

Tenancy Support Policy

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Housing Landscape	2
3. Aims and Objectives.....	3
4. Defining Vulnerability	3
5. Identifying who needs help.....	4
6. The Tenancy Support Service.....	4
7. Financial Inclusion.....	6
8. Partnership working.....	6
9. Dealing with anti-social behaviour.....	6
10. Additional support prior to legal action.....	7
11. Safeguarding	7
12. Links to other policies	7
13. Data Protection	8
14. Equality & Diversity.....	8
15. Monitoring and Review.....	8
16. Document History and Approval.....	8

[Title]			
Version	1	Approved by	Cabinet
Date last amended	Click here to enter a date.	Approval date	Click here to enter a date.
Lead officer	Click here to enter text.	Review date	Click here to enter a date.
Contact	Click here to enter text.	Effective date	Click here to enter a date.

1. Introduction

The Affordable Housing Service (the Council) can offer special support to residents who need help to maintain their tenancies. This may be just for a short period to deal with a temporary difficulty, or for a longer period to help with ongoing concerns.

This includes support with debt and other money worries, understanding benefits entitlements and applying for benefits, accessing emergency support such as food banks and energy grants, plus advice on housing and employment rights, relationship queries, immigration, and consumer issues.

There are three main drivers for promoting tenancy sustainment:

- By being more proactive in the prevention of homelessness and promoting tenancy sustainment, we are providing a better service to our tenants.
- It is sound business practice to prevent arrears, abandonments, evictions and neighbour problems where possible and to reduce the cost of repairs, lost rent and staff time in dealing with these.
- The Council is being consistent with government policy and regulatory requirements around homelessness and tenancy sustainment.

2. Housing Landscape

There are a number of issues arising from the current economic, social and political context which affect, or will affect, the housing landscape in Eastleigh Borough over the coming years. In order to take account of the factors which will have an impact for customer support and tenancy sustainment as they unfold, and those which are not yet apparent, this policy will be a living document which contains the flexibility to respond to challenges as they arise over its lifetime.

The Council know from looking at current and projected trends that there will be many challenges facing our social housing communities, and just some of these are illustrated here.

- Food Poverty
- Fuel Poverty
- Population Change
- Private Rented Sector issues and standards
- Supply of affordable housing (all tenure types)
- Mental Health
- Digital Inclusion/Exclusion
- Rural Needs

3. Aims and Objectives

3.1 The objectives of the Tenancy Support Policy are to:

- support and empower tenants to successfully maintain their tenancy and access services to help them achieve their goals and move forward with their lives.
- help tenants deal with any problems or issues that arise during their tenancy such as rent arrears or problems with welfare benefits
- provide direct support through trained housing staff
- refer tenants to partner agencies for more specialist or long term advice and support when needed
- liaise with other statutory agencies, and make representations on tenants' behalf
- create safer and more stable communities
- reduce the economic and social effect of failed tenancies
- reduce rent arrears, and the associated costs of legal action
- maximise tenants' incomes
- help tenants to maintain their independence
- prevent and reduce homelessness and the associated costs.

3.2 These objectives are delivered by:

- identifying tenants at risk of vulnerability or support at the beginning of and during their tenancies
- providing support either in-house or by accessing support from partner agencies
- encouraging and promoting partnerships with external agencies to maximise support for our tenants
- developing and following robust safeguarding procedures that will help to
- keep children and vulnerable adults safe from abuse
- continually seeking to improve the information we hold about the needs and vulnerability of our tenants in order to best direct resources into meeting the needs of vulnerable households.

4. Defining Vulnerability

4.1 Examples of people who may be vulnerable or who may need support (this is not an exhaustive list) include:

- 16-17 year olds;
- Young people who have not held a tenancy before
- Young people 'moving on' from supported housing into an independent tenancy for the first time
- People living in temporary accommodation
- Care leavers
- People with drug / alcohol misuse issues
- People with an offending history
- People with poor mental health
- People with behaviour problems or personality disorders
- People with learning difficulties

- People with physical disabilities
- Frail older people
- Families whose children have behavioural / emotional / mental health issues that affect parents' ability to comply with tenancy conditions
- Families with 'children in need of services' or 'children in need of protection' where the children's problems affect their parents' / carers' ability to cope with maintaining their tenancy
- Households with a history of tenancy failure
- Households with significant debts / financial difficulties
- People from abroad or who do not have English as a first language
- Teenage parents
- People who have suffered domestic abuse.

5. Identifying who needs help

5.1 Landlord Services assesses the vulnerability and support needs of all prospective tenants at the point an applicant is offered a tenancy.

5.2 All new tenants will be visited by a member of housing staff within the initial 4 weeks of their tenancies and uses this as an opportunity to check if all support needs have been identified and that any support needs are met. If a support need has been identified and is unmet, the officer will make a referral to the Affordable Housing Team and follow up visits may be arranged.

5.3 When the officer visits, they will ask the tenant to complete a form which asks for information about gender, sexuality, disability, age and vulnerability. This form is also completed during routine tenancy visits. The information gained is used to record levels of vulnerability. This helps the Council ensure that support is directed to the most vulnerable tenants, and also shape its services to meet the needs of vulnerable people.

5.4 Officers check for vulnerability and support needs whenever a problem occurs with a tenancy i.e. tenancy breach, anti-social behaviour or rent arrears. A vulnerability risk assessment is carried out on all complainants of anti-social behaviour, with linked support where necessary.

5.5 Known vulnerabilities and disabilities are recorded on Landlord Services' integrated Housing Management System (QL). (new software system??)

5.6 Information held on QL about vulnerability is used to alert all staff to the needs of that tenant.

6. The Tenancy Support Service

6.1 The Council employ trained staff to deliver the in-house Tenancy Support Service.

6.2 The Tenancy Support Service provides advice and assistance to vulnerable

tenants to help them sustain their tenancies.

Types of Support provided

- Support to maintain their tenancy independently and/or resettlement advice in order to move to more appropriate accommodation as necessary, including liaison with landlords, viewings, social housing applications and the private rented sector
- Encouragement and support to meet their obligations under their tenancy agreements
- Claim appropriate benefits and funding to maximise income
- Ensure connection to utilities and contact with utility companies
- Help with organising repairs or improvements to their homes
- Support with relationships and family, maintaining support networks and good neighbour relations
- Resolve/prevent anti-social behaviour issues
- Support to enable and empower service users to cope with daily living tasks, social interactions, their health and wellbeing
- Assistance in developing life skills that will allow a service user to cope better with daily living tasks
- Resolve or prevent debts including accessing specialist advice
- General guidance, advice and support to enable people to maximise their potential and improve confidence and self-esteem
- Promote involvement in local community life, enabling people to gain a sense of belonging in their communities;
- Support to ensure a service user feels safe and secure in their home;
- Promotion of good parenting skills;
- Advocacy and child protection matters;
- Dealing with statutory and voluntary services;
- Identify transport options that will enable a service user to access services independently;
- Help to overcome social isolation and deprivation;
- Registration with services like GP and dentists and signposting, if necessary, to other specialist agencies;(e.g. Homestart)
- Access to employment, including training, educational & volunteering opportunities

6.3 The Tenancy Support Service concentrates on helping new vulnerable tenants set-up and establish their tenancies as well as assisting existing vulnerable tenants who have encountered a crisis in their tenancy. For example, they may be threatened with legal action because of rent arrears or anti-social behaviour, they may have fallen into serious debt affecting their ability to pay essential bills, they may have allowed their home conditions to deteriorate to an extent that poses a risk to themselves or others, (including hoarding and self-neglect), or they may be suffering a health problem that is affecting their ability to cope with everyday life.

Housing Officers will offer assistance in the initial stages of a tenancy or in the event of a crisis and will where necessary try to refer the tenant to an external tenancy support agency

who will be able to offer longer term, more structured or specialist support or to another service such as Social Care or Health.

6.4 The Affordable Housing Service also offers ad-hoc tenancy support for vulnerable people who do not engage well with other agencies or whose needs are too substantial or long-term for other tenancy support agencies to meet.

7. Financial Inclusion

7.1 There are staff based in the housing team who can provide support to tenants on:

- how to maximise income and apply for welfare and housing benefits and Universal Credit
- how to minimise household expenditure
- advice on budgeting
- where to get more in depth advice and debt management advice if necessary.

7.2 The Council have other staff who have a role to play in advising tenants in relation to rent arrears, helping them resolve housing benefit and universal credit issues, and helping them to pay their rent by negotiating agreements to pay by instalments. There will also be a member of staff allocated to Former Tenant Arrears in the Finance Team.

8. Partnership working

8.1 The Council recognises the importance of working in partnership to help tenants sustain their tenancies.

8.2 The Council also works closely with other external agencies. The most common agencies are the police, DWP, Social Care, GPs, mental health professionals, in order to maximise support and successful outcomes for vulnerable tenants

8.3 The Council can advise and assist tenants with disabilities on aids and adaptations to their home and will advise on and recommend the scope and type of support needed.

8.4 The Council may offer additional support for children and/or their carers who are encountering difficulties with issues such as behaviour, school attendance and effective parenting.

8.5 The Council refers tenants who are exhibiting signs of self-neglect and/or hoarding behaviours to Adult Social Care and to health professionals for further assessment and support. The Council works closely with these agencies to try and improve living conditions for tenants in these circumstances and also attend relevant safeguarding meetings.

9. Dealing with anti-social behaviour

9.1. When anti-social behaviour is reported, a risk assessment of the complainant is carried out. Vulnerabilities and support needs are identified at the earliest opportunity for both

complainants and perpetrators. Support is generally provided, where necessary, to both parties in order to resolve the situation.

10. Additional support prior to legal action

10.1. Where it is identified that it is necessary to take legal action (for rent arrears or anti-social behaviour), a multi-agency meeting generally takes place to review the circumstances of the case, to identify what support is required, and to check that it has been provided. This ensures that as far as is reasonably practicable so no support opportunities have been missed.

11. Safeguarding

11.1. Every effort is made to ensure that vulnerable adults and children are kept safe from harm and abuse. The Council (housing service) has a safeguarding policy that follows Eastleigh Borough Council's Corporate safeguarding policy.

11.2. Within Landlord Services, there are five designated safeguarding officers (DSOs) who are trained to deal with safeguarding incidents for both children and vulnerable adults. This includes the tenancy support team leader and the principal officer - tenancy and income management.

11.3. All front-line staff working with vulnerable adults and/or children receive safeguarding training in relation to child protection matters and support for vulnerable adults. This equips officers with the skills to identify potential risk and support issues, as well as making sure that officers know how to refer to appropriate agencies. This training is ongoing and this policy will be updated every three years either by attending a training session or completing on-line training.

11.4. Officers work closely in the council in relation to safeguarding. A summary of all safeguarding incidents and the action taken is recorded. This allows the Council to identify patterns or frequent incidents relating to a particular child or vulnerable adult as well as providing a secure record of action taken on each incident.

12. Links to other policies

12.1. Landlord Services seeks to consider the needs of vulnerable tenants in other relevant housing management policies such as those surrounding harassment, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse.

12.2. The following Council policies have relevance for the tenancy support policy:

- Anti-social behaviour policy
- Income management policy
- Community safety partnership plan
- Homelessness strategy
- Housing Management policy
- Safeguarding policy

13. Data Protection

The Council are committed to protecting and respecting the privacy of personal data. As a registered Data Controller (Reg. no. Z7118863) it complies with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (GDPR).

More information on how the Council collects, uses and keeps your personal information, and how it protects privacy can be found in our [Record of Processing Activity](#) (ROPA).

The corporate privacy notice provides general information about the council's personal data processing activities overall. As the range of services the council provides is so varied, it has also produced individual [privacy notices for each service area](#), to explain specifically how data will be used within each service.

14. Equality & Diversity

10.1 Equality and diversity are of fundamental importance to services provided regardless of a person's protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, religion pregnancy and maternity, race, belief, or sex). All must be treated with respect. The Council treats everyone it houses, serves, and employs, fairly, and encourages others to do the same.

10.2 The Council provides information that is clear, accessible, and in an appropriate format (such as translated into another language, or in large print on request). Where appropriate, Council Officers will assist residents, by, for example, helping to complete paperwork. These policies ensure residents are treated in a fair and efficient manner.

15. Monitoring and Review

11.1 This policy will be reviewed regularly, to incorporate legislative and regulatory amendments and changes, best practice developments, or to address any operational issues with the procedure. Input will be sought from our residents (via the [Residents Committee or similar](#)) prior to making any substantive changes. This is in line with our Corporate Values and is intended to ensure our policy continues to meet the needs and aspirations of our residents.

16. Document History and Approval

Identity and Version Control

This document is the final approved version and will be a controlled document with an individual assigned to version review/amendment.