LANGSTANE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

TENANCY SUSTAINMENT STRATEGY 2020-2023

Tenancy Sustainment Strategy

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Contents

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

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 homes and services that make a positive difference to peoples lives'

This is echoed in the Association's Vision for the future 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'

The Tenancy Sustainment Strategy has been developed to support these business plan objectives and provides a framework for increasing tenancy sustainment.

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

- Understanding who are tenants are
- Early Intervention and the Prevention of Homelessness
- Improving Neighbourhoods
- Rent Affordability, Welfare Reform and Fuel Poverty
- Health and Wellbeing
- Digital Technology
- Ageing Population

This strategy links to a number of strategies and plans including the Business Plan (and specifically the Internal Management Plan which refers to increased tenancy sustainment), the Asset Management Strategy, the Tenant Participation Strategy, the IT Strategy, the Community Investment Strategy and the Sustainability Strategy.

An Action Plan sets out a 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 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 equality:

'every tenant and other customer will have their individual need recognised, is treated fairly and with respect and receives fair access to housing'.

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

Specifically the measurement of tenancy sustainment refers to (Indicator 20):

**'the percentage of new tenancies sustained for more than a year'**
Figure 1

Tenancy Sustainment	2019-2020	2018-2019
Percentage of new tenancies to existing tenants sustained for more than a year	93.44%	87.10%
Percentage of new tenancies to applicants who were assessed as statutory homeless by the local authority sustained for more than a year	80.31%	82.76%
Percentage of new tenancies to applicants from the landlord's housing list sustained for over a year	92.31%	n/a
Percentage of new tenancies to applicants nominated by the local authority sustained for over a year	89.91%	82.67%
Percentage of tenancies to others sustained for over a year	100%	100%
Overall Sustainment	**85.44%**	**83.22%**

The figures noted above helps the Association to focus on areas for improved sustainment, particularly further support for statutory homeless cases and others nominated by the local authority at the start of their tenancy. The reasons for a lower sustainment rate can include often chaotic life styles, a lack of support and a need to move quickly from homeless temporary accommodation where the rents are higher. The requirement for additional support at this time is included in the Action Plan.

Another useful point of analysis is when a tenant terminates their tenancy. When a termination of tenancy is received the Association will make contact with the tenant to try to establish the reasons for leaving (except where there is a legal process ongoing) and to determine if there is anything that can be done to prevent the termination. The figures for 2019-2020 are noted below and relate to 405 terminations in total:
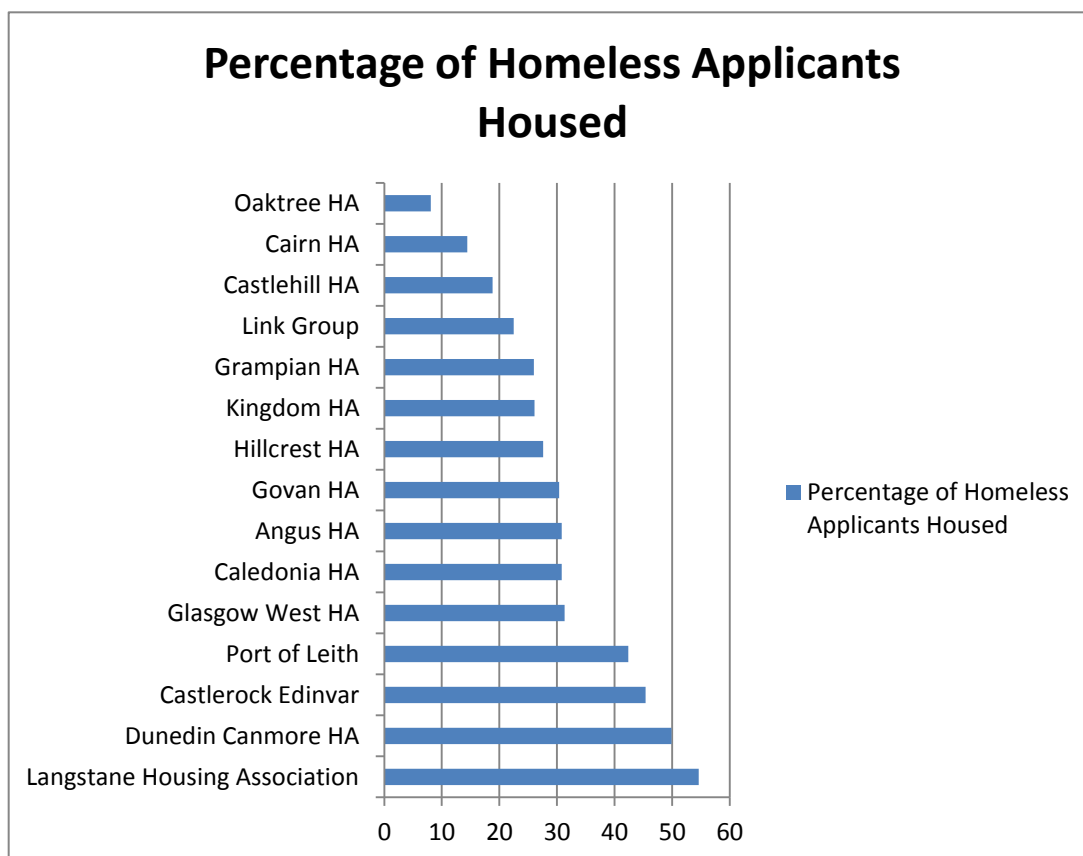
Figure 2
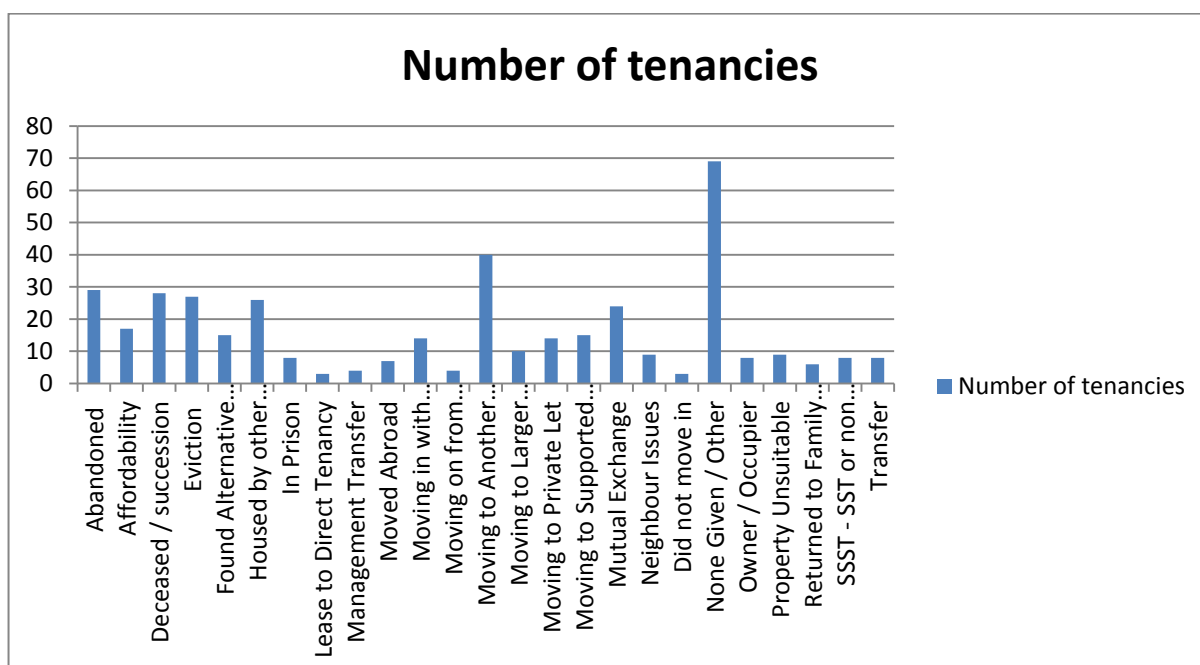
The reasons for leaving will be analysed in more detail to inform future actions to increase sustainment and to determine any patterns occurring, for example anti social behaviour / neighbour issues in a particular area. In addition tenants will be encouraged to provide the reason for leaving.

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

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

In terms of the national drivers, the Scottish Government and COSLA's Guidance on the 'Prevention of Homelessness'[1] 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 3 below shows that amongst some of the Association's peer group Langstane allocated the highest number of lets to homeless applicants (54.6%) in 2018-2019[2].

Percentage of Homeless Applicants Housed

Association	Percentage
Oaktree HA	8
Cairn HA	14
Castlehill HA	19
Link Group	23
Grampian HA	26
Kingdom HA	26
Hillcrest HA	28
Govan HA	30
Angus HA	31
Caledonia HA	31
Glasgow West HA	32
Port of Leith	43
Castlerock Edinvar	46
Dunedin Canmore HA	50
Langstane Housing Association	55

■ Percentage of Homeless Applicants Housed

The housing market across the North East has dipped and with more choice opening up to prospective tenants the number of homeless applicants housed for 2019-2020 has reduced.

Homeless nominations resulting in an offer of accommodation (%)	90.56
Homeless nominations resulting in an actual let (%)	66.35

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[1] The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Prevention of Homelessness Guidance 2009
[2] Scotland's Housing Network Statistical Data 2018-2019

The overall lets to statutory homeless applicants has reduced in 2019-2020 to 39%. (Section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 referrals: 49 lets, Statutory Homeless Nominations: 83 lets, other statutory homeless cases: 14 (146 / 375 lets).

Rapid Re-housing Plans and Housing First

The Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) was set up by the Scottish Government in October 2017 to produce short and long term solutions to end homelessness and rough sleeping. The vision was for a 'whole-systems' approach where prevention of homelessness is paramount and the responsibility lies not just with local authorities but also other sectors including housing associations.

When homelessness occurs, rapid rehousing should be the default position, avoiding the need for time in temporary accommodation. For people who require the emergency safety net of temporary accommodation, their time there should be as short as possible.

Where homelessness cannot be prevented, Rapid Rehousing means:

- A settled, mainstream housing outcome as quickly as possible
- Time spent in any form of temporary accommodation reduced to a minimum

Housing First, which forms part of the rapid rehousing model provides mainstream, settled housing as a first response for people with complex needs. It recognises a safe and secure home as the best base for recovery and offers personalised, open-ended, flexible support for people to end their experience of homelessness and address wider issues. The model separates the provision of housing and support, offers choice and control to tenants and works to the principles of harm reduction. This approach sees a shift away from a culture of 'tenancy readiness'.

The Association will continue to work in partnership with Aberdeen Cyrenians, Aberdeen Foyer, Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils to provide mainstream housing for homeless applicants who require intensive personalised support and have multiple and complex needs and monitor progress of these tenancies to ensure that tenancy sustainment is maintained.

As the success of the initiative is evidenced the number of tenancies can be increased (subject to Board approval).

3.0   SEVEN STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1.   Who Are Our Tenants?

When a tenant signs a tenancy agreement, information is collated to allow any required assistance to be identified at an early stage and targeted to ensure that the tenant has the best possible start in the tenancy. This exercise also gathers information on literacy issues, whether translation services are required and preferred contact methods. The information from the tenants at this stage is recorded on the Housing Management system. Referrals are made to the Langstane Support Service for assessment where additional help is required.

In 2015-2016 Langstane undertook a tenant profiling exercise in order to gain a better understanding of who the Association's customers were and to identify the specific issues they were 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 where welfare reform and digital inclusion issues were identified. This was recorded in a detailed action plan for the Langstane Support Team to address and take forward for existing and new tenants.

More recently a welfare reform exercise was carried out to identify vulnerable tenants in receipt of benefits who may struggle with the implementation of Universal Credit. This involved categorising tenants using a traffic light system; red, amber and green groups and targeting, in the first instance, the more vulnerable (red) tenants with practical help and advice.

It was recognised however that the tenants who responded to the tenant profile exercise were those who already engaged with the Association.

The gap in knowledge between the information gathered for new tenants and those existing tenants who engage with the Association is recognised and making contact with these harder to reach tenants is a priority for the future. 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.

Outcomes

- **The Association aims to visit every tenant in their home at least once a year to make sure that those who do not engage are at the very least provided with information and wherever possible advice.**

- **To carry out a tenant profiling exercise in 2020-2021 to ensure that the most update information is available to the Association to better tailor services to tenants.**

2. Early Intervention and Prevention (Arrears)

The Association has had 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 in Figure 3 below, this remains an area of risk for the Association, requires careful monitoring and impacts directly on tenancy sustainment.

Figure 3
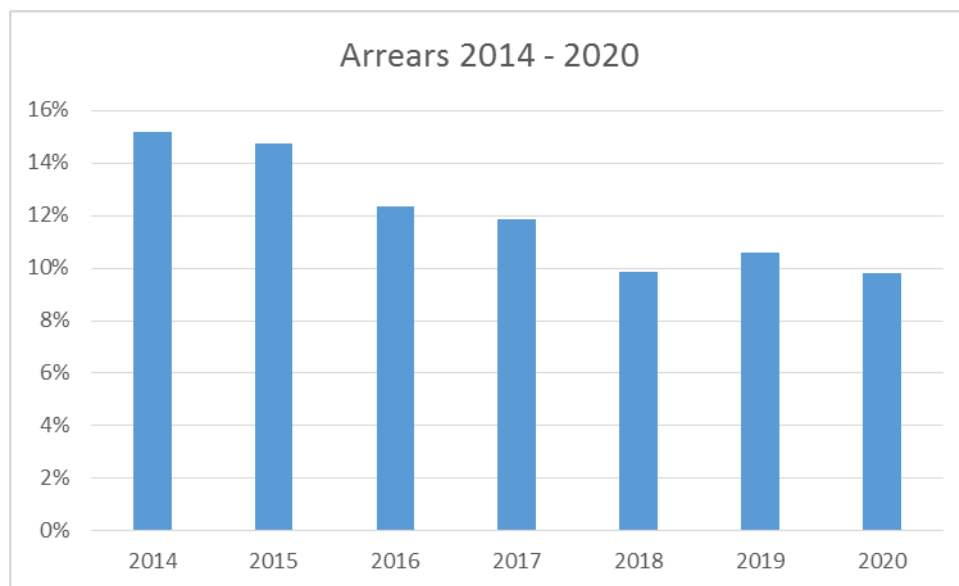
Key to addressing the arrears is the provision of advice, information and assistance at an early stage, ensuring that wherever possible this early intervention prevents arrears from accruing.

An initial assessment is carried out by the Association's Welfare Advisor when the tenants sign for their tenancy to maximise benefits and reiterate the requirement to pay rent and provide help and advice for those seeking to apply for Universal Credit.

Complex cases involving multiple debts are referred to money advice services.

Outcome

- **To reduce rent arrears and in particular the number of evictions year on year for the life of this strategy and the years beyond.**

3.   Improving Neighbourhoods / Communities

A tenant satisfaction survey carried out in 2018-2019 identified concerns raised by tenants in relation to their neighbourhoods. In particular anti social behaviour, dog fouling, car parking issues and fly-tipping or littering within the developments were highlighted as the main areas for improvement. This information has been captured in an action plan 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.

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. In particular the Association will build on current successful use of mobile CCTV units to deter anti social behaviour.

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.

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 turnover.

Outcomes

- **To increase the use of CCTV and work with other agencies to target and reduce anti social behaviour in communities**

- **Housing Services and Asset Management will work together to identify and target localities for improvement to increase sustainability.**

4.   Rent Affordability, Fuel Poverty and Welfare Reform

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 living wage.

Having recognised the affordability issues the Association took forward a review of the Association's rent structure during 2017-2018 and examined in greater detail the charging system. A decision was made to freeze rents for one bedroom properties in Aberdeen City in 2020 to reflect affordability. It was also noted that many rental charges were out of alignment with the rent policy / matrix which had occurred over a number of years and particularly following an unsuccessful attempt to re-structure rents in the early 2000's. It was agreed that rents should be aligned to the matrix to ensure fairness, transparency and consistency contributing to sustainable tenancies. With 17 tenants terminating their tenancies in 2019-2020 on the grounds of affordability this is a key area for sustainment.

Outcome
The impact of the new rent structure on individual rents has been modelled and was implemented in April 2020 however careful monitoring is key to ensuring that rents remain affordable, any future rent increases are minimised and the reasons for terminating tenancies on the grounds of affordability are reduced to below 10 in 2020-2021.

Fuel Poverty and Tenancy Sustainment
(See also the Association's Sustainability Strategy)

Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019

This Act sets out a new definition for fuel poverty:

A household is in fuel poverty if-

(a) the fuel costs necessary for the home in which members of the household live to meet the conditions set out in subsection (2) are more than 10% of the household's adjusted net income, and

(b) after deducting such fuel costs, benefits received for a care need or disability (if any) and the household's childcare costs (if any), the household's remaining adjusted net income is insufficient to maintain an acceptable standard of living for members of the household

A household will be deemed to be in extreme fuel poverty if fuel costs are more than 20% of the adjusted net income.

The Act also sets clear targets for reducing fuel poverty:

- By 2040 no more than 5% of households will be in fuel poverty and no more than 1% in extreme fuel poverty

- Interim targets are set for 2030; 15% households in fuel poverty and 5% extreme fuel poverty, and 2035; 10% households in fuel poverty with 3% in extreme fuel poverty

In 2017, 24.9% (613,000) of households were thought to be in fuel poverty in Scotland[3] with 7% (174,000) of households living in extreme fuel poverty.

Fuel poverty is driven by a number of factors:

- Type of heating
- Heating costs
- Water heating costs
- Lighting, cooking and other running costs
- Low incomes
- Inefficient construction of homes

Fuel poverty in Scotland
(based on 2016 Scottish House Condition Survey)
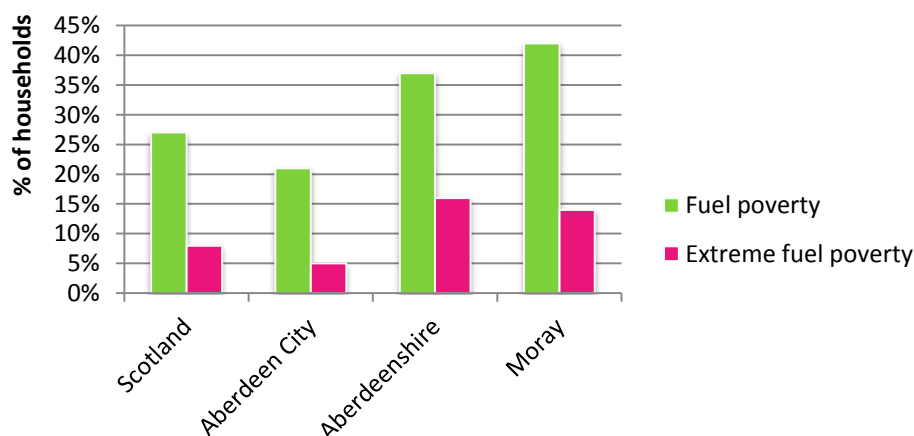
The majority of households in fuel poverty in the three Local Authority areas that the Association operates in are older households and there is a higher level of fuel poverty in social housing than in private rented or owner occupied property. Just over half of households in fuel poverty have electric heating. Improving heating and insulation in our homes to meet EESSH2 will contribute to reduced fuel costs for tenants and assist with reducing fuel poverty amongst our tenant population. It is difficult for us to estimate accurately how many of our households are currently in fuel poverty as we do not hold income information for our tenants.

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[3] Based on figures published in Scottish Government's Scottish House Condition Survey 2017

However, in 2020/21 we will carry out a tenant profiling survey and will include questions on fuel poverty to identify how many households struggle with their fuel costs.

Outcome:

The Langstane Housing Support Team will continue to assist tenants to review tariffs to ensure that the best deal from the energy suppliers is available. The Association will continue to work towards meeting EEESH targets to reduce fuel poverty.

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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 Rent Management Team. While this will assist tenants to maximise income and will highlight the need for budgeting in preparation for a Universal Credit payment, the overall effect of welfare reform will continue to impact on the income to the Association and could 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 priority, as is 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.

Outcomes:

In order to improve tenancy sustainment the Association will build on relationships with the Department of Work and Pensions staff to facilitate the exchange of information and will continue to support tenants and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations to ensure:

- **all UC claims are backdated to the date of claim,**
- **the 5 week wait for UC be abandoned,**
- **direct rental payments to landlords will be made wherever possible with the permission of the tenant**
- **welfare advisers are able to process claims on behalf of vulnerable tenant**

5. Digital Inclusion

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

In addition to contacting the tenants who had indicated that they needed assistance the Association has signed up to the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisation (SCVO) 'Social Housing Digital Champions Network'.

Seven members of staff 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.

The Association has increased access to the internet for tenants by providing computers in reception linked to online waiting list forms and Universal Credit forms with assistance from staff on hand, to guide and advise tenants.

This work is key to increasing tenancy sustainment.

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

The Association's Digital Champions and Trainer

Outcome:

To ensure that tenants are digitally supported, to increase their online activity and maximise opportunities.

6 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 previous 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 has in place a self referral process. 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.

7 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.

In addition social isolation becomes an increasing issue the older people get. Unless a tenant has a physical need then external service provision is limited. The Association will prioritise at least one annual telephone call or visit to those tenants over 70 and where possible or requested refer for befriending where resources allow. This will assist older tenants to remain in their properties for longer.

In addition and linking to digital inclusion it will be important to support older tenants to access digital services to ensure that participation is maximised.

Outcome : to increase sustainability for older tenants through regular contact, befriending and support with digital access to services.

4.0 The Role of the Housing Support Service

The role of the Housing Support Service is to identify those tenants who need help and to provide low level housing support at an early stage.

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.
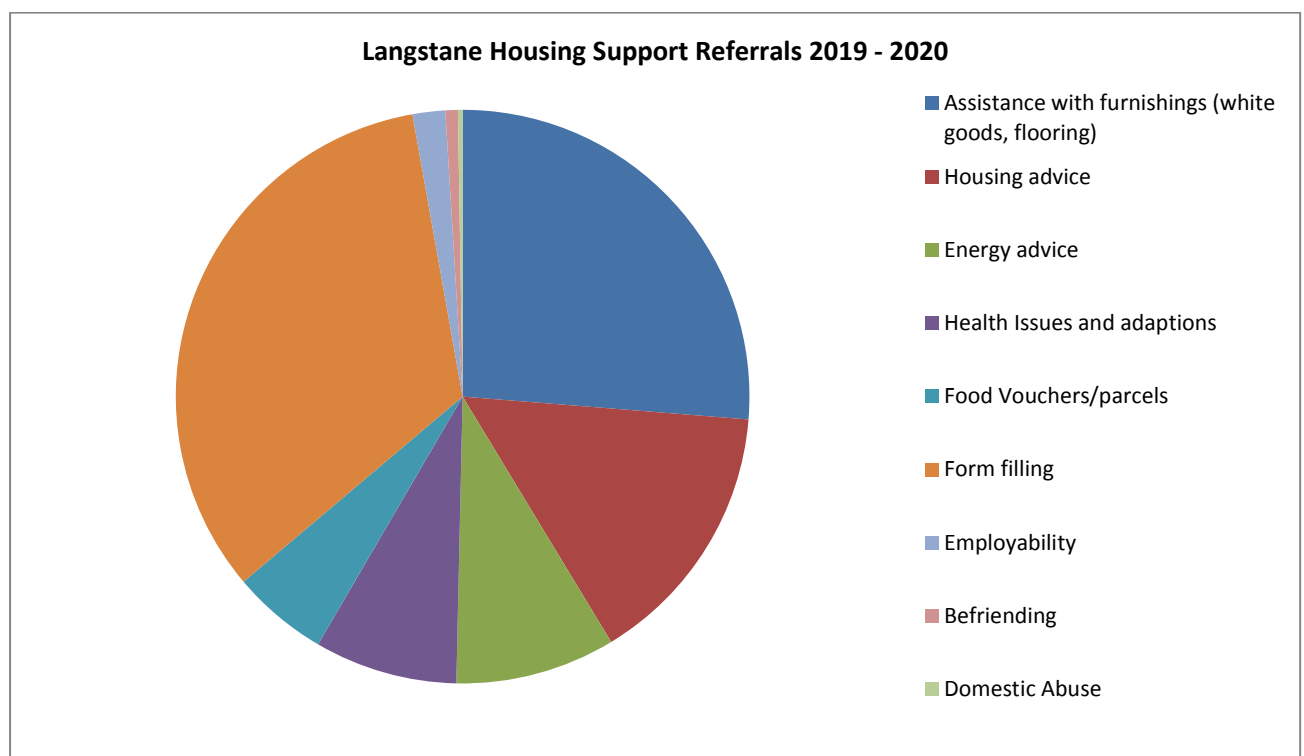
Early in the new financial year 2020 - 2021 the Association will formally register the service with the Care Inspectorate to ensure that the complexity of support needed by the tenants can be delivered by the Langstane Housing Support Service.

The team consists of a Team Leader, two Support Workers and an Administrative Assistant.

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

The Housing Support Service plays 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 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.

Langstane Housing Support Referrals 2019 - 2020

- Assistance with furnishings (white goods, flooring)
- Housing advice
- Energy advice
- Health Issues and adaptions
- Food Vouchers/parcels
- Form filling
- Employability
- Befriending
- Domestic Abuse

5.0 Summary

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

The outcomes noted above have been collated in an Action Plan and have been broken down into Specific Measureable, 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 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.

7.0   ACTION PLAN

Action 6.1	Outcome	Responsibility	Timescale
Seek funding opportunities	The Housing Support Service will be resourced and provide a service which tenants can rely on if needed.	Team Leader Langstane Support Services	March 2021
6.2			
To assess the requirement for support particularly for homeless applicants at the start of the tenancy and work with local authorities to provide this support	Increased sustainment for homeless households	Team Leader Langstane Support Services	By the Annual Return on the Charter 2020-2021
6.3			
To analyse the reasons for termination in order to target areas for improvement	Increased sustainment levels	Housing Services Manager	By the Annual Return on the Charter 2020-2021
6.4			
To carry out an updated tenant profiling exercise	This will establish any gaps in knowledge and better tailor services for tenants	Director of Housing	January 2021
6.5			
Visit / call tenants at least once every year, prioritising older tenants and those who have had no contact	Langstane will better understand tenants' needs and can determine how help is to be provided	Housing Services Manager	March 2021 and annually thereafter

6.6			
To increase the use of CCTV or other preventative measures and work with other agencies to target and reduce anti social behaviour in communities	To increase sustainability and reduce tenants terminating tenancies on the grounds of neighbour issues	Housing Services Manager	ARC Return 2020-2021
6.7			
Monitor average rent levels to ensure affordability for tenants and reduce the reasons for termination on the grounds of affordability to under 10 in 2020-2021	Ensures rents are affordable for tenants and reduces the number of tenants terminating their tenancy on the grounds of affordability	Housing Services Manager	Annual Return on the Charter 2020-2021 and annually thereafter
6.8			
Register the Langstane Support Service with the Care Inspectorate	Regulation will demonstrate effective delivery of the service	Director of Housing	By September 2020
6.9			
Examine the indicators used in software analysis to prioritise specific areas for planned maintenance / improvement	Increased satisfaction and ability to demonstrate that the Association's properties are places where tenants wish to live	Asset Manager/ Housing Services Manager	By December 2020
6.10			
Progress '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 Manager	By March 2021.