



Drumchapel Housing

Co-operative Limited

Tenancy Sustainment Policy

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Tenancy Sustainment Policy sets out Drumchapel Housing Co-operative's approach to tenancy sustainment.
- 1.2 The term tenancy sustainment is used to describe the prevention of a tenancy from 'failing'. Tenancies can fail for number of reasons however the Co-operative considers that a tenancy has not been sustained if it ends within 12 months. We also consider a failed tenancy to be a tenancy which has ended due to abandonment or eviction.
- 1.3 A failed tenancy is not only detrimental to a tenant and their family, but also to the Co-operative. A failed tenancy can incur substantial costs to the Co-operative in terms of rent loss while the property is empty, void repair costs and staff resources to re-let the property.
- 1.4 The Co-operative also recognises that tenants end their tenancy for positive reasons such as moving for job reasons or to a larger home.

2. Aims and Objectives

- 2.1 The aims of the Policy are to ensure that the Co-operative provides an effective Housing Management Service which complies with our landlord obligations in relation to tenancy sustainment.
- 2.2 Our objectives include –
 - minimising tenancy failures
 - preventing homelessness
 - maintain high demand for our stock
 - maintain high tenant satisfaction levels
 - promote sustainable communities

We will do this through –

- Promoting equality– tailoring our services to meet our tenants individual ever changing needs.
- Prevention and early intervention – to ensure that any issues which may affect tenancy sustainment are identified at pre-offer or sign-up stage. Also, for existing tenants, by recognising any change in behaviour which prevents tenants managing their tenancy or follow up concerns raised by other parties.
- Tenancy and housing support – to provide support and advice to tenants throughout their tenancy, signpost tenants to partner agencies for specialised support, and make referrals on behalf of tenants to partner agencies.

- Partnership working – have good working relationships with other agencies and work in partnership to assist tenants.

2.2 In line with our Business Plan, we strive to be the landlord of choice in our neighbourhood, working with our tenants, communities, and local stakeholders to create an area where people choose to, and are happy to live. Great service and value for money will be at our core and we will strive relentlessly to balance both.

3. Regulatory Requirements

3.1 We comply with all relevant legislation including:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, 2001, 2010, 2014
- The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003
- The Equalities Act 2010
- The Welfare Reform Act 2012

3.2 In terms of the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC), the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) has identified key indicators relevant to tenancy sustainment where they will measure landlord performance –

Outcome 1 – Equalities

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

- *They support the right to adequate housing.*
- *Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs and rights recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to.*

Outcome 11 – Tenancy Sustainment

Social landlords should 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.”

Outcome 13 – Value for Money

Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that:

“Tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.”

3.2 The Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) is responsible for monitoring, assessing and reporting on how well social landlords achieve the Charter’s outcomes. This is assessed through the Annual Return on the Charter (ARC).

4. Key Principles

4.1 Affordability

We aim to provide affordable homes and have developed a clear rent structure. One of the key objectives of our Rent Policy is to keep rents affordable and our long-term projections are based on the Co-operative keeping rent increases to inflation rate when practically possible.

We are also working to make our homes as energy efficient as possible to minimise the amount our tenants spend on heating their homes.

We will continuously work with tenants to prevent tenants falling into rent arrears. We implemented proactive procedures to prevent rent arrears with prompt personal contact and early responsive action taken immediately there is a missed payment is crucial to avoid rent arrears debt and the potential risk of tenancy failing. We will also continue to raise awareness of the benefits tenants are entitled to and support tenants to maximise their incomes through benefit claims.

4.2 Housing options

We adopt a Housing Options approach to assist and advise applicants who contact us seeking permanent accommodation. We spend time with applicants discussing their housing need and considering their options as part of the housing application and allocations process to ensure that a tenancy with the Co-operative will meet their long-term housing need.

4.3 Allocations

We operate a Choice Based Lettings Allocations system of allocation where applicants chose the properties they wish to be considered for. We let our properties to those applicants in greatest housing need by giving priority tickets to those who fall under the legislative reasonable preference groups. We do this in a way that makes best use of our available stock, meets the needs of applicants and helps sustain our community. This helps tenancy sustainment however there are other factors to consider to ensure a tenancy does not fail.

The Co-operative also works in partnership with Glasgow City Council, and we agree a Local Letting Plan on an annual basis for those experiencing homelessness. We have an obligation under Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to help provide a permanent home to people experiencing homelessness.

4.4 Vulnerable groups

It is the Housing Management Team and other referring agencies decision if a tenant is potentially vulnerable and if this vulnerability could impact on their ability to sustain a tenancy. These groups may need help and support to sustain their tenancy.

The following list shows who we would consider to be potentially vulnerable however the list is not exhaustive –

- Those who have previously been homeless
- Those suffering financial hardship
- Those with existing support needs
- Young people setting up home for the first time or care leavers
- Those with disabilities
- Older people who may have support needs
- Those with addiction issues
- Those who have suffered previously from domestic abuse or other types of violence
- Those suffering from either racial or non-racial harassment
- Ex-offenders

4.5 Roles and responsibilities

All tenants are responsible for managing their tenancy and adhering to the terms of their tenancy agreement.

The Co-operative has a role to play in identifying tenants or households with support needs or, who may be vulnerable and make a referral to any relevant agencies for appropriate support and assistance. In addition to our Housing Management Team, our staff carry out home visits to our tenants and are trained to notice signs that suggest a tenant may be struggling to maintain their tenancy. Our staff and contractors routinely raise any concerns with our Housing Management Team so that appropriate tenancy support can be put in place and/or referrals can be made.

Referrals will be made where, in the professional opinion of our Housing Management Team, that a tenant or household has support needs or may otherwise be considered as vulnerable where this may affect their ability to sustain their tenancy.

4.6 Partnership working

The Co-operative will familiarise themselves with the support services and agencies in the area. We will agree referral arrangements, or where necessary, have protocols in place for liaising, sharing information and working with agencies/organisations. This may include attending training with these agencies/organisations provide to be proactive when making referrals.

4.7 Minimising new tenancy failures

Prior to an offer of housing, a pre-tenancy interview takes place with a potential tenant. This provides the opportunity to get to know them, confirm their current circumstances, discuss the cost of running a home and provide as much information regarding the available property. By understanding an applicant's circumstances and expectations, we aim to make an offer of housing that meets their long-term housing need.

To minimise the risk of new tenancies failing, we will work with and support new tenants to:

- Ensure they know their obligations as a tenant at the point of sign-up and who to contact at the Co-operative if they have any enquiries or issues.
- Provide as much information and guidance as possible on the responsibilities of managing a tenancy.
- Explain how to pay rent and give advice regarding entitlement to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Costs.
- Let a property which meets our lettable standard and the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS).
- Offer a starter pack to any new tenants who may benefit from this and give advice on how to source furniture/other household goods.
- Offer an appointment to attend one of our weekly Welfare Rights Surgeries with an Adviser from Citizens Advice Bureau to assist with benefit checks, changing address with other agencies or claiming any benefits they may be entitled to.
- Carry out a New Tenant Visit within 6 weeks of the date of entry to review any tenancy issues or support needs.

4.8 Minimising tenancy failures

We will continue to work with and support existing tenants to sustain their tenancy by:

- Maintaining regular contact with vulnerable groups
- Identify any changes in support needs
- Identify possible disabled adaptations
- Identify any changes in tenant behaviour which is leading to difficulties in managing their tenancy i.e. non-engagement, rent arrears, tenancy in poor condition or concerns raised by other parties.
- Carrying out routine tenancy visits to all tenants

We will also review information on termination forms to continuously improve our services and review internal procedures when required.

4.9 Enforcement Action

We acknowledge that enforcement action should be a last resort in dealing with a failing tenancy however, we have an obligation to other tenants and members of the community to appropriately manage failing tenancies.

5. Tenancy Sustainment Fund

There is a wide range of assistance which is provided by the Co-operative directly. Our Tenancy Sustainment Fund (TSF) budget is administered by the Housing Management Team and reviewed on an annual basis.

The TSF can assist tenants with the following however the list is not exhaustive –

- Emergency food parcels and/or vouchers
- Emergency fuel vouchers
- Decoration vouchers for new tenants and for those tenants identified as requiring assistance
- Starter packs for new tenants
- Rent incentive for new tenants
- Carpets/floor coverings

The Senior Housing Officer will oversee the level of assistance being administered to individual tenants.

6. Complaints

If tenant or service user is dissatisfied with the level of service they have received in relation to this policy, a complaint should be made to the Co-operative who will respond in accordance with their complaints policy and procedures. Should the tenant or service user remain dissatisfied having exhausted the organisation's internal complaints procedures, they can raise a complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

7. Equality and Diversity

Our core values include providing a fair and equal service for all service users and we will ensure that in applying this policy we will not discriminate against any individual, household or group on any of the grounds detailed in our Equality and Human Rights Policy.

The following are some examples of how we will achieve this:

- Publication of the policy in alternative formats and different languages, on request (with any reasonable costs borne by the Co-operative).
- Providing interpreting service on request.
- Consulting with national bodies, as required, to promote good practice.

8. Policy Review

The Co-operative will review this policy every 3 years unless amendment is required sooner due a change in statutory, regulatory or best practice guidance.

9. GDPR

The Co-operative will gather and use certain information about individuals in accordance with UK GDPR and DPA 2018. Staff members have a responsibility to ensure compliance with the terms of the privacy policy and to collect, handle and store personal information in accordance with relevant legislation. The Fair Processing Notice (FPN) details how personal data is held and processed.