



Customer Investment Strategy 2017-2020

We are committed to ensuring that all our customers are able to sustain their tenancies, maintain a basic standard of living and interact with their local community. This strategy outlines our approach to identifying and assisting those customers that need advice and support; either through direct service provision or in partnership with statutory and voluntary partners.

Whilst we appreciate that not all customers will require additional advice and support beyond our core function as a landlord, we also accept that customers' needs may change over time, and this strategy outlines our approach to meeting those needs as and when required.

Providing advice to customers is fundamental to effective tenancy management and is delivered as part of the day to day activities of neighbourhood services. We aim to provide a variety of services to assist customers who need additional support.

In addition to direct support provision we aim to facilitate referrals to statutory and voluntary partners who provide specialist advice, develop strategic relationships with those partners to enable good joint working practices, provide information and guidance to our customers through a variety of channels on any changes in legislation which may affect their tenancy and make safeguarding referrals where we have concerns that a child or vulnerable adult may be at risk.

This strategy covers the first three years and we will;

- Hold up to date and accurate information on our customers to allow us to assist them
- Understand how our customers are affected by changes which may affect them to sustain their tenancies
- Reduce our rent arrears and the impact of Welfare Reform on these.

Enable our customers to receive tailored support
We can do this by:
Low level support – provided internally: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welfare benefits and debt advice (low/medium level)• Assistance with general tenancy management issues – home management, housing options, low level ASB, hoarding• Assistance with obtaining a job or enrolling in a training course• Assistance with volunteering opportunities• Assistance with functional skills – Maths, English, Digital Inclusion• Signposting to other services
High level support – in partnership with other voluntary and statutory agencies: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical or mental health problems• Domestic abuse• Substance and alcohol dependency issues• Safeguarding issues



Early Identification

We aim to undertake proactive work prior to tenancy sign up to ensure that customers are fully aware of both their and our responsibilities within their tenancy agreement:

- We will provide information at an early stage on the additional support services that are available to our customers should customers need them.
- To increase the change of identifying those at risk of tenancy failure we will complete a Housing Benefit / Universal Credit assessment with all prospective customers prior to sign up. We will prioritise:
 - Those who may fall into one of the two support groups under Universal Credit.
 - Those that are under 35 years old and are most at risk from changing welfare legislation
 - Those impacted by the Local Housing Allowance cap
 - Those that declare significant debt or welfare benefit issues
 - Those that have underlying care and support needs.
- Where a customer is highlighted as at risk of tenancy failure, support teams will work closely with Neighbourhoods, Income, ASB, Lettings and other internal teams and external agencies to establish an appropriate package of support for the customer.

Mitigating the impact of Welfare Reform

Welfare legislation changes frequently. We will carefully consider any future changes, will seek to identify those groups of customers that are likely to be the most significantly impacted by proactively collecting information about our customer profiles/demographics and will target our support services appropriately.

- We will offer a specialist welfare benefits and debt advice service to customers to enable them to maximise their income and minimise debt
- We will identify those tenancies that are most at risk, and offer assistance to customers from our Employment and Training, Volunteering and Customer Training teams.
- We will work closely with customers. If tenancy action is imminent due to rent arrears support teams will liaise close with the income and neighbourhood teams to ensure that the customer is aware of any action we may take, and we will highlight to the customer the benefits of moving to alternative accommodation.
- A Welfare Fund aims to provide assistance with funding for furniture, white goods and flooring where a customer is unable to afford to purchase these items themselves.

Money Management and Advice

Our teams aim to provide advice on effective budgeting, debt and welfare issues. Teams will highlight to customers the benefits of saving to purchase, and where this is not possible will give details of more affordable methods of credit (e.g. Credit Unions).

- Support teams will work closely with the income team to ensure that customers receive a consistent message with regards to paying rent.
- Our Tenancy Support team will provide support and advice on a range of issues where there is a tenancy related support need.
- The team aim to use Advantaged Thinking but limit their support to no more than 6 months although we may go beyond this in exceptional circumstances.



- Where a customer has ongoing support needs the team will ensure that an appropriate package of support is in place from statutory and voluntary agencies before they withdraw.

Employment and Training

Our Employment and Training team will work with customers to increase their income by assisting them in returning to work through a variety of methods:

- Advice on CV writing, interview skills and referrals to skills training with particular emphasis on digital skills.
- We also aim to provide Individual Placement Schemes and Apprenticeships where employment is provided first and skills are taught on the job. Where a customer has been out of work for some time the team may seek volunteering placements for the customer initially to enhance the customer's CV.

Digital Inclusion

It is in both ours and our customers' interests that they are able to access online services. Whilst we appreciate that not all customers will have easy access to wi-fi, we will make information available to customers on wi-fi hotspots within our geographical area.

- Where customers do not have the necessary equipment to access online services we will, where possible provide an option to purchase a cheap computer and/or smart phone.
- We will also provide customer access at local community centres and will make information available to customer about other locations which provide computer access.
- We aim to work in partnership with other organisations promoting digital access to provide digital training to customers who want to know more about using online services.
- We will actively encourage customers to engage with us through digital channels, and will promote our self-service portal as the primary method of communicating with us.