



## TENANCY SUSTAINMENT POLICY

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## OSPREY GROUP TENANCY SUSTAINMENT POLICY STATEMENT

*Osprey Housing believes that effective and efficient tenancy sustainment is vital to the success of maintaining good quality services for all our tenants and provide value for money.*

This is encompassed in our Core Values:

- **Ambition and Achievement** – we are a high performing organisation delivering through innovation and challenge
- **Equality and Respect** – we recognise and celebrate the unique value in everyone
- **Quality and Professionalism** – we strive to deliver high standards
- **Agile and Responsive** – we are flexible and quick to deal with change without diminishing our delivery

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Policy Statement

The Group believe that effective, pro-active and efficient tenancy sustainment is vital in achieving greater economic, social and environmental benefits for tenants and communities.

The Tenancy Sustainment Policy aims to ensure that the Group provides an effective housing service that complies with its landlord obligations in respect of tenancy sustainment and offers the right level of support to our tenants to empower them to lead successful tenancies. Our objectives include minimising tenancy breakdown, preventing homelessness and promoting stable and sustainable tenancies through:

- Early Intervention and Prevention -
- Rent Affordability, Fuel Poverty and Welfare Reform
- Health and Wellbeing
- Digital Inclusion
- Improving Neighbourhoods

## 1.2 Compliance with Regulatory Standards

In terms of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, the Scottish Housing Regulator has identified a number of key indicators relevant to tenancy sustainment by which it measures landlord performance, including the following:

- **Housing options** – people looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them, tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options, and people at risk of losing their homes get advice on preventing homelessness.
- **Access to social housing** – 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.
- **Tenancy sustainment** – 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.
- **Homeless people** – homeless people get prompt and easy access to help and advice, are provided with suitable, good-quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.
- **Value for money** – tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.
- **Equalities** – tenants, owners and other customers have their individual needs recognised, are treated fairly, with respect and receive fair access to housing services, regardless of age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex of sexual orientation.

- **Participation** - tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

### **1.3 The Legal Framework**

We will comply with all relevant legislation and associated regulations, including:

- The Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, 2001, 2010 & 2014;
- The Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003;
- The Data Protection Act 1998;
- The Welfare Reform Act 2012; and
- The Scottish Social Housing Charter

Common law, statute and the contractual obligations within our tenancy agreement set out our responsibilities as landlord and those of our tenants.

Our Tenancy Sustainment Policy is consistent with our:

- Group Strategic Business Plan;
- Allocations Policy;
- Arrears Management Policy;
- Estate Management Policy;
- Anti Social Behaviour Policy;
- Domestic Abuse Policy;
- Risk Management Strategy.

## **2. Aims and Objectives**

The key objectives for the Tenancy Sustainment Policy are

- Preventing Homelessness
- To minimise tenancy terminations through evictions and abandonments (including minimising costs associated with void loss)
- Promote partnership working in ways of providing support and advice for tenants and service users
- Build stable and sustainable communities

To achieve the positive outcomes of:

- Early Intervention and Prevention
- Rent Affordability, Fuel Poverty and Welfare Reform
- Health and Wellbeing
- Digital Inclusion
- Improving Neighbourhoods

## **3. Implementing the Policy**

Allocating tenancies through our Housing Allocation Policy, we let houses in a way that gives reasonable preference to those in greatest housing need, makes best use of

available stock, maximises choice and helps sustain communities. We seek to promote housing options for applicants through working collaboratively with the local authority and other social landlords. The Tenancy Sustainment Policy seeks to promote sustainability of tenancies and as such assist with the sustainability of communities. However the provision of a tenancy is not in itself sufficient to make a tenancy successful and there are other factors to consider so that once a tenancy starts it does not fail.

Under the terms of their Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST), every tenant is responsible for managing their tenancy and complying with tenancy conditions. It is recognised, however that we have a role to play in identifying tenants or households with particular needs or who may be vulnerable and require additional support to manage their tenancy.

The Tenancy Sustainment and Support Working Group Action plan shows the approach to delivering and supporting each objective of the policy.

In an effort to minimise tenancy failure, we will seek to develop pre-tenancy, during tenancy and post tenancy measures to assist us in identifying tenants at most risk of not sustaining their tenancy. We will seek to:

- Allow applicants as much choice as possible in their preferred type and location of housing,
- Provide as much information and guidance as possible on the responsibilities of managing a tenancy and maintaining their home. Provide information on local services etc
- Participate in Mutual Exchanges, where appropriate, to maximise choice of Housing Options
- Carry out New tenant visits within 6 weeks to review any changes or support needs
- At the commencement of a tenancy provide as much information as possible on tenancy sustainment and address any issues a new tenant may have.
- Maintain regular, personal and sustained contact with "at risk" householders
- Work in partnership with specialist support agencies who work with vulnerable client groups and the statutory authorities.
- Make referrals to the Tenancy Sustainment staff and initiate early intervention in the case of financial crisis or poverty.
- Staff will assess tenants on the RAG rating (Appendix 1 Aim 2) and record this on the Group's database to ensure there is regular monitoring of identified higher risk tenancies. This will include monitoring their rent accounts and carrying out regular home visits to offer advice and support to help sustain their tenancy.
- Ensure tenants access the Tenancy Sustainment service in relation to Benefit matters if in need of additional support.
- Ensure the tenant is aware of their responsibilities and the Contact details for their housing officer/area team
- Identify changes in support needs required to sustain a tenancy – for example disabled adaptations

- Engage with external agencies regarding support needs/packages
- Ensuring all tenants and service users are able to understand and access services provided by the Group and such of partner agencies who can offer support.
- We will analyse information from exit interviews and termination forms with the view to continuously improve on our services and to review procedures as and when required.

### **3.1 Extra Support**

Particular household types may require additional support or assistance in order to sustain their tenancy, these could be

- Households who have been previously homeless
- Older people with support needs
- Young people setting up home for the first time – particularly those leaving care
- Families with support needs
- Young parents
- Those with learning difficulties, mental health issues or personality disorders
- Those with drug or alcohol addictions
- Households with histories of financial exclusion or multiple debts
- Those with disabilities who may or may not have support needs
- Households suffering from either racial and non racial harassment
- People who have suffered previously from domestic abuse or other types of violence
- Ex offenders

### **3.2 Failed tenancies**

We consider that a failed tenancy is one that ends by eviction, abandonment or where early tenancy termination occurs (i.e. a tenancy which lasts less than 12 months). A tenancy which falls into this category can incur substantial additional costs for the Group, including rent loss (through void period and possible former tenant arrears), cost of relet repairs (including possible rechargeable repairs), staff resources associated with the lettings process and in some cases legal costs.

Research shows that there are a number of reasons why tenancies typically fail and listed below are the most common reasons:

- anti social behaviour by others;
- drug or alcohol addiction problems;
- mental health issues;
- domestic abuse;
- leaving care;
- learning difficulties;
- poverty;
- fuel poverty;
- extreme youth or immaturity;
- no established local networks (particularly for new immigrants); and
- families with support needs

## **4. Staff Training**

Housing staff, including the Tenancy Sustainment Coordinator and Officers will be provided with inhouse and external training to assist them carry out their responsibilities covered in this policy. Staff will be encouraged to play an active and positive role in establishing and developing relationships with the many support organisations and agencies that can help tenants, the community and Osprey.

## **5. Equal Opportunities**

The Group shall strive to ensure equality of opportunity, and by definition, that all individuals are treated fairly regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Group opposes, and shall adopt a zero tolerance stance towards, all forms of unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

In this regard, the Group acknowledges the protected characteristics and types of unlawful behaviour defined within the Equality Act 2010. As a minimum all practices shall aim to ensure compliance with the legislative provisions therein.

## **6. Monitoring & Reporting**

The Group will monitor this policy in conjunction with our other policies and procedures to ensure that it is being adhered to.

## **7. Review**

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless the following criteria dictate that it would be best practise to review sooner:

1. applicable legislation, rules, regulations and guidance, both those which affect the Group directly and those which affect the resources available to significant numbers of our customers to enable them to sustain tenancies
2. changes in the organisation
3. continued best practice