement of these priorities.</p> <p>Guidance: 2.4</p> <p>Regulatory Standard 5 The RSL conducts its affairs with honesty and integrity.</p> <p>Guidance: 5.1 , 5.3</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Tenancy Sustainment is a generic term for the prevention of tenancy breakdown or a 'failed tenancy'. Failed tenancies can be disastrous for the tenant who may end up homeless and find it difficult to secure another tenancy. They are also a waste of resources because each additional property becoming empty incurs significant costs.
- 1.2 This policy aims to:
- ensure that tenancy sustainment underpins the delivery of our housing services
 - ensure resources are directed towards proactive tenancy management solutions, avoiding evictions and abandonments
 - optimise service satisfaction levels
 - minimise the direct and indirect costs associated with tenancy failure
- 1.3 The cost of a failed tenancy can be high for both the tenant and the Association. Every failed tenancy represents:
- the human 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
 - rent loss during the time a property is empty
 - costs incurred associated with the re-letting of a property
 - in some cases, legal costs
 - supplementary costs incurred by other agencies or authorities who subsequently take responsibility for accommodating the former tenant

2. Scottish Social Housing Charter

- 2.1 Glen Housing Association's values, organisational culture and customer service standards are designed to ensure a first-class service is given to all its service users, partner organisations and other stakeholders. This also supports staff to achieve the standards and outcomes included in the Scottish Social Housing Charter.
- 2.2 The Scottish Housing Regulator uses outcomes and standards set out in the Scottish Social Housing Charter (the Charter) to assess the performance of social landlords. This policy complies with the Charter and takes into account the following outcomes and standards for this policy:

Outcome 1: 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.

Outcome 2: Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

Outcome 3: Social landlords manage their businesses so that tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Outcome 6: Social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure as far as reasonably possible that: tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.

Outcome 7: People looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them.

Outcome 8: Tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options.

Outcome 9: People at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness.

Outcome 10: People looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and their prospects of being housed.

AND most specifically:

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 on their own, or in partnership with others, 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. The following sections of the policy detail how we meet these objectives, help our tenants sustain their tenancies and avoid failed tenancies.

3. WHAT IS A FAILED TENANCY

- 3.1 We adopt the definition of failed tenancy as used by the Scottish Housing Regulator within the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC).

We consider that a tenancy has 'failed' if it ends by:

- eviction (Indicator 22)
- abandonment
- early termination (under 12 months) (Indicator 16)

Whilst we record all early terminations as failed tenancies, we recognise that there may be reasons why people give up their tenancies early, such as domestic abuse and other forms of harassment, illness and death. We also recognise that people may terminate their tenancy early for positive reasons such as finding a new job or moving in with a partner. Although recorded as a failed tenancy we recognise that not all early terminations are avoidable.

3.2 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
- extreme youth or immaturity
- young parents
- older people with support needs
- families with support needs
- no established local networks/lack of support

In addition to the known risk factors there are other causes of tenancy breakdown such as:

- allocations in unwanted areas
- dissatisfaction with property condition
- anti-social 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

- 3.3 Tenancy sustainment is not a new concept for us, and our staff are experienced in assisting tenants to sustain their tenancies and prevent 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 agencies with the expertise to assist.

4. KEY OBJECTIVES

By implementing a Tenancy Sustainment Policy, we have sought to identify 3 key objectives to prevent tenancy failure and homelessness:

4.1 Prevention

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

4.2 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.

4.3 Partnership Working

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

Appendix 1 outlines the detail of the above 3 objectives.

5. COMPLAINTS

As per our Complaints Handling Procedure, Glen Housing Association is committed to providing high-quality customer services. However, if anyone does wish to raise a complaint, this can be done so in person at any of our offices, by telephone, in writing, by email or using our complaints form on www.glenhousing.co.uk

6. OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

Glen Housing Association is committed to promoting fair and equal treatment for all and is opposed to any form of unlawful discrimination. We operate an Equality & Diversity Policy which informs all aspects of our business and ensures we adhere to the Equality Act 2010.

In line with our commitment and upon request, the Association can make this Policy available, free of charge, in a variety of alternative formats including large print, audio, Braille and community languages.

7. GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATIONS

The Association will treat all personal data in line with its obligations under the current data protection regulations and its own Privacy Policy. Information regarding how personal data will be used and the basis for processing it is provided in the Association's Fair Processing Notice.

8. REVIEW OF POLICY

This Policy will be reviewed on a five-yearly basis with any changes to the List of Approved Consultants being brought to the Board on an on-going basis, as appropriate.

APPENDIX 1

Tenancy Sustainment in Practice

Objective 1: Prevention

Pre-tenancy measures and initiatives which assist in the identification of tenants' vulnerabilities and support needs will assist the Association and its staff in identifying those prospective tenants most at risk of abandoning their tenancy or developing problem tenancies. The Association will be better placed to address any issues when they arise.

Pre-Allocation

We will seek to:

- satisfy applicants' choice of where they want to live
- carry out a pre offer interview to discuss potential support needs (see Objective 2)
- ensure that our empty properties meet our minimum re-let standard
- carry out accompanied viewings of our empty properties. On the few occasions where this is not practical, staff will ensure that the applicant has adequate information on the property and the surrounding neighbourhood, when keys are signed out for viewings
- at the tenancy sign-up meeting, ensure that the most important features of the Tenancy Agreement are highlighted, including responsibility for rent payments and the Association's policies regarding rent arrears and anti-social behaviour
- offer a decoration allowance to assist with re-decoration where appropriate
- provide details of energy suppliers with the most up to date meter readings for the property
- advise on the benefits of having home contents insurance
- provide details of suppliers/charities in the area who can assist with furniture provision
- encourage the tenant to provide details of next of kin or other support contact, in the event that staff have difficulty contacting the tenant in an emergency
- if applicable, advise and assist the tenant with a submission for Universal Credit or Housing Benefit (for pensioners) and calculate an estimate for any rent they may have to pay.

During the Tenancy:

- we will carry out a post allocation visit within 6 – 8 weeks of the start of the tenancy
- ensure all information provided to applicants and tenants is in plain English, easy to understand and in a format suited to each individual
- make regular, personal and sustained contact with 'at risk' households
- provide advice, make referrals or provide direct support as per Objective 2 and 3 below

Objective 2: Tenancy Support

The Association recognises that continued personal and sustained support for potentially vulnerable individuals is critical to the future success of their tenancy.

Prior to allocation, the specific needs of applicants are assessed by the central team of Fife Housing Register (FHR) when the application is submitted, so that each allocating partner is aware of the needs of the applicant before considering them for a property. In addition, staff will liaise with Housing and Social Work Occupational Therapists, if necessary, to ensure the property is suitable for identified needs.

Glen HA cannot provide all levels of specialist support directly to tenants but will ensure that new tenants with specific needs for support have a package already in place when they are allocated a property.

We will interview applicants prior to allocation to determine any specific needs or support requirements they may have which have not been picked up through the FHR assessment process. We will assist applicants through direct provision, signposting or referral, to obtain any support they may require.

This support may include:

- Community Care grants (Welfare Fund)
- Ongoing tenancy support;
- Decoration vouchers;
- Obtaining furniture, carpets and curtains;
- Income maximisation
- Money and budgeting advice;
- Fuel poverty and energy advice;
- Assistance with benefit claims;
- Social care support.
- Referrals for food and fuel support

We may not allocate a property if support needs exist that cannot be met.

We will carry out a post allocation visit to identify any potential risks or vulnerabilities, within 6-8 weeks of the tenancy starting and offer advice or referrals for support as required.

Where a need for support for an existing tenant becomes apparent, a referral can be made using Fife Online Referral Tracking system (FORT) which is administered by Fife Rights Forum and is used by over 100 agencies across Fife.

Examples of types of support referrals:

- drug and alcohol misuse/dependency
- tenancy support
- mediation
- mental health services
- furniture provision
- money advice
- violence and domestic abuse

We can also assist tenants in making a self-referral for medical adaptations to their house, or self-referrals to support or social work services.

We can provide referrals or help to complete applications to other agencies who may provide specialist support, have available grant funding or can provide products or services that can help a tenant sustain their tenancy.

In order to try to reduce any detrimental impact that moving onto Universal Credit may have, we will assist tenants by means of providing advice and assistance on how Universal Credit operates, and by making referrals to the appropriate agencies in relation to income maximisation, money advice, budgeting, fuel poverty and energy advice.

As Universal Credit is conducted predominantly on-line, if a tenant does not have sufficient IT skills, staff will be available to offer assistance or refer to digital inclusion services as required.

Objective 3: Partnership Working

We work in partnership with a range of organisations as follows:

Fife Council

- Homelessness prevention and housing the homeless
- Fife Housing Register on an operational level and through representation on the management framework
- Fife Housing Association Alliance with the wider aim of housing provision
- Housing Investigation Team to tackle anti-social behaviour
- National Accommodation Strategy for Sex Offenders

- Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements

Other RSLs

Working in partnership, both locally and nationally, to develop additional services and support, in particular for issues relating to:

- Income Maximisation
- Fuel Poverty and Fuel Debt
- Digital Integration

Fife Police

- Protocols in place for information sharing.
- Attendance at community engagement meetings in all areas where we have properties. This close working relationship allows us to tackle anti-social behaviour at all levels as soon as it arises.

Social Work and Health Services

- We will work closely with local social work and health services to resolve issues that might impact on a tenant's ability to remain in their home.

Other Agencies

- We will make use of the FORT system and work with the agencies involved to support tenants and applicants.
- We will use Charis, Turn2Us and other online tools to find charities and grant providers to meet particular circumstances.
- We will continue to work with partner agencies such as Cozy Kingdom and Aberlour Childcare Trust in the provision of services to tenants.
- We will continue to seek to develop partnership working with any other agencies and community groups that play a part in the local community.
- We will work with these groups to identify local needs and establish services in the area to tackle these issues. This can include providing additional support and services for issues including:
 - General Tenancy Support
 - Income Maximisation
 - Fuel or Food Poverty
 - Digital Integration
 - Isolation (mental health/loneliness)