



Langstane Housing Association

Tenancy Sustainment Strategy 2024-2027

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, renovated to become Peacocks Court, Aberdeen

The Association today remains faithful to the original ethos with a clear Mission to:

“provide homes and services that make a positive difference to peoples’ lives”

This is echoed in the Association’s values where:

“we remember our origins, that Langstane Housing Association was set up to help and support single person households who were among the most vulnerable members of our society” and where:

“we provide homes not houses and support our tenants to live independently and be active members of our communities”.

We recognise that ‘Our Customers’ may need support moving into their Langstane home and during their time with us as a tenant. Providing support helps tenants to thrive in their communities, build relationships and to remain with us as tenants.

We cannot do this alone and will focus on working with partner and other third sector organisations to prevent homelessness and address issues such as fuel poverty and financial exclusion to promote stable and sustainable communities.

Tenancy sustainment is defined by Shelter as, ***“preventing a tenancy from coming to a premature end by providing the necessary information, advice and support for tenants to be able to maintain their tenancies”***

There is a cost attached to a ‘failed’ tenancy in terms of rent loss, repairs and resources. By reducing tenancies ending prematurely, resources can be re-directed to other priority areas.

To achieve an increase in tenancy sustainment, four strategic priorities are examined within the strategy:

- ✓ Alleviating Poverty
- ✓ Partnerships and Community
- ✓ Early Intervention
- ✓ Health and Wellbeing

2.0 The Drivers

Before reviewing our priorities we consider the broad issues affecting the Association.

The Scottish Social Housing Charter sets the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities, and pledges that in terms of 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”

In terms of equalities, customers ***‘have their individual needs recognised, are treated fairly and with respect and receive fair access to housing and housing providers’***.

The performance results from the Annual Return on the Charter are scrutinised by the Scottish Housing Regulator and annually a Charter Report is produced in conjunction with tenants to allow the results to be reviewed.

Specifically the measurement of tenancy sustainment refers to (Indicator 16):

‘the percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than a year’

Tenancy Sustainment	2022-2023	2021-2022	2020-2021
Percentage of new tenancies to existing tenants sustained for more than a year	95.45%	93.75%	92.31%
Percentage of new tenancies to applicants who were assessed as statutory homeless by the local authority sustained for more than a year	82.48%	73.33%	83.22%
Percentage of new tenancies to applicants from the landlord’s housing list sustained for over a year	83.33%	81.45%	84.12%
Percentage of new tenancies to applicants nominated by the local authority sustained for over a year	90.79%	84.62%	78.38%
Percentage of tenancies to others sustained for over a year	87.50%	100%	100.00%
Total Sustainment	85.30%	79.00%	83.33%

Overall the figures show an improving picture particularly for those who have been assessed as statutory homeless.

The Association was successful in securing funding from the Scottish Government’s Homelessness Prevention fund and with the grant employed an additional support worker to focus on this area of work. The funding however runs out in January 2024. **‘A priority moving forward is to source further funding for this post and to ensure tenants who are struggling, continue to be supported’.**

The Association will set a target for improving overall tenancy sustainment for the period of this strategy, to a total sustainment figure of 93% by 2027.

Compared to the Association’s peers overall sustainment is lower as the table below shows.

Categories	Scottish Average	Langstane HA	Peer RSL 1	Peer RSL 2	Peer RSL 3
New tenancies sustained for over a year - existing tenants	94.45	95.45	100	92.19	100
New tenancies sustained for over a year - statutory homeless	90.33	82.48	96.55	94.03	100
New tenancies sustained for over a year - Housing list	90.98	83.33	88.79	91.45	NULL
New tenancies sustained for over a year - LA nominations	89.77	90.79	NULL	95	92.11
New tenancies sustained for over a year - others	86.3	87.5	91.89	NULL	92
New tenancies sustained for over a year - all	91.23	85.3	90.13	92.14	95.73

The Association continues to have a vulnerable tenant group who can lead chaotic lifestyles and as a result may be unable to settle or sustain their tenancies. In addition, 61% (1,762) of the Association’s lettable stock (2,879) are one bedroom properties or bedsits with 1,049 being single occupancy.

Reports¹ show that since the pandemic, aspirations are for larger accommodation and outdoor space. Single tenants may also be more inclined to move on.

In contrast, more tenants are living in single households than ever before. In 1971, there were around 310,000 single person households. Now, 50 years later, there are around 900,000, and by 2040 there are projected to be over a million².

This is discussed in more detail in the Asset Management Strategy but to ensure tenancy sustainment for the future, properties have to fulfil the aspirations of prospective tenants, particularly where there is choice.

To ensure that the Association has a broader picture of how tenancy sustainment can be understood and improved at a local level, it is important to consider all the underlying factors including the neighbourhoods and communities where tenants live and the role the

¹ Scottish Government, Housing to 2040

² *Ibid* p6

Association has in preventing homelessness, reducing evictions and identifying tenants who need help.

The figures below relate to tenants who terminated their tenancy in 2022-2023 (378).

Reason for Termination	Number of tenancies
Abandoned	27
Affordability	15
By Agreement with agency	7
Deceased	31
Eviction Arrears Tenant Absent	6
Eviction Arrears Tenant Present	3
Eviction ASB Tenant Absent	2
Found Alternative Accommodation	13
Housed by LA	19
Housed by other HA	12
In Prison	5
Lease to direct tenancy	1
Management transfer	4
Moved abroad	4
Moving in with partner/spouse	14
Moving on from Supported Accom	1
Moving to Another Area	52
Moving to Larger Accommodation	9
Moving to Private Let	6
Moving to smaller Accommodation	2
Moving to Supported Accommodation	11
Neighbour issues	16
Never moved in	2
None Given	43
Other	6
Owner / Occupier	12
Property unsuitable	16
Returned to family home	14
SSST – SST	1
Transfer	24
Grand Total	378

While some tenants move because of positive reasons, many are ‘failed tenancies’. This is generally when a tenancy ends due to eviction, abandonment or terminates within 12 months of starting.

The reasons for termination need to be better understood and an **action point is to ‘review termination reasons to ensure they provide meaningful information’**, for example why a tenant did not move in, or the reasons for moving to another housing association, local authority or a new area. The number of deaths occurring reflects the general health and wellbeing and mental health of tenants. This is an area of focus in the strategy.

3.0 PRIORITIES

(i) Alleviating Poverty

While inflation in 2024 is forecast to reduce and the cost of living crises ease to a certain extent, a Joseph Rowntree report³ on 'Poverty in Scotland' confirms:

- Over one million people still live in poverty in Scotland with a quarter being children.

In a similar report for the UK, the report states that social rented sector tenants experience the highest levels of poverty and over half are in arrears.

Rent levels are reviewed annually with a target of tenants spending less than 30% of their (net) income (based on a living wage) on rent. According to the Joseph Rowntree foundation 1 in 10 workers are in persistent low pay, that is, that they earn below the real living wage.

While affordability is measured and reported on, it is important for those tenants earning less than a living wage to be able to access advice and information on the benefit system, and maximise benefits wherever possible. **'The Association will continue to promote the services of the Tenant Welfare Adviser and in 2024 extend the remit to include money advice'** (see Early Intervention below).

Langstane is committed to contributing to the eradication of fuel poverty. As noted in the Asset Management Strategy there is conflict between fuel poverty and decarbonisation with gas central heating the least expensive way to heat a home.

The move to decarbonisation will see an increasing number of electric heating systems which are generally more expensive to run unless well insulated and supplemented with technologies such as solar panels.

Fuel prices remain high and unaffordable to many tenants with many making difficult decisions between eating, heating their homes and paying their rent with an increasing number having gas supplies capped and electricity cut off.

The Association received fuel support funding from the Scottish Government which has helped alleviate fuel poverty for some tenants and this will continue into 2024. **'The Association will continue to seek external funding to assist tenants with fuel poverty'**.

³ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/work/poverty-in-scotland-2023>

(ii) Partnerships and Community

Partners

Since the Association was founded in 1977, it has worked with the third sector to provide affordable social rented accommodation to meet the needs of a range of people requiring support. In doing so, the Association promotes equalities and is contributing to the needs of the wider community and the philanthropic objectives laid out in the Association's Rules. Partnerships with other organisations allow the Association to support tenants to a higher degree than could be done alone and it is important to foster and extend these arrangements wherever possible.

For some organisations; SCARF, AberNecessities, CFine and Instant Neighbour, the relationship is on the basis of a referral process to assist tenants with food, fuel vouchers or other basic necessities. For other organisations the relationship is the provision of affordable rented accommodation to facilitate housing support. These include the Cyrenians, Penumbra, Community Integrated Care (previously Inspire), and Cornerstone who provide accommodation for those with learning disabilities and SAMH and Turning Point for those experiencing mental health difficulties.

Accommodation is also provided with support on a sleep over / 24-hour basis. The Association leases office accommodation to the Foyer and more formally the Citizens Advice Bureau on a commercial lease basis.



In addition, the Association owns an office at Fraser Court and a large 'Common Room'. This can be used for meetings or tenant events. It is the intention to relocate the Housing Support Team to the Fraser Court Office where they will be close to the community. Options for opening and using the Fraser Court Common Room will be explored further.

In total, Langstane works with 31 organisations to deliver its charitable aims, and sustain and support tenants across the spectrum of housing need.

'We will build on our partnerships and promote the services Langstane provides to the wider community to increase tenancy sustainment'.

Antisocial Behaviour

In terms of communities, Langstane will continue to take a proactive approach to addressing antisocial behaviour.

This includes the successful scheme walkabouts where colleagues listen to tenants' concerns around a range of issues from dog fouling to substance misuse and violence in the area.



A walk about in Stonehaven, meeting the tenants and viewing the new flood defences outside Woodview Court

The presence of housing and property officers in the schemes is essential to building communities and reducing anti-social behaviour and will ensure tenants are proud of the environment they live in.

There is also an increase in damage to properties, fly tipping, rubbish and littering. This remains a financial burden for the Association and makes the schemes less attractive to new and existing tenants. Innovative ways to reduce costs while maintaining the appearance of both properties and outside communal spaces, will be investigated further with tenants involved in the process. In particular the Association will build on its current, successful use of CCTV units to deter antisocial behaviour.

‘We will increase the use of CCTV and work with other agencies to target and reduce antisocial behaviour in our communities’.

Digital Inclusion

The launch of a new tenant portal will provide easily accessible online services. This will increase digital inclusion, which remains a focus for the Association. The Association will continue to work with organisations to improve digital inclusion and promote supporting tenants with their digital skills. This will include upgrading their devices, developing their confidence in using different forms of technology.

A small number of colleagues volunteered to become digital champions and work with tenants and other customers to help them become less socially excluded, save time and money by enabling them to increase their online skills and ultimately if unemployed to increase their opportunities for employment. This work will continue.

(iii) Early Intervention

Early intervention at the start of a tenancy, is vital to tenancy sustainment. Our early intervention profiling interview for prospective tenants assists us in understanding what help a prospective tenant may need to sustain a tenancy. This may include a housing support referral, translation services, literacy, utility supply issues or assistance with furniture.

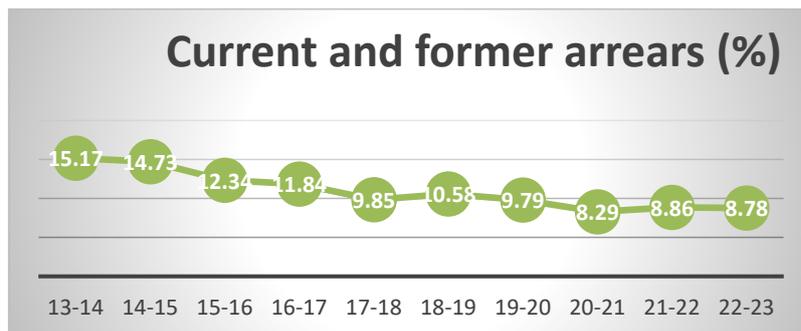
In terms of furniture a referral is made to the Scottish Welfare Fund however the process is lengthy and flooring is not provided in the majority of cases. This is often a barrier to a successful start to the tenancy.

‘We will establish an in-house furniture leasing project to ensure that tenants have the best start possible’.

In addition to the general support early intervention measures noted above, it is vital that advice and information is provided to tenants to ensure that their income is maximised to give the tenant the best possible start to the tenancy.

65% of our tenants are in receipt of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit. If working, tenants may have zero hour contracts or low paid employment and the advice provided can assist tenants to budget and ensure rent payments are a priority.

The Association has a history of high rent arrears and this has been a key performance target area for improvement for a number of years. While there is a downward trend in the level of arrears as shown below, this remains an area of risk for the Association, requires careful monitoring and impacts directly on tenancy sustainment.



The Association carried out 12 evictions in 2022-2023, 10 due to rent arrears and two in relation to antisocial behaviour.

Complex cases involving multiple debts are currently referred to external money advice services. A **key action point is to be able to ‘provide this advice in-house’**. Training has been provided and a credit licence will be explored to allow this to happen. This will allow the Association to provide a ‘one stop shop’ to maximising income and in more complex cases help prevent eviction.

(iv) Health and Wellbeing

Mental health issues increasingly feature in the work the housing support service carry out. Some tenants do have professional help however for others their only source of support is the Langstane Housing Support Team. Issues are often interrelated with complex needs connected to mental well-being. These include general neglect, hoarding, disengagement from other services, repeated calls or visits to the Association and increasingly alcohol or substance misuse.

Mental health first aid training has been provided to a number of front-line colleagues by Mental Health Aberdeen. However access to critical mental health services remains difficult. It is a challenge to manage many of the issues outlined above effectively, without professional services being accessible.

'The Association will continue to foster relationships and work with mental health charities to support tenants struggling with their mental health and well-being'.

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

When tenants' health deteriorates, they may struggle with day to day activities. To assist making a Langstane tenancy a forever home, the Association provides an aids and adaptations service. This allows a tenant to self-refer for small adaptations including grab rails and lever taps. For larger adaptations, for example a wet floor shower or stair lift, a referral is made by an occupational therapist, GP or support worker.



4.0 The Role of the Langstane Housing Support Service

While the operational teams at Langstane all have a responsibility to ensure that tenants sustain their home wherever possible, the day to day support falls to the Housing Support Service.

The role of the Langstane Housing Support Service is to provide low level housing support to tenants who are struggling.

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

The team consists of a Team Leader and three support workers who are fully qualified and the team is registered with the Care Inspectorate.

The Housing Support Service plays a crucial part in ensuring tenancies are sustained. The role they play in supporting homeless, and other vulnerable applicants (nominated by the local authority), is recognised within the Association and the wider community as a valuable resource.

'It is therefore important to ensure funding opportunities are sought to reinforce the team and expand their role in supporting the tenants'.

The Langstane Housing Support Team



"I was feeling really low and she helped get me sorted"

"My support worker gives me confidence – she supports me through everything"

"I have no one – my support worker helped me with two job interviews and I feel a lot better"



5.0 Summary

In summary there are a number of areas where performance can be strengthened in order to improve tenancy sustainment.

The actions noted above have been collated in a plan and have been broken down into Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound (SMART) activities.



6.0 Delivering the Strategy

Responsibility

The Director of Housing will have ongoing responsibility for the successful delivery of the Action Plan (Appendix 1).

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.

Risk Management

It is important for the Association to acknowledge 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.

7.0 ACTION PLAN

Action	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale
7.1 Source further funding to ensure the tenants who are struggling continue to be supported, including those experiencing fuel poverty.	The Langstane Housing Support Service will be resourced and provide a service which tenants can rely on if needed.	Director of Housing	By January 2025 and ongoing
7.2 To review and analyse in more detail the reasons for termination to better understand the causes of failed tenancies	Increased sustainment levels	Housing Manager	By the Annual Return on the Charter 2025
7.3 To promote and extend the services of the Tenant Welfare Adviser to include money advice	Tenants receive an all-encompassing service reducing evictions and promoting sustainability	Housing Manager	By 31 December 2024
7.4 To increase the number of partner organisations and promote Langstane's services to the wider community, particularly to improve mental well-being	Increased sustainment through partnership working	Director of Housing	By 31 st March 2025
7.5 To increase the use of CCTV and other preventative measures and work with other agencies to target and reduce anti-social behaviour in communities	To increase sustainability and reduce tenancies terminated on the grounds of neighbour issues	Housing Manager	By 31 st March 2025
7.6 Re-launch our digital champions approach	Tenants feel confident using technology	Customer Services Manager	By June 2024
7.7 To establish an in-house furniture leasing project to ensure tenants have the best start possible	To increase sustainment	Director of Housing	By 31 st March 2024