



## Tenancy Sustainment Policy

### Housing Services

<b>Policy:</b>	Tenancy Sustainment Policy
<b>Scope:</b>	This policy outlines how St Albans City and District Council support tenants in helping them sustain and manage their tenancy.
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<b>Approved by:</b>	<b>Assistant Director, Housing</b>
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<b>Statute:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023</li> <li>• Equality Act 2010</li> <li>• Housing Act 1985</li> <li>• Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)</li> <li>• Equalities Act 2010</li> <li>• Mental Health Act 1983, 2007</li> <li>• Welfare Reform Act 2012</li> </ul>
<b>Related Policies/Agreements:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrears Policy</li> <li>• Anti-Social Behaviour Policy</li> <li>• Vulnerable Residents and Reasonable Adjustments Policy</li> <li>• Domestic Abuse Policy</li> <li>• Safeguarding Policy</li> <li>• Equality Policy</li> <li>• Housing Allocations Policy</li> <li>• Tenancy Agreement Terms and Conditions</li> <li>• Aids and Adaptations Policy</li> </ul>

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## **1.0 Introduction**

**1.1** The terms 'we', 'us', and 'our' refer to St Albans City and District Council (SADC).

The terms 'you' and 'your' refer to St Albans City and District Council tenants.

**1.2** This policy applies to all secure, introductory, flexible fixed term and demoted tenancies, along with licence agreements for tenants who are decanted. It does not apply to leaseholders and non-council residents.

This policy also applies to tenants who are in the process of a mutual exchange, an assignment, a succession, or the termination of a tenancy.

**1.3** St Albans City and District Council are committed to helping tenants maintain their tenancy. We will offer a range of ways to support our tenants in helping them achieve a successful tenancy, maintain the terms of their tenancy agreement, and live safely and independently in their homes.

**1.4** This policy will outline how we aim to support our tenants in sustaining and managing their tenancy, thus preventing tenancy failure, homelessness, eviction, promoting community cohesion and wellbeing. Tenancy Sustainment helps prevent any negative effects that the tenant may experience if they become homeless or find it difficult to secure another tenancy because of issues relating to their former tenancy.

**1.5** Our tenant's circumstances and needs can vary, so this policy does not try to explain how we will approach every situation. We are committed to ensuring fair access for our vulnerable tenants when providing support. However, there are certain situations in which we are unable to provide support. This is outlined in the Vulnerable Residents and Reasonable Adjustments Policy.

The policy will cover how SADC will:

- Identify risks to tenancy failure
- Provide support at different stages throughout a tenancy
- Consider referrals for specialist support
- Liaise and work with partners and community groups

## **2.0 Definition**

**2.1** Tenancy sustainment is the provision of a range of measures which provide tenants with the necessary support to give them the best chance of successfully managing their tenancy.

**2.2** Every tenant is responsible for managing their tenancy and keeping to their tenancy agreement.

**2.3** However, sometimes life events, illness, bereavement, unemployment, financial difficulties or other factors, can make maintaining a tenancy more difficult, and make tenants more vulnerable. We recognise that continued and sustained support for potentially vulnerable individuals and families may be critical for the success of their tenancies.

- 2.4 An indication that support may be required could be highlighted by the tenant themselves, SADC officers, SADC contractors, family members and the wider community. For more information, please see SADC's Vulnerable Residents and Reasonable Adjustments Policy.
- 2.5 Residents who are worried about their tenancy and any breaches or potential problems should firstly contact their Neighbourhood Housing or Income Officer. Where further support or intervention is required, a referral may be made to the Tenancy Sustainment Team, or other third-party organisations.
- 2.6 There may unfortunately be occasions where, despite our best-efforts, tenancy enforcement action is necessary to protect other residents, our properties, staff or resources.

### **3.0 Recognising vulnerabilities to help prevent tenancy failure**

- 3.1 There is no single definition of vulnerability across the social housing sector, however we define vulnerability as:

*Someone who has an underlying characteristic and/or have experienced an exceptional life event, meaning they are currently unable to act independently or are unable to cope with managing their tenancy without additional assistance or support.*

- 3.2 For more information, please see the St Albans City and District Council's Vulnerable Residents and Reasonable Adjustments Policy.
- 3.3 Vulnerability can be a changing state and can occur at different points in a person's life. It can be temporary, period or recurring, as well as ongoing and developing over time. There are several indicators that someone may be vulnerable or in need of support.
- 3.4 Risks and vulnerabilities can be identified at any stage of a tenancy. Officers will approach these discussions with tenants initially at the sign-up stage and throughout a tenancy as they arise. Where necessary, with the tenant's consent, their family members will be a part of these discussions. If support is already in place, we will liaise with those parties to consider how best to work together and help tenants sustain their tenancies.

### **4.0 Stages of intervention to help sustain a tenancy**

SADC will support tenants with housing related issues as they arise during a tenancy, to prevent and reduce the risk of eviction and homelessness. SADC will try to identify vulnerabilities at the earliest opportunity, through sign ups, or throughout the tenancy where the tenant seeks support and/or the Housing Team identifies needs through conversations with the tenant.

Where there is a risk of harm or concern regarding the welfare of adults who are experiencing, or are at risk from abuse or neglect, we will follow our safeguarding policies and procedures.

With the residents' consent, we can also make referrals for further assistance and support, to our own services such as tenancy sustainment, community protection or

external agencies as required. On occasion, referrals may be made without the tenant's consent and in these circumstances the tenant will be offered the choice in accepting it or not.

#### **4.1 Early intervention support**

##### **4.1.1 *At the sign up:***

SADC will support tenants from the initial sign-up stage. This is crucial to identifying any potential vulnerabilities and ensure that the tenancy can start successfully.

When a tenant first moves into their home, SADC will go through the tenancy agreement, explaining to the tenant(s) the type of tenancy and the rights and responsibilities of both the Council and the tenant(s).

Tenants will be made aware of their allocated Neighbourhood Housing and Income Officer. They will support the tenants throughout their tenancy.

Tenants will be given information about their utility providers. We can help support tenants set up their bills with the best fuel tariff and provider and help them seek assistance in meeting fuel costs.

##### **4.1.2 *Within the first six weeks:***

A Neighbourhood Housing Officer or Income Officer will carry out a welcome visit within the first six weeks, and no later than eight weeks from the commencement of the tenancy. This will be booked in at the sign-up stage with the tenant and the tenant will be sent a reminder before it takes place. This will help identify any vulnerabilities that were not disclosed at the initial sign up and answer any questions the tenant may have.

##### **4.1.3 *Where needs are identified:***

Income Officers can discuss how rent will be paid in order to prevent any rent arrears further down the line. Where necessary, The Tenancy Sustainment Officers can provide benefits advice and support to ensure tenants meet their housing costs.

If a tenant discloses a vulnerability or support need, we will collate information regarding current support already in place. We will discuss with the tenant(s) and those third parties how best to support tenants with the new tenancy given to them. For those tenants who are already seeking support from third party organisations, we will liaise with those parties to consider how best to work together.

The Housing Management Team can make referrals at this stage to the Tenancy Sustainment Service to provide specialist support. An assessment can be carried out to identify financial and welfare concerns that the tenant is experiencing. The Tenancy Sustainment Team can help tenants settle into their homes and answer any concerns around the property which includes flooring, essential white goods, and setting up their bills.

## **4.2 Support during the tenancy**

Housing Officers and Income Officers will provide support to tenants throughout their tenancy.

### **4.2.1 The Housing Income Officers can:**

- Support tenants with setting up payment plans, applying for universal credit, discretionary housing payments (DHP) and help setting up direct payments from universal credit.
- Signpost tenants for debt advice and benefits they can claim.
- Identifying tenants who may need help to maximise their income and ensuring they are on the correct benefits.
- Liaise with the DWP and other organisations on behalf of the tenant(s).

### **4.2.2 The Neighbourhood Housing Officer can:**

- The Neighbourhood Housing Officer can help to identify whether the tenant has any support networks in place.
- Act as a liaison for tenants to deal with other housing services and external agencies, for example waste management, lock changes, repair issues, and anti-social behaviour.
- Help tenants look after and manage their property, for example where hoarding has been identified
- Assist tenants with information advice relating to changes in circumstances, for example mutual exchange and downsizing

## **4.3 Complex needs support – The Tenancy Sustainment Team**

Some tenants will require extra support to sustain their tenancy, especially those with complex needs and vulnerabilities. SADC has a designated Tenancy Sustainment Team who provide tenants with this support on a short-term basis. The Tenancy Sustainment Team accepts referrals from all teams within Housing, including temporary accommodation and the homelessness teams

The Tenancy Sustainment Team will be a specialist resource to the Housing Teams providing advice and assistance to tenants to help them sustain their tenancy and prevent unnecessary evictions. The Officers will look to maximise tenant's income, help with any benefits issues affecting their rent payments, tackle social isolation, and signpost to relevant agencies for further support.

### **4.3.1 Tenancy Sustainment Officers can:**

- Liaise with external agencies in setting up utilities and managing utility debt.
- Work on a one-to-one basis to discuss household budgeting – managing household bills, payment plans, and general monthly expenditures.
- Carry out benefits calculations – check for eligibility, apply for any new benefits, help complete forms, and advice on current benefit issues.

- Help tenants access support from local services and agencies, for example assisting them in applying for grants from charities. This could involve obtaining white goods to set up their homes, essential items, and reducing debts.
- Signpost tenants to employment and training opportunities offered by local organisations.
- Assist tenants with completing forms relating to debt and financial issues.
- Signpost tenants to organisations that promote life skills and help tenants live safely in their homes.
- Signpost tenants to employment and training opportunities.
- Support tenants with identified vulnerabilities in accessing statutory services and specialist providers.
- Make recommendations to Housing Review Panel (HRP) on behalf of tenants (This panel of senior officers make certain decisions on cases including allocating homes outside of the usual policy in exceptional circumstances).
- Encourage social inclusion.
- Assess a tenant's needs and create a tailored support plan.
- Help maximise tenant's income and ensure tenants are on the correct benefits.

## **5.0 Community Protection and Community Safety Teams**

**5.1** The Community Protection Team and Community Safety Teams are specialised teams trained to deal with a wide range of behaviours that impact a tenant's ability to manage a tenancy. The Council takes a balanced approach, taking action when behaviour falls outside the range that a 'reasonable' person may find acceptable. Both teams assist in providing a long-term solution to persistent issues.

They can:

- Make safeguarding referrals and refer to external agencies who will complete safeguarding assessments
- Gather relevant evidence regarding complaints
- Promote stable and safe communities, by dealing with anti-social behaviour cases as they arise
- Refer to specialist agencies to support tenants whose behaviour is impacting on the community
- Enforce anti-social behaviour actions, such as injunctions and closure orders
- Issue Community Protection Notices by focusing on the behaviour and understanding the impact that anti-social behaviour has on the victims and the communities that are being affected
- Deal with high level cases e.g. drug supply, dealing with assault, gang and organised crime activity where there isn't another responsible landlord
- Support vulnerable tenants who are victims of domestic abuse

## **6.0 Working with Partners**

- 6.1** We work closely with partners and community groups and signpost our tenants for further support to help them sustain their tenancy.
- 6.2** We can refer tenants who require support, including but not limited to:
- Specialist debt management support and further benefit tribunal support
  - Referrals to health and social care partners, to manage care needs and live independently at home
  - Skills and resources required to be able to live successfully in their home
  - Budgeting and managing everyday finances
  - Parenting and family issues
  - Short-term support with access to food banks, local charities, and community groups
  - Drug and alcohol services
  - Employment opportunities
  - Accessing mental health services
  - Support in acquiring essential and wider essential items to set up their homes

## **7.0 Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion**

- 7.1** SADC are committed to ensuring that everyone is treated with fairness and respect. We will ensure equal and fair access to our services, by taking into consideration the individual needs of our tenants.
- 7.2** An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed during the development of this policy to ensure that the policy does not unfairly disadvantage people with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation).
- 7.3** We do not necessarily define all people with a protected characteristic as 'vulnerable'. However, we will give due consideration to any protected characteristic, and the individual circumstances, in deciding the support we offer.
- 7.4** This policy does not have any negative impacts on tenants with these protected characteristics.
- 7.5** Instead, this policy may have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics. For example, as outlined in the Vulnerable Residents and Reasonable Adjustments policy, where tenants with disabilities are identified as being more vulnerable, this policy highlights the support available to those tenants.
- 7.6** Support will be provided following an assessment carried out by an Officer within the Housing Team if further needs are identified. The Tenancy Sustainment Officers can then cater to the tenant's needs on a case-by-case basis.
- 7.7** Reasonable adjustments can be made to ensure all tenants can access our services.

## **8.0 Review and Communication**

- 8.1** This policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if legislation or regulations change.



- 8.2** Tenants have been consulted on this policy at the Tenant and Leaseholder Forum and feedback will be considered.
- 8.3** The policy has been circulated with the relevant Officers involved in delivering this policy.
- 8.4** Reasonable adjustments can be made to ensure all tenants can access our services. The policy will also be available on the St Albans City and District Council website and an easy read version can be available upon request.