



## **LANGSTANE HOUSING ASSOCIATION TENANCY SUSTAINMENT STRATEGY 2017-2020**

## Tenancy Sustainment Strategy

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## 1.0 Introduction and Vision

Langstane Housing Association was established in 1977 from a recognised need to move predominately single people from the old lodging houses in Aberdeen into more suitable self-contained accommodation.



The old lodging house, Peacocks Court, Aberdeen



Inside the old Lodging House

The Association today remains faithful to the original ethos with a clear Mission stated in the Business Plan to:

***‘provide good quality housing that promotes social inclusion and generates sustainable communities’***

This is echoed in the Association’s Vision for the future which includes the provision of:

***‘accommodation and accessible services to those who are disadvantaged in the housing market, in particular single persons’.***

The Tenancy Sustainment Strategy has been developed to support the business plan objectives and provides a framework for:

***‘increasing tenancy sustainment and building communities’***

The Strategy firstly considers the current issues affecting the Association and its tenants at both a local and national level and focusses on six strategic priorities for tenancy sustainment:

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

The successful implementation of this Strategy will deliver the following broad outcomes:

- Supporting Social Inclusion
- Preventing Homelessness
- Sustainable Communities

This Strategy links to the Business Plan, the Asset Management Strategy, the IT Strategy and the Community Investment Strategy.

An Action Plan sets out the range of activities and outcomes required to meet the strategic priorities.

## 2.0 Local and National Drivers

In order to achieve the Association's Mission, Vision and strategic priorities this Strategy firstly considers the broad issues affecting Langstane at both a local and national level.

The Scottish Housing Charter sets the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities.

The results are scrutinised by the Scottish Housing Regulator in terms of performance and improvement and annually a Charter Report is published to allow tenants and other customers to view the results.

Specifically the measurement of tenancy sustainment refers to (Indicator 11):

*'the percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than a year'*

In relation to Indicator 11 the Scottish average was reported as 89.04% (2016-2017) with Langstane's performance reported as 86.49%. The tenancy sustainment figure in 2015-2016 was reported as 88.37%.

For those tenants not sustaining their tenancy for more than a year the reasons for leaving are analysed to establish what support could have been provided to prevent the tenant from leaving.

In some cases the reasons for terminating a tenancy are positive, for example, where the tenant has moved in with a partner or moving to another area. Figure 1 shows the reasons for termination.

Figure 1

Reason for Leaving	2016-2017
Mutual Exchange	9
Transfer	5
Abandoned	5
Affordability	5
Eviction for Arrears	5
Moving to Private Let	4
None Given (2 moved away, 1 moved in with partner, 1 unknown)	4
Found Alternative Accommodation	4
Moving to Another Area	3
Moving to Supported Accommodation	2
Other (reason not given)	2
Deceased	1
In Prison	1
Property unsuitable	1
Neighbour issues	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>

There are a number of areas of the Charter where performance can be strengthened in order to improve the tenancy sustainment figures. These are linked to the outcomes for the Strategy:

Supporting Social Inclusion:

- Ensure that where tenants need help, this is provided and that tenants feel valued

Preventing Homelessness:

- Reduce arrears levels
- Reduce the number of abandoned tenancies
- Reduce the number of evictions
- Ensure rent is affordable

Sustainable Communities:

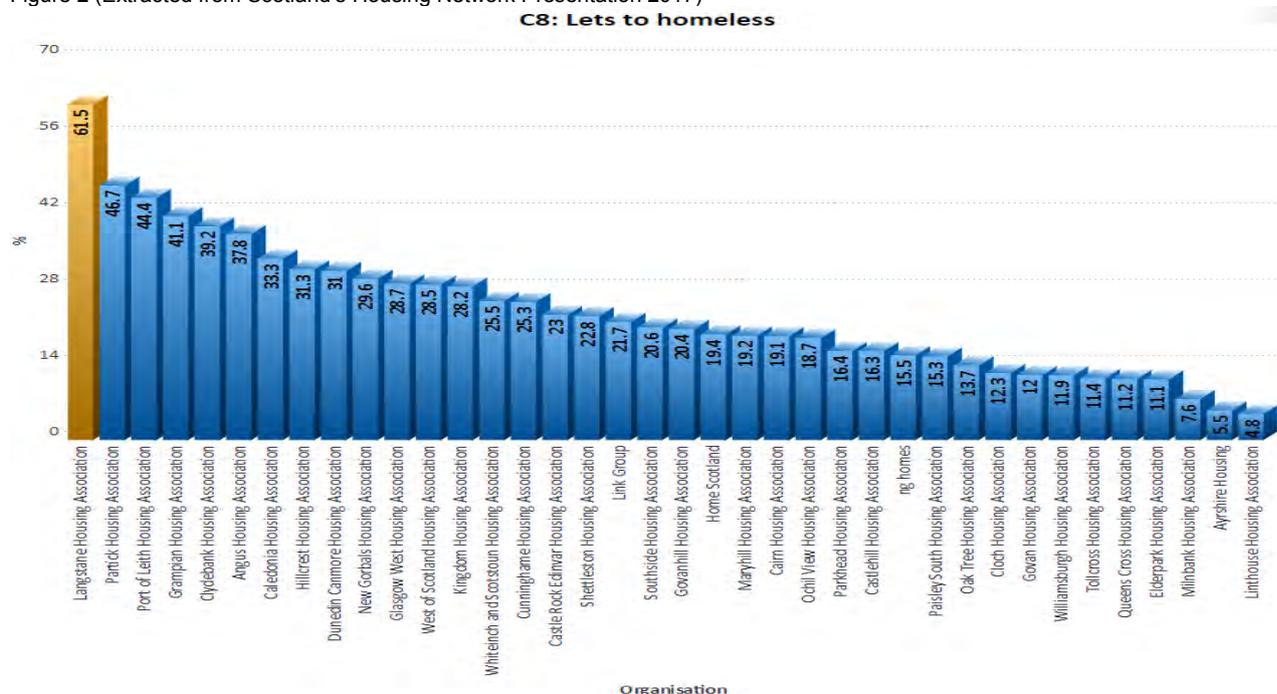
- Deal proactively with antisocial behaviour and identify underlying issues
- Ensure that Langstane's properties are where tenants want to live
- Reduce the number of re-lets
- Work in partnership with agencies to facilitate tenancy sustainment

To ensure that the Association has a broader picture of how tenancy sustainment can be understood and improved at a local level, it is therefore important to consider all the underlying factors including the neighbourhoods and communities where tenants live and the role the Association has in preventing homelessness, reducing evictions and identifying tenants who need help.

The Scottish Government and COSLA's Guidance on the 'Prevention of Homelessness'<sup>1</sup> confirms that tenancy sustainment is key to preventing recurring homelessness and ensuring that the homeless applicant has the necessary support at the start of their tenancy is key to tenancy sustainment.

Figure 2 below shows that amongst the Association's peer group Langstane allocates the highest number of lets to homeless applicants (61.5%).

Figure 2 (Extracted from Scotland's Housing Network Presentation 2017)



In addition to strengthening performance the Strategy outlines the Association's broader strategic priorities which include and align with the drivers noted above. These are examined in more detail in Section 6 of the Strategy.

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

Critical to this approach is understanding the needs of tenants and building trust to ensure that they can ask for help when they need it.

<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Prevention of Homelessness Guidance 2009

### **3.0 Tenant Profiling**

When a tenant signs a tenancy agreement, information is collected to allow any required assistance to be identified and targeted to ensure that the tenant has the best start possible in the tenancy. The information gathered from the tenants at this stage is recorded on the Housing Management system. This data was reviewed and strengthened following the establishment of a Social Justice Team however it was recognised that further information regarding the tenants was needed.

In 2015 - 2016 Langstane undertook a tenant profiling exercise in order to gain a better understanding of who the Association's customers are and to identify the specific issues they are facing. The outcome of the exercise highlighted where additional support could be provided to tenants and areas for improvement in terms of advice and assistance, particularly around welfare reform and digital inclusion were identified. This was recorded in a detailed action plan for the Social Justice Team to address and take forward for existing and new tenants.

It was recognised however that the tenants who responded to the tenant profile exercise were those who engaged with the Association and were more likely to ask for help.

The gap in knowledge between the information gathered for new tenants and those existing tenants who engage with the Association is recognised. Officers across the Association including technical, rent management, allocations and estate

management staff will be encouraged to make contact with those tenants. This will allow the Association's records to be updated and ensure that an assessment of need is carried out to establish whether advice or assistance is required. This will form part of the Strategic Action Plan.

The main issues identified through the tenant profiling exercise reflect the strategic priorities in the Strategy.

### **4.0 Neighbourhoods**

The Asset Management Strategy recognises the need to build a better understanding of the condition of the stock in conjunction with tenants' needs.

As part of the data led assessment of the stock using innovative software and in addition to financial information, non financial indicators are considered including the location, number and length of voids, refusals, length of tenancy, energy efficiency rating and ultimately overall customer satisfaction.

This contributes to the overall picture of the developments or areas of the Association's stock which are not performing well in terms of quality and are likely to lead to tenants terminating or abandoning their tenancies, increasing turn-over.

The Housing and Social Justice Service and Asset Management will work together to identify and target localities for improvement to increase sustainability.

## 5.0 The Role of the Social Justice Team

The role of the Social Justice Team is to identify those tenants who need help and to provide low level housing support.

Where specialised assistance is required, for example where a tenant has multiple debts or health issues, this may also require a referral to a specific / specialised agency or professional in the appropriate field.

In 2018-2019 the Association will consider formally registering the Service with the Care Inspectorate to ensure that the depth of support needed by the tenants can be provided by the Social Justice Team and that an effective and efficient service can be demonstrated.

The team consists of a Team Leader, two Housing Officers, a Welfare Advisor and an Administrative Assistant.

One Housing Officer post is currently funded externally by Aberdeenshire Council with any new funding negotiated on an annual basis.

The Welfare Advisor provides tenants with appropriate advice and assistance particularly by reviewing their benefit entitlement and assists tenants with forms to enable tenants' income to be maximised which in turn assists with rental payments.

The Social Justice Team play a crucial part in ensuring that tenancies are sustained and the role they have in supporting homeless and other vulnerable applicants nominated by the local authority, is recognised within the Association and by the Local Authorities as a valuable resource.

In addition to continuing to ensure that the current funding remains in place other funding opportunities will be sought to reinforce the team and expand their role in supporting the tenants.

The work carried out by the Social Justice Team in 2016-2017 is noted at Figure 3 below:

## Social Justice Team Referrals 2016-2017

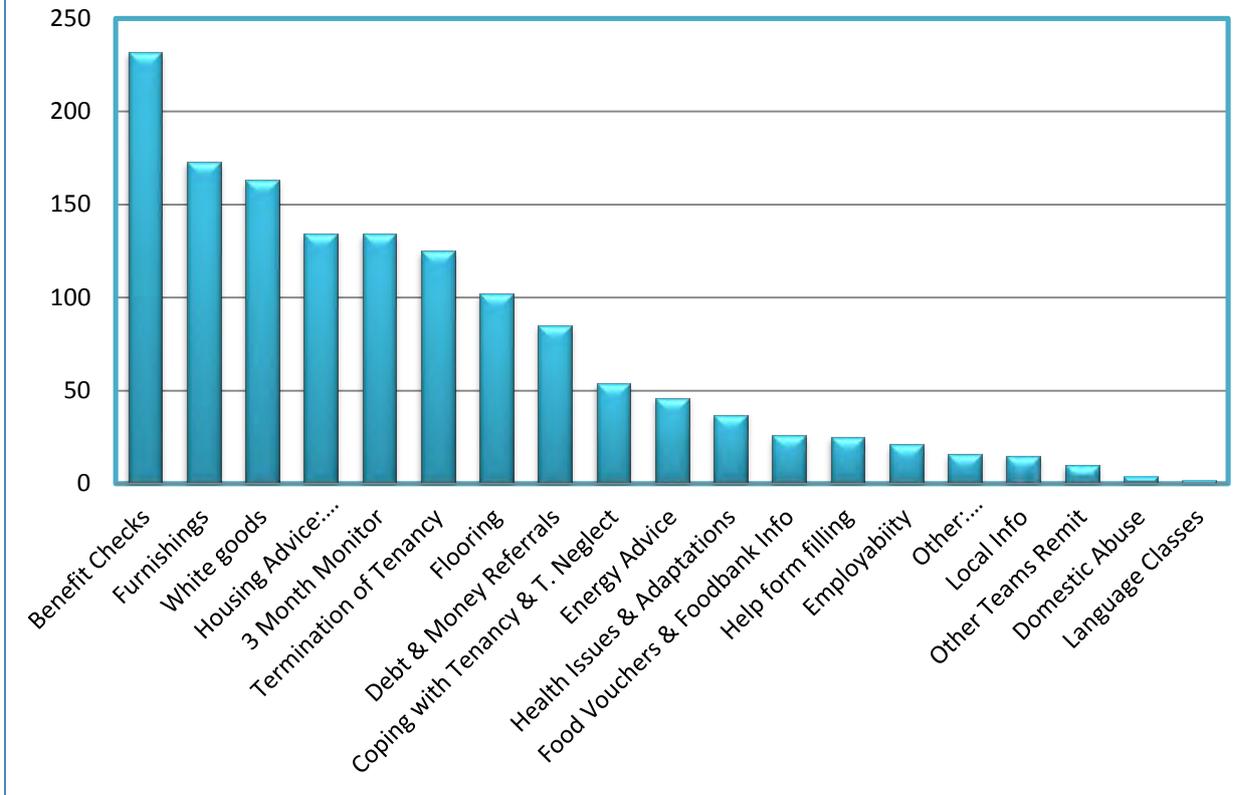


Figure 3

## 6.0 Strategic Priorities for Tenancy Sustainment

### 6.1 Early Intervention and Prevention (Arrears)

The Association has had a history of high rent arrears which has been a priority area for the Association for a number of years. While there is a downward trend in the level of arrears as shown in Figure 4 below, this remains an area for monitoring.

Key to addressing the arrears is the provision of advice, information and assistance at an early stage, ensuring that wherever possible this early intervention prevents arrears from accruing.

An initial assessment is carried out by the Association's Welfare Advisor when the tenants sign for their tenancy.

Complex cases involving multiple debts are referred to the SMART money advice partnership. A revised Service Level Agreement has been agreed for the next three years (2017-2020) formalising the partnership.

The number of evictions carried out for arrears cases in particular is closely monitored. These should reduce as the arrears continue to fall and support for individual tenants increases.

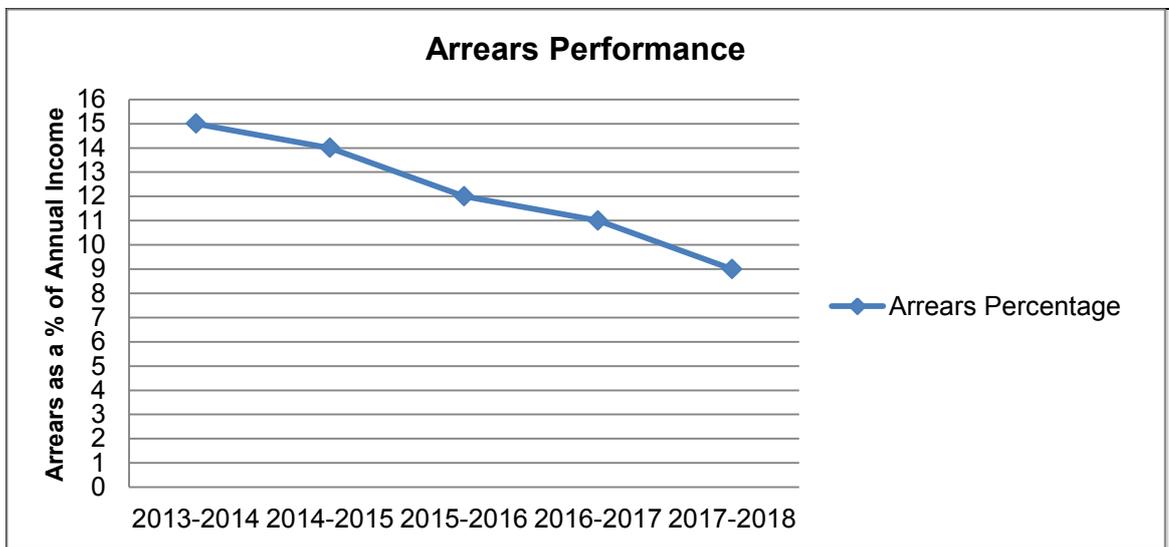


Figure 4

Outcome: Preventing homelessness: reducing arrears levels which will lead to a lower level of court actions and evictions. Ensuring that tenants' income is maximised through appropriate advice

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## 6.2 Neighbourhoods / Communities

A tenant satisfaction survey carried out in 2015-2016 identified concerns raised by tenants in relation to their neighbourhoods. In particular dog fouling, car parking issues and rubbish or littering within the developments were highlighted as the main areas for improvement. In terms of tenancy sustainment ensuring that neighbourhoods are areas where tenants wish to live is essential to maintaining strong and settled communities.

The Association will continue to take a proactive approach to addressing anti social behaviour including the main concerns around dog fouling where work will continue with tenants and the community wardens to tackle this issue.

A new motor vehicle parking policy was approved in July 2016 to assist Officers in dealing with car parking issues within the Association's developments. This continues to be monitored.

Fly tipping, rubbish and littering remains a financial burden for the Association and innovative ways to reduce costs while maintaining the appearance of outside communal spaces will be investigated further with involvement from tenants.

The Association will continue to work in partnership with third sector agencies to facilitate the provision of support to vulnerable tenants in the community to increase tenancy sustainment.

Outcome:      Increasing sustainable communities by dealing proactively with anti social behaviour  
                     Preventing homelessness by reducing the number of abandoned tenancies because of the neighbourhood  
                     Increasing sustainable communities by working with third sector agencies in the provision of support

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## 6.3 Rent Affordability, Fuel Poverty and Welfare Reform

### 6.3.1 Rent Affordability

In December 2016 the Association commissioned Arneil Johnston to carry out research to deliver credible intelligence on the extent and nature of housing affordability at a local level. In particular the study considered the relative Association rent levels in terms of location, size and type in comparison to local incomes and how the rents benchmarked against Langstane's peer group. The outcome of the study showed that the rent levels for one bedroom properties in Aberdeen City in particular were close to the threshold of affordability for a tenant on a minimum or living wage.

Having recognised the affordability issues the Association will take forward a review of the Association's rent structure during 2017-2018 and examine in greater detail the charging system to inform a new rent setting policy. The outcome of the process will maximise fairness, transparency and consistency in terms of affordable rent setting and mitigate against welfare benefit reforms as far as possible contributing to sustainable tenancies.

### 6.3.2 Fuel Poverty

The Association continues to consider innovative ways of improving energy efficiency to tackle fuel poverty.

A household is considered to be in fuel poverty if it has to spend 10% or more of its income to adequately heat the home.

There are three contributing factors to fuel poverty:

1. Cost of energy
2. Energy efficiency of the home
3. Household income

In terms of the cost of energy the Association will continue to work with the utility companies to obtain value for money in terms of the energy costs for void properties.

The Social Justice team will continue to assist tenants to review tariffs to ensure that the best deal from the energy suppliers is available.

Since 2016 and by March 2018 the Association will have replaced 288 inefficient gas boilers with new condensing boilers and will continue with this programme of replacement.

The new boilers save tenants, on average £75.00 per annum. The Association will continue with a programme of switching fuel supplies from electric to gas with 255 completed since 2016 with another 66 planned by March 2018. Energy Performance Certificate comparisons show an average saving of £360 for a one bedroom flat. For an average home the Energy Savings Trust Scotland quotes a saving of £560.

The Association will also investigate the provision of under floor insulation. This potentially will provide savings of up to £100 per annum for ground floor flats. Those failing EESSH will be targeted first in a pilot scheme with a programme identified up to 2019 if the pilot is successful.

The Association will continue to refer cases to SCARF for energy advice but also ensure that any available funding will be accessed to enhance energy advice for tenants.

A Warm Homes Bill is expected early in 2018 that will provide an opportunity for discussion and a possibility to influence policy on fuel poverty and energy efficiency in Scotland.

The Scottish Government is currently reviewing the Energy Efficiency standards for Social Housing (ESSH). Any changes to ESSH are likely to reflect targets in the Climate Change Act with targets of 90% carbon reduction by 2050 with a proposal that 80% of homes should be heated by low carbon heating or renewables by 2032 with an improvement in efficiency levels and consequential reduction in fuel poverty.

Affordability in terms of rent and what percentage is paid on housing costs is currently being reviewed as part of the rent affordability project.

### 6.3.3 Welfare Reform

Welfare reform is a key barrier to tenancy sustainment. Every new tenant who requires advice regarding welfare benefits receives a referral to the Tenancy Welfare Advisor who is based within the Social Justice Team. While this will assist tenants to maximise income and will highlight the need for budgeting in preparation for the implementation of Universal Credit, the overall effect of welfare reform will continue to impact on the income to the Association and could potentially also have a negative effect on the sustainability of tenancies. Ensuring that early intervention and assistance is provided at the start of the tenancy is a key strategic priority and recognising that flexibility in terms of payment methods and arrangements is needed to meet the requirements of Universal Credit.

The Association will continue to provide advice and assistance to all tenants who require financial assistance to help them pay their rent and continue to campaign to ensure that vulnerable tenants are not disadvantaged by any proposed changes.

Tenants aged between 16 and 64 (a couple or a single person with children) have a £20,000 per annum limit placed on the total amount of benefit their household can claim. A single person without children has a limit of £13,400<sup>2</sup>. If a tenant's income is above this limit, their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit is likely to be reduced by this benefit cap.

These changes will place significant pressure on household budgets and while financial or budgeting advice can be provided it will also be important to ensure that employment opportunities are available to tenants. The Association will continue to work with WorkingRite to maximise access to employment for younger tenants and continue to ensure that older tenants are supported into employment.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/benefit-cap/benefit-cap-amounts> <accessed 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017>

The Association will build on the information currently given to tenants at the beginning of their tenancy to ensure that they are aware of Universal Credit and other welfare benefit implications.

Outcomes:

- Preventing homelessness by providing advice and assistance to tenants who need help
- Preventing homelessness by ensuring that rents are affordable to tenants

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## 6.4 Digital Inclusion

The Tenant Profiling exercise identified digital inclusion as an area for improvement.

Currently if assistance is required with digital technology, the Social Justice Team or other staff will help the tenant with online forms or provide access to the internet at the Association. Staff may also signpost the tenant to available resources e.g. community hubs or libraries specifically for completing forms online. The Association will seek to increase access to the internet for tenants by providing additional computers in reception linked to online waiting list forms and Universal Credit forms.

The Association currently facilitates Silver City Surfers to run various activities at Fraser Court where technology skills are developed within a social setting with the aim of helping older people with modern technology, thereby reducing loneliness and isolation for those aged over 55.

Sessions cover a number of basic digital skills, building confidence and motivation.

The Association will continue to source additional funding for similar projects and work with the Local Authorities in ensuring access to online facilities.

In addition to practical help the Association through the IT Strategy will investigate 'self-service' portals via the website and mobile devices to allow tenants to manage rent account and report repairs online.

Outcome: Contributing to social inclusion by valuing tenants and ensuring that where help is needed this is provided

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## 6.5 Health and Wellbeing

An important aspect of tenancy sustainment is ensuring that where possible tenants with a disability or who require adaptations to their property can remain in their home.

The tenant profiling exercise asked tenants if they were likely to move within a specified period. 113 responded indicating they would need to move because of medical or health reasons.

Where limited adaptations are required the Association will investigate a self referral process in conjunction with Occupational Therapists. This will enable minor adaptations to be carried out by the Association's in-house Direct Labour Organisation saving time, money and allow tenants to remain in their homes. The Association will continue to lobby for additional resources to carry out major adaptations to tenants' homes.

The Association will also continue to work with CFine, Community Food Initiatives to enable tenants to access affordable fresh fruit and vegetables increasing general health and wellbeing.



Outcome: Creating sustainable communities – reducing the number of re-lets, ensuring that where tenants wish to remain in their home they can do so

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## 6.6 Ageing Population

Scotland's ageing population also has wider implications for tenancy sustainment. The Association must ensure that the services which are provided meet the requirements of not only older tenants but those with particular needs or disabilities. It is important to consider the types of property currently available and those which are being built for the future and whether they are flexible enough to enable people to stay in their own home if their circumstances change as they get older or have a disability. This also links to the funds available for adaptations and the health and wellbeing of tenants.

Outcome: Creating sustainable communities - reducing the number of re-lets, ensuring that where tenants wish to remain in their home they can do so

## **7.0 Delivering the Strategy**

### **7.1 Responsibility**

The Director of Housing and Social Justice will have on-going responsibility for the successful delivery of the Action Plan (Appendix 1).

### **7.2 Review and Reporting Progress**

The Strategy will be formally reviewed and will take into account any revisions of the Business Plan in consultation with the Board of Management and progress against the Action Plan reported regularly to the Operational Services Committee.

### **7.3 Risk Management**

It is important for the Association to recognise the business, social and economic value of tenancy sustainment. Reducing void costs both in terms of repair budgets and lost income to the Association will reduce the financial risk to the Association. Sustainably communities will reduce the likelihood of anti social behaviour and encourage social inclusion.

### **7.4 Outcomes**

The broad outcomes noted below have been collated in the Action Plan and have been broken down into Specific Measureable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound (SMART) activities:

- Support social inclusion by:
  - Ensuring that where tenants need help, this is provided and that tenants feel valued
- Prevent homelessness by:
  - Reducing arrears levels
  - Reducing the number of abandoned tenancies
  - Reducing the number of evictions
  - Ensuring rent is affordable
- Help sustain communities by:
  - Dealing proactively with antisocial behaviour and identify underlying issues
  - Ensuring that the Association's properties are where tenants want to live
  - Reducing the number of re-lets
  - Continuing to work with third sector agencies to ensure that tenancies for vulnerable residents are sustained

## 8.0 ACTION PLAN

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale
<b>8.1</b>			
<b>Seek funding opportunities</b>	The Social Justice Team will be resourced and provide a service which tenants can rely on if needed.	Business Development Officer	April 2018 (Funding for Housing Officer post confirmed)
<b>8.2</b>			
<b>Identify tenants who have not made contact with the Association or are vulnerable to gain further information and assess need (also relevant for preparation for Universal Credit).</b>	Langstane will better understand tenants' needs and can determine how help is to be provided	Social Justice Team / Rent Management and other staff	Complete by March 2019
<b>8.3</b>			
<b>Ensure tenants with multiple debts are supported</b>	Monitor the SMART Service Level Agreement and record outcomes of those tenants assisted by the partnership	Director of Housing and Social Justice	March 2018 and on-going thereafter

<b>8.4</b>			
<b>Register the Social Justice Service with the Care Inspectorate</b>	Regulation will demonstrate effective delivery of the service	Director of Housing and Social Justice	By March 2019
<b>8.5</b>			
<b>Review rent setting policy in line with outcome of affordability study and tenant consultation</b>	A more robust, open and transparent rent setting policy where rent affordability is recognised	Director of Housing and Social Justice	Implementation by July 2019 (Timeline for consultation and harmonisation of rents included)
<b>8.6</b>			
<b>Examine the indicators used in software analysis to prioritise specific areas for planned maintenance / improvement</b>	Increased satisfaction and ability to demonstrate that the Association's properties are places where tenants wish to live	Asset Management (Lead)	By March 2019
<b>8.7</b>			
<b>Ensuring robust information is available to tenants regarding Universal Credit and other welfare benefit reforms</b>	Tenants will be more aware of Universal Credit implications and be prepared (Links to 8.2 above)	Social Justice Team	Immediate
<b>8.8</b>			
<b>Assist tenants to obtain the best tariff from the energy suppliers</b>	Improve fuel poverty / income for tenants	Social Justice Team	Immediate and On-going

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**8.9**

**Continue with a programme of switching fuel supplies from electric to gas and investigate the provision of under floor insulation**

Improve fuel poverty / income for tenants

Asset Management (Lead)

On-going

**8.10**

**Where minor adaptations are required investigate a self referral process in conjunction with Occupational Therapists to allow these adaptations to be carried out in-house.**

Improve the likelihood of tenants remaining in their own homes reducing the number of re-lets and related costs

Asset Management (Lead) & Direct Labour Organisation

On-going

**8.11**

**Investigate 'self-service' portals via the website and mobile devices to allow tenants to manage rent account and report repairs online.**

To increase access for tenants to information about their accounts

IT (Lead) (Budget to be confirmed)

March 2019