



Tenancy and Tenure Management Policy

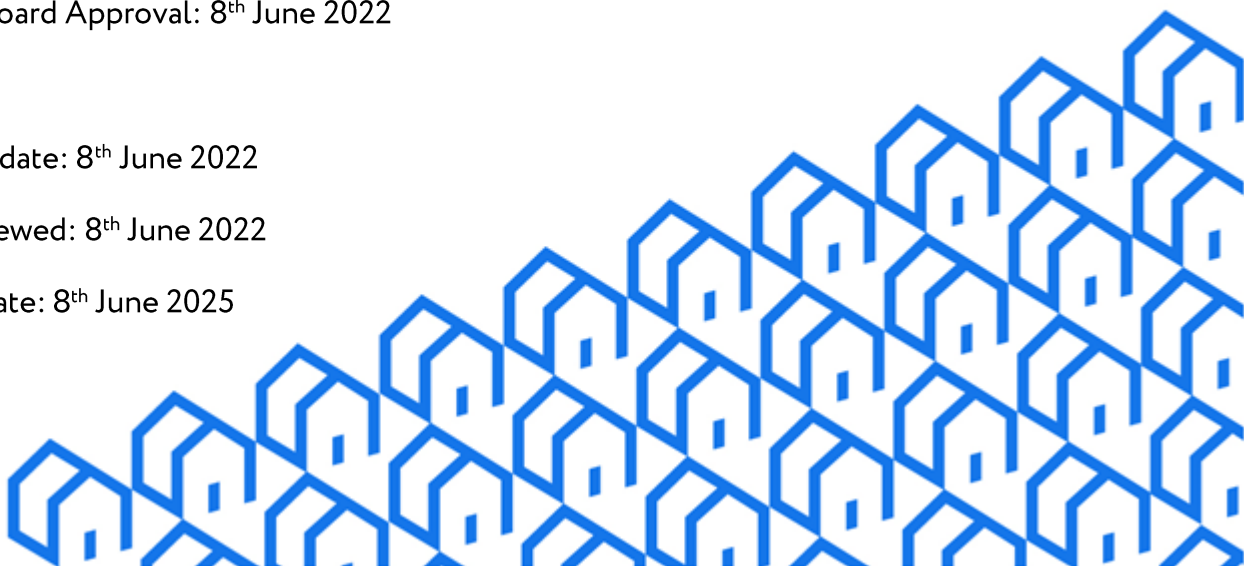
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Introduction

This Policy describes Empower Housing Association's (EHA) approach to granting tenancies and managing a variety of tenancy related matters; recognising that supported living accommodation is a scarce and valuable national resource, with the demand for affordable, well-maintained housing far exceeding availability.

The Policy supports the delivery of commitments of EHA's Corporate Plan and ensures that our tenants and their families have the peace of mind which comes from knowing they can stay in their home for as long as they want to.

We support our tenants to understand, take responsibility for and meet their responsibilities, whilst providing help and advice for those requiring additional support.

Scope of the Policy

This Policy details EHA's approach to tenancy management and ensures that we issue tenancies that are compatible with:

- The purpose of the accommodation
- The needs of the individual household

This policy also adheres to all applicable statutory and legal requirements in relation to the form and use of tenancy agreements or terms of occupation, including:

- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard
- The Fraud Act 2006
- The Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013
- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 198
- Localism Act 2011

Aims and Objectives

This Policy aims to set out our high-level commitment to ensuring the peace of mind that comes with security of tenure and ensure that we create and maintain sustainable tenancies in line with our Corporate Objectives.

The Policy objectives are:

- To offer new customers occupancy terms which promote security of tenure

- To respond positively to our tenants changing needs providing consistent advice on issues to enable them to maintain their tenancies or moving home
- To maximise tenancy sustainability
- To offer housing options advice to encourage tenants to occupy a home which meets their needs
- To ensure our properties are occupied by our tenants, proactively challenging tenancy fraud
- To ensure a tenancy comes to an end in a positive way for both our tenant and EHA

Security of Tenure

EHA cherish the principle of security of tenure, and see strong social, financial and administrative reasons to offer this to any new supported living tenants.

We will offer Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) to all our tenants, including those whose previous tenancy was a shorthold, they were on licence, or they were previously living with family. The ASTs reflect the unique nature and purpose of our supported living houses, its management and specific tenant needs.

EHA will ensure the principle of choice is at the heart of our offer to new tenants. We will work closely with families, Social Services, Care Providers and Commissioners to find the right home for our tenants. EHA will assist tenants and their families to complete and submit housing benefit applications under specified exempt accommodation, with housing benefit covering the rent detailed within the tenancy in full.

Tenancy Management

EHA hold a Service Level Agreement with the nominated Care Provider, providing the personal care and support to our tenants. This agreement promotes a positive two-way relationship with the Care Provider to ensure our tenants can maintain their tenancies. Our approach is to be proactive, and able to respond positively to what will be unique, individual concerns working with broader policy guidance and housing law. As appropriate we will ensure tenants and their family/representatives are aware of their statutory and contractual occupancy rights.

The nominated Care Provider will provide our tenants with their personal support and supervision whilst EHA will handle all housing related matters. We will instruct the Care

Provider on matters relating to the tenants to enable them to maintain their tenancy. EHA are available 24/7/365 to all our tenants and their personal support teams. We visit all our properties every three to four months to carry out review checks to support our tenants to enable them to maintain their tenancies. Our contacts with our properties will be additionally as and when required depending upon the needs of the tenant. This extends to working with parents, Care Providers and other agencies to support the tenant, due to their behaviours we would not necessarily always have direct contact with the tenant as we need to manage risks for not only staff on the ground but contractors as and when required to carry out repairs and maintenance. EHA provide an in-house maintenance service along with contracting out to regional suppliers to carry out general and responsive repairs, including blocked drains/toilets, heating issues, property damage, electrical faults, which is available 24/7/365. Many of the issues that will arise with our properties will be picked up as part of our review service and consequently this provides the support our tenants to enable them to continue to live in a supported living tenancy.

EHA will also contact our properties to explain and advise on utilities, health and safety, to assist with budgeting, advise on benefits as required, setting up the utility accounts, communicating with parents, Care Providers, social workers and neighbours to discuss ongoing behaviours and additional works, via visit, phone call and email, as well as managing repairs and contractor access. All the work EHA do is to ensure that our tenants are able to maintain their tenancies by understanding their requirements.

Sustainable Tenancies

Our SLA establishes a two-way relationship with nominated Care Providers who provide the personal care and support to our tenants. This agreement helps to promote tenant independence where possible and the responsibilities which come with an EHA tenancy, with additional housing related support provided by us.

The majority of our tenants are eligible for housing benefit, therefore:

- Our approach to rent setting for the annual rent increase, for all properties takes into consideration each Local Authorities acceptable rent level under specified exempt accommodation rulings
- Our Value for Money Policy and approach supports tenants to maintain their tenancy and avoid unnecessary evictions.
- In identifying new properties, we work closely with families, Social Services, Care Providers and Commissioners to find the right home for our tenants

- We employ a range of roles to support tenants to sustain their tenancies and improve their personal circumstances
- We provide housing related support to our all tenants, along with regular Performance Review Telephone Calls or face to face to assist with matters such as utility bills, budgeting etc
- We adopt measures which enable us to identify those tenancies at risk of failure due to factors such as a change in tenants circumstances/needs, breakdown in relationships between tenants, location of the property.

Household Need

Supported living accommodation is an increasingly scarce and valuable asset that provides stability to vulnerable adults in housing need. Whilst EHA cherishes the peace of mind which comes from our tenants enjoying such security of tenure, we will also ensure existing tenants and their families/representatives are aware of housing options as their circumstances change, be this through adaptations, relationship breakdowns, location etc.

Tenancy Fraud

As part of our two-way relationship EHA acknowledges it has a duty to make the best use of our homes and ensure properties continue to be occupied by those who are authorised to do so. Tenants who benefit from supported living accommodation also have an obligation to act within the terms of their tenancy agreements.

As raised awareness of tenancy fraud amongst EHA employees and tenants it is important in the overall strategy to prevent and tackle tenancy fraud. In pro-actively tackling tenancy fraud we will:

- Request for a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA – new properties only) and New Tenants Questionnaires (NTQs) to be completed in full prior to offering a new tenancy, including proof of ID, support hours and Pen Pictures. To ensure the applicant's circumstances are correct and that they meet supported living accommodation requirements.
- Carry out verification checks whenever contact is made to EHA by our tenant's families/representatives including the request for proof of appointee ship.

- Commit as a minimum to undertake an initial investigation into any report of tenancy fraud. Where there is sufficient evidence EHA will consider legal remedies in order to terminate the tenancy. Where possible tenants will be encouraged to voluntarily surrender their tenancy.
- Work with Local Authorities to jointly tackle tenancy fraud and share information.
- Use available internal and external data to inform of proactive approach to managing tenancy fraud in the properties we own or manage.

Moving On

EHA recognises that not all of our tenants will want to stay in their home forever. Our aim is that tenancy is ended on the best possible terms, even where during the course of the tenancy management action has been taken or there is debt outstanding on the rent account.

We encourage tenants and their families/representatives to provide a full notice period but are flexible enough to work with them agreeing an end date dependant on their circumstances. As EHA do not hold keys to any of the properties, they manage these must be returned to the Care Provider on the last day of tenancy.

During the notice period EHA will complete a bedroom/property inspection to ensure any remedial works required to bring the room(s) back to a relatable condition prior to the tenancy coming to an end. Any findings are reported to the tenant and their families/representatives to ensure this is completed. A further inspection will be undertaken once the tenancy comes to an end with a fixed fee of £250 issued to the tenant and their family/representatives should the room(s) be left in an unfit condition. This is in our business interests and allows assurance the room(s) are ready for the next tenant.

Tenants and their families/representatives are advised of the importance of ending their tenancy on a clear note, and the consequences of not doing so in terms of future housing options and debt recovery.

Financial/Value for Money Implications

Delivering value for money through this Policy and generally our approach to tenancy management is about the right service delivered efficiently in a way that benefits our tenants.

Our approach to promoting best use of the houses we own or manage and challenging tenancy fraud, support value for money objectives at both local and national policy levels.

Implications for Tenants

Our tenants are as diverse as the communities that they live in. We know that our tenants and their families/representatives welcome the peace of mind which comes from security of tenure and being issued with a robust and proportionate tenancy agreement. A safe secure home can improve wellbeing and support tenancy sustainment. The SLA promotes a two-way relationship and employees will engage with Care Providers in a way that will create trust and understanding.

Promoting best use of the housing we own or manage and challenging tenancy fraud, will help ensure that future tenants currently in need of supported living accommodation are able to access and enjoy EHA's housing offer.

How Performance will be Monitored

There are a range of measures and performance indicators which enable EHA to monitor the overall effectiveness of its approach to tenancy management and implementation of this Policy.

Tenant satisfaction is a critical success factor for the company. Benchmarking our performance sets our performance context across the sector. We track this regularly as well as undertaking regular Performance Review Checks (PRCs) both over the telephone and face to face with the nominated Care Providers. In completing PRCs it helps us understand how the tenants and their Care Provider feel about us as a landlord and the services we offer. This Policy is well placed to have a positive impact on this.

HA also report to their Board on bedspaces, vacant bed spaces and loss of income due to covering loss in void rent.