



INVESTIGATING TENANCY SUSTAINMENT IN GLASGOW SUMMARY REPORT

**HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY
AND MANDY LITTLEWOOD**



Produced in association with



This summary and the full report are both available online at www.gha.org.uk

This publication is available on request in large print, braille and audio format. It is also available on request in other languages. If you need the publication provided in any of these formats, please contact us on 0141 274 6553.

CONTENTS

- 03 KEY FINDINGS
- 04 BACKGROUND
- 05 GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM PREVIOUS REPORTS
- 07 WORK ALREADY IN PROGRESS
- 10 TENANCY SUSTAINMENT IN GLASGOW:
STAKEHOLDER VIEWS
- 12 GHA TENANCY SUSTAINMENT:
A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS
- 16 THE EXPERIENCES OF EX-TENANTS
- 20 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS



KEY FINDINGS

Glasgow Housing Association (GHA) is tasked with implementing a major investment programme to upgrade the housing stock inherited from Glasgow City Council (GCC) in 2003. It is also committed to preventing homelessness and improving housing management.

The historically high rate of tenancy breakdown is an issue of concern. GHA and GCC therefore commissioned this research by Heriot-Watt University to provide robust information on the reasons for 'early tenancy termination'. The research aimed to inform policy and service development measures to provide greater tenancy sustainability and greater community stability. The research team's full research report is available from the GHA website: www.gha.org.uk

- A fifth of all GHA permanent lettings are terminated within a year. In comparison with other social landlords this is a high, though not exceptional, rate of tenancy breakdown.
- Those housed from the GHA waiting list outnumber those housed as homeless by two to one. As the 'tenancy decay' profiles are similar, there are twice as many 'early termination' cases among former waiting list applicants as among former homeless households. Hence, plans to tackle tenancy non-sustainment need to be cast much more widely than simply aiming to prevent repeat homelessness.
- Excluding transfer movers, some 25 per cent of GHA tenancies are terminated within 12 months. However, the rate of tenancy breakdown is virtually identical for formerly homeless households and for those housed from the GHA waiting list.
- Whilst single young adults have a higher than average rate of tenancy breakdown, this group accounts for only a small proportion of lettings and consequently forms only a fraction of those whose tenancies are 'ended early'. Indeed, more than 60 per cent of early tenancy terminations relating to GHA lettings in 2003 involved tenants aged over 25.
- The rate of tenancy breakdown for furnished lettings is significantly lower than for mainstream lettings, suggesting that this is an effective means of combating the problem.
- Barely half of all lettings to new tenants (waiting list or ex-homeless) result in tenancies remaining intact for more than two years.
- The most common single reason for giving up a tenancy within its first year is anti-social behaviour – a factor mentioned by half the ex-tenants interviewed in the research. Other factors cited by significant numbers of tenants handing in keys or abandoning properties within 12 months included:
 - being allocated a home in an unwanted area
 - the inability to secure adequate furniture and equipment
 - dissatisfaction with property condition
 - debt problems
 - social isolation.
- Many of GHA's housing management and investment initiatives already planned or under way should help to improve tenancy sustainment. However, there is considerable scope for additional measures to tackle the problem. The research provides a number of recommendations for GHA, GCC and partner agencies to consider.

"I think it was quite a good idea if there was somebody there to help you. Cover like all your paperwork and go through everything with you, and like give you help through things, grants and that. I mean that would just kind of start you up, get you on your feet a bit."

BACKGROUND

GHA is tasked with implementing a major investment programme to upgrade the housing stock inherited from GCC in 2003.

It is also committed to ambitious targets for improving housing management both in terms of service quality and efficiency. The historically high rate of 'tenancy failure' represents a major impediment to the achievement of these goals.

Tenancy breakdown is wasteful of resources because each additional property falling vacant incurs significant revenue costs. These arise in relation to the repair, cleaning and re-servicing required to bring each newly arising vacancy up to a lettable standard. Such costs also follow from the rent loss resulting from the void period and from the administrative costs of re-letting each dwelling. Taking account of GHA's current performance on reletting void properties, each additional vacancy costs the association some £545 in lost rent, in addition to the typical £783 spent on repairs and security. Hence, every tenancy termination avoided saves the association £1,328, as well as the staff costs associated with reletting.

GHA and GCC therefore commissioned this research to provide an evidence base on the reasons for 'early tenancy termination' (defined as involving tenancies ending within a year of being let) and on the household and property types most associated with early tenancy termination. As such, the research aims to inform policy and service development measures aimed at reducing the tenancy 'churn', providing greater tenancy sustainability and greater community stability.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The principal objectives of the research, as set out in the project brief, were to:

- Examine existing policies, procedures and practices in both GHA and the Glasgow Homelessness Service
- Analyse the data sources available from GHA and GCC to establish the extent to which certain types of household, certain types of property and certain sources of let are more prone to early termination and repeat homelessness.
- Trace and interview a sample of people who have terminated their tenancies within a year of let to establish the factors involved and assess whether actions by GHA and/or the council might have helped to sustain the tenancy.
- Provide recommendations to GHA and GCC on policy and service development measures which may assist in preventing homelessness.

In addressing these objectives a variety of research methods were used. These included a statistical analysis of GHA lettings in 2003, a series of focus groups and interviews with staff of GHA, GCC and voluntary agencies, and a set of 50 interviews with former tenants of GHA who gave up tenancies within 12-18 months.

GOOD PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The good practice literature on dealing with a lack of tenancy sustainment focuses on the following identified problems:

- **SUPPORT PROVISION**

Much of the literature concentrates on how support can be provided to help tenants whose tenancy is at risk. This may be needed to help address a wide range of practical, emotional, substance abuse and health and mental health problems. It needs to be provided in an accessible and sensitive way; it needs to be available when problems start to emerge – either during the early months of a tenancy or more suddenly, in response to crisis situations affecting more long-established tenants

Financial constraints affecting social landlords inevitably limit the resources available to provide the ideal support in a people-centred, flexible, accessible way. In addition, tenants may not always be sometimes reluctant to engage with the support and advice services made available. Some tenants may require information to be provided in their own language, have limited literacy, or lead chaotic lifestyles.

- **FINANCIAL SYSTEMS, ADVICE AND INFORMATION**

There is a particular need identified to help ensure that tenants are helped to claim benefits as appropriate, that they fully understand, for instance, their arrears position and the consequences of it, and that systems work well to ensure that problems of a lack of co-ordination between agencies are minimised. Social landlords are recommended to act promptly in making contact with a tenant when early signs of a tenancy in trouble are seen.

Equally, although the social rented stock is in the process of being improved to a decent standard, landlords at present have to manage with the dwellings and the neighbourhoods in their current state – and some of those where vacancies are most readily available do not provide particularly desirable places to live, while safe, good quality social rented homes are in shorter supply.

- **PROVIDING A 'LIVEABLE' ENVIRONMENT**

Decision-making on lettings should maximise customer choice as well as being sensitive to potential tenancy sustainment problems – to avoid allocations that increase the risk of early tenancy termination. This includes avoiding placing 'at risk' applicants in neighbourhoods where they may be in close proximity to drug dealing, or where they are at particular threat from violence or harassment. Practical and other support may be needed to help the tenant to create a comfortable home and for instance to help young tenants exercise 'door control' as appropriate.

However, poor tenancy sustainment also imposes costs on the landlord and it is likely that even within existing resources there is scope for many landlords to deliver a service that is better able to enable tenants to sustain their tenancies. These are the issues that are explored in this research.

“My friends helped a lot and family helped. I had the essentials. I was staying at Mum’s before so I was fortunate that I could save some money for a fridge, a cooker etc. I bought stuff second-hand.”



WORK ALREADY IN PROGRESS

It is important to acknowledge that the study has been undertaken against a backdrop of a range of relevant initiatives already under way or at an advanced state of planning at GHA. A number of these are summarised below.

INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

Some tenancy non-sustainment is seen as being linked with the frequently poor physical condition of GHA properties. The post-transfer investment programme holds out the prospect of gains here – particularly in relation to improvements such as the installation of new kitchens.

LETTING STANDARD

GHA is planning to introduce a new letting standard in 2006/07. In addition to ensuring that the property is clean and in good repair, there will also be a minimum standard of decoration in key rooms.

UPGRADING ICT SYSTEMS

The upgrading of the outdated ICT system, which GHA inherited from GCC, to iWorld will provide the opportunity to review, modernise and streamline business processes. The first stage, focused on rent collection and arrears management, involves an extensive re-write of procedures and the implementation of task-based online training. The upgrade will also encompass void management procedures, case management and estate management. Handheld mobile technology is also being piloted to enable housing officers to keep in touch while on the move.

“Maybe a visit to see how things are going would be good. Just something a bit more ‘substantial’ .”

HOUSING SERVICES REVIEW

GHA's Housing Services Review is the culmination of an 18-month evaluation of the association's housing management practices. Initially focussed on the concierge service in multi-storey flats (MFS), it has been expanded to provide a platform for a new improved housing management service that will enable:

- Flexibility for local housing organisations (LHOs) to manage their staffing budgets to meet local circumstances and requirements
- A better managed and more effective concierge service, with improved service conditions for staff, and providing extended cleaning and 24-hour security services for tenants MSFs
- Improved environmental monitoring and neighbourhood management
- A renewed focus on core business areas of arrears and void management
- The introduction of new proactive work practices, to improve tenancy management and tenancy sustainment.

ADDRESSING RENT ARREARS

Given that some tenancy non-sustainment results from the accumulation of rent arrears and incomplete benefit take-up, it is relevant that some of the LHOs in the GHA network are promoting the delivery of welfare benefits advice. GHA employs nine welfare benefits advisors to help tenants maximise their incomes. A key part of their role is to boost Housing Benefit take-up through supporting tenants with new applications, requests for backdated payments, discretionary housing payment awards and assisting LHO staff to tackle both current and former tenant overpayments. One LHO represented in focus group discussions had recently begun to host a CAB outreach worker, with the service being publicised through the office's newsletter to tenants. This was seen as having been highly successful. A more comprehensive overhaul of GHA policy and practice on rent arrears management is planned for later in 2006.

“For the first three months it was okay, but then I started getting problems off the local youths which resulted in windows getting smashed and things like that, things getting poked through my letterbox and things, so it wasn't really too good.”

CHOICE-BASED LETTINGS

The introduction of choice-based lettings, planned for 2006/07, should also have an impact on tenancy sustainment – ensuring that more tenants have an active say in the property they are offered. Evidence from elsewhere suggests that there could be a 25 per cent improvement in tenancy sustainment rates.

REVIEW OF TENANCY SIGN-UP PROCEDURES AND SETTLING-IN VISITS

The ongoing review of sign-up procedures is emphasising the crucial role that can be played by contact established at this point in the tenancy. This interview should lay the groundwork for the establishment of trust between the housing officer and the tenant. The procedures are being re-written to stress the supportive role.

Similarly, procedures for the routine ‘settling in visit’ are being re-drafted to change its emphasis. Instead of focusing mainly on checking any repairs and outstanding rent, this should be a much more supportive process. The housing officer needs to make use of the opportunity to check for any signs of previously unidentified vulnerability or hints that the tenancy might be at risk (e.g. the absence of furniture). It should be an opportunity to discuss and offer help with any such problems.

OVERHAUL OF TENANT HANDBOOK

The ongoing development of a new tenant handbook is also relevant to tenancy sustainment in terms of providing a vehicle for information on sources of support for tenants at risk of giving up their tenancy.

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY CARE STRATEGY

GHA has also been developing a Housing and Community Care strategy jointly with GCC/Greater Glasgow Health Board (GGHB) and other agencies. This focuses on the GHA role, both in the provision of accommodation, and in the housing management role of identifying support needs and working with other agencies. Groups identified include homeless people, vulnerable young people, and people with addictions, mental health and learning disabilities.

REVIEW OF SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE

Following a review, GHA's sheltered housing service is currently being improved. GHA has appointed a specialist management team and is implementing new job descriptions for sheltered housing wardens and an extensive training programme to improve the provision of housing support to elderly people. Although the service is currently focused on the elderly, there is potential in the new arrangements for the sheltered housing support workers to provide support to vulnerable people living nearby.

NEIGHBOUR RELATIONS TEAM

The Neighbour Relations team also has a role in providing support to people referred to them due to anti-social behaviour complaints. Typically, the team will be working with around 100 people at any one time – liaising with other agencies and services to address the underlying problems which may be putting the tenancy at risk (often alcohol and drug use related).



TENANCY SUSTAINMENT IN GLASGOW: STAKEHOLDER VIEWS

FACTORS IN TENANCY BREAKDOWN

There is a degree of consensus about the factors which place tenants at risk of tenancy non-sustainment. Those with a history of drug or alcohol abuse are seen as particularly under threat. For many, however, support is most importantly needed to combat social isolation and to assist in resolving practical problems, such as an initial lack of furniture or the submission of welfare benefit applications.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

It is, however, clear that there are important shortcomings in the way that the various stakeholder organisations work together. One area to improve would be communication between LHO staff and voluntary sector support provider agencies. Lack of communication may stem from the fact that the agencies are commissioned by GCC, as the strategic body responsible for Supporting People funding, and have no direct relationship with GHA staff.

The call for 'better co-ordination' of support provision could imply a need for the GCC Supporting People team to maintain a database of clients being assisted which would, in turn, require agencies themselves to notify the team of any clients taken on or 'cases closed'. LHOs might also benefit from some form of directory and/or mapping exercise to list out all the agencies providing support of different kinds and across which areas.

HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

As far as the rehousing of formerly homeless households is concerned there is evidence of some lack of trust between GCC caseworkers and housing association staff (not solely limited to GHA). The existence of agreed protocols and procedures on information sharing does not seem to be effective in regulating these relationships. From an outsider perspective it would seem that homelessness caseworkers perhaps tend to hold a fairly restricted view of the factors which might be relevant to a housing association's rehousing decisions.

On the other hand, GCC accounts of the process suggest that homeless households benefit from being subject to a fairly rigorous assessment of their support needs, and a sense of responsibility on the part of GCC caseworkers for assembling a suitable care package where appropriate. It should, at the same time, be acknowledged that some GHA staff question whether the thoroughness of such assessments is entirely consistent and argue that cases are, in some instances, signed off too quickly.

WAITING LIST APPLICANTS

Importantly, the research found that the incidence of tenancy non-sustainment is no higher among ex-homeless households than among those accessing GHA tenancies through the association's waiting list (*Figure 2, page 13*). Also, because waiting list lettings hugely outnumber those to homeless households (by two to one in 2003) far more 'early terminations' involve people who accessed their tenancy through the waiting list rather than through the homeless route. Even if a lack of communication about a new tenant's former circumstances and support needs compromises tenancy sustainment among formerly homeless households, it is irrelevant to the problems of most of those surrendering GHA tenancies in their first year. It is clearly essential that there is a more systematic assessment of GHA waiting list applicants' support needs at the point of rehousing (or before).

ALLOCATION PROCESSES

The widely voiced LHO complaint that a lack of information about GCC nominee support needs compromises the scope for 'sensitive lettings' must be seen in the context of the planned introduction of choice-based lettings. As typically implemented, CBL reduces the scope for such practices – though GHA plans to keep the option of 'direct lets' (e.g. outwith CBL) for some homeless, management transfers/clearance and community care lets. The aim of this is to ensure access to specific and appropriate vacancies without the need to compete. This may provide the 'sensitive' let answer – though it will need to be carefully policed.

Outwith GHA there is a view that the association could make more use of management transfers where there are threats of violence or harassment, to avoid the need for tenants to declare themselves homeless. GHA accepts that the number of management transfers has fallen – and that some LHOs make greater use of the provision than others. At the same time, there are concerns that management transfers do not always secure a rapid move and that this sometimes results from the refusal of offers where tenants erroneously expect the process to result in a move to a better house or area.



GHA TENANCY SUSTAINMENT: A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

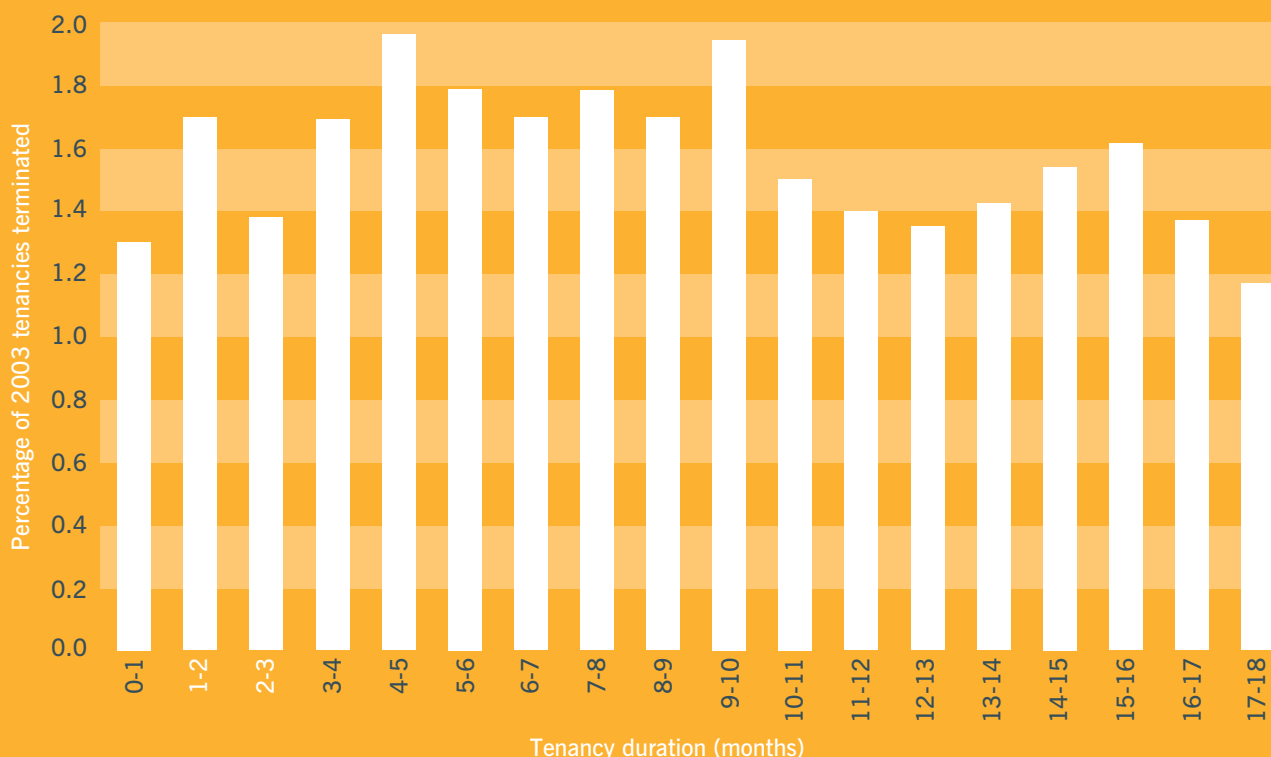
A fifth of GHA 'permanent lettings' are terminated within a year. This is fairly, though not exceptionally, high by comparison with other social landlords. In the course of a separate study the research team has recently collected comparable data from local authorities in England.

Among 60 councils submitting returns, ten reported 'early terminations' in respect of 2003/04 tenancies at levels equal to or exceeding the 20 per cent found for GHA. Most of those recording 'early termination' rates in excess of this level were larger metropolitan councils in the north of England and subject – in varying degrees – to low demand for social housing.

The vast majority of GHA tenancies subject to 'early terminations' involve moves out of GHA stock rather than transfers or deaths. Only 11 per cent of early terminations of 2003 tenancies were due to the outgoing tenant getting a transfer or being decanted, whilst another four per cent arose due to deaths. Among those involving people departing the sector only a very small proportion (*two per cent of all early*

terminations) resulted from eviction. Just over a third (*34 per cent*) of former homeless households who terminated early either abandoned their home without notice or never occupied it in the first place. Tenancy terminations peak between three and six months into their term. However, the rate at which tenancies fail falls off only very gradually beyond this point (see *Figure 1*).

FIGURE 1
GHA LETTINGS, 2003: DURATION OF TENANCIES
(EXCLUDES TEMP AND OTHER NON-MAINSTREAM LETS)

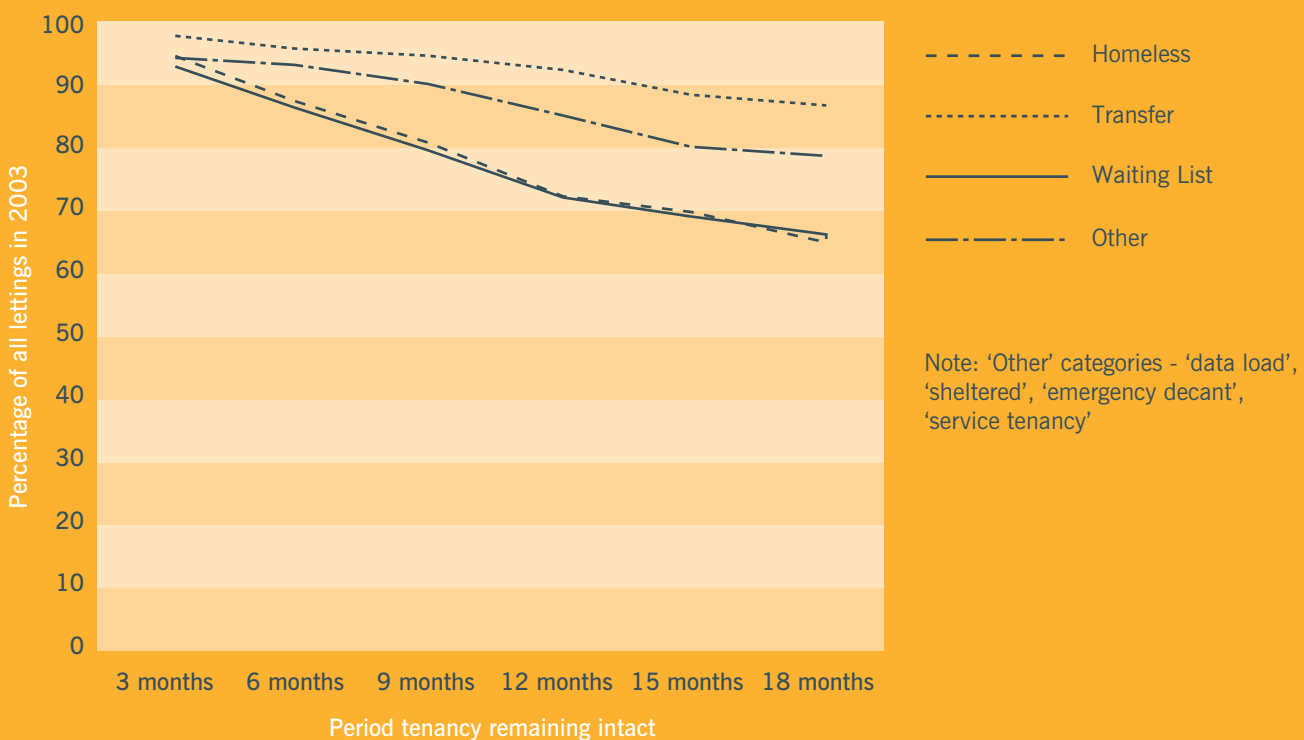


Rates of tenancy non-sustainment are relatively low among lettings to transfer applicants, with only eight per cent being terminated within their first 12 months. Non-sustainment rates are almost identical for lets to homeless households and waiting list applicants; in both instances around a

quarter of tenancies are terminated within a year (see *Figure 2*). Based on data for 'tenancy decay' in the first 18 months following lettings it can be predicted that barely 50 per cent of lets to homeless households and waiting list cases will remain intact for more than two years.

“She just asked if everything was okay, if it was fine, and I said uh-huh, everything was fine. She asked if I was settled in, and I just uh-huh, I was in and everything was fine. And then that was it. She had to do the phone call so she could sign the case off.”

FIGURE 2
GHA TENANCIES 2003:
TENANCY SUSTAINMENT RATES BY REHOUSING GROUP

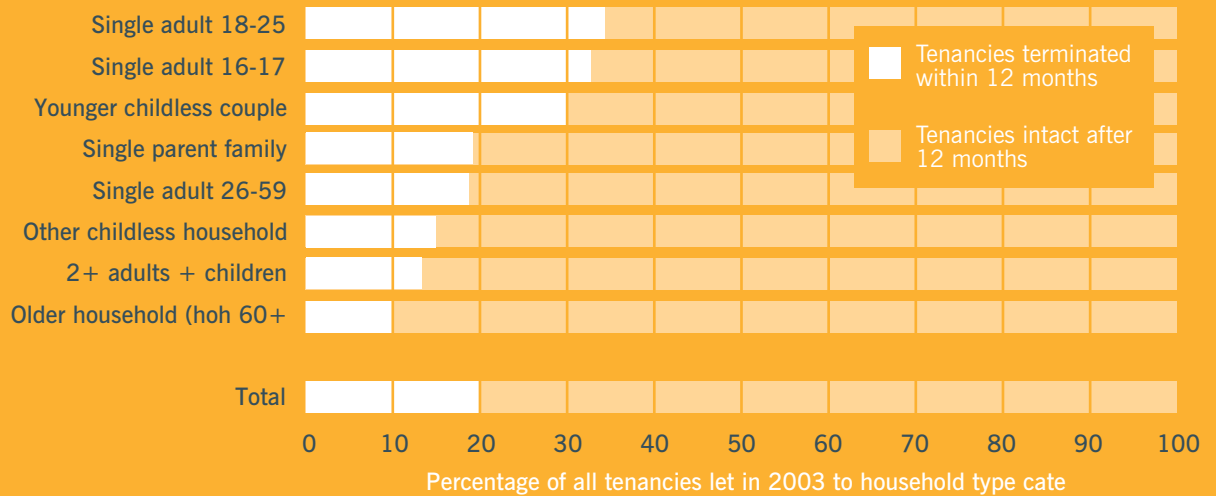


Because the ex-waiting list and ex-homeless groups have very similar 'tenancy decay' profiles, and because the former outnumber the latter by two to one, there are twice as many 'early termination' cases among former waiting list applicants as among former homeless households. It would therefore be a mistake to focus tenancy sustainability interventions mainly on homeless households.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the risk of tenancy non-sustainment is relatively high for lets involving:

- younger single people and childless couples
- properties classed as 'less popular'
- post-war and pre-1919 tenements.

FIGURE 3
GHA TENANCIES 2003:
PROPENSITY FOR EARLY TENANCY
TERMINATION BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE



However, contrary to popular belief, tenancy non-sustainment is not primarily a problem relating to young people. Whilst young adults have a relatively high propensity for tenancy breakdown, they form only a small proportion of those rehoused. As a result, they account for only a small fraction of all tenancies terminated early. More than 60 per cent of early tenancy terminations relating to GHA lettings in 2003 involved tenants aged over 25.

homeless lets in 'more popular dwellings' is actually slightly higher than the equivalent percentage for waiting list applicants.

Although relatively small in number, furnished lets appear to be an effective means of promoting tenancy sustainment. Particularly where offered to homeless households, these are associated with considerably lower rates of tenancy failure (14 per cent of such tenancies ending within a year as compared with 25 per cent of all homeless lets).

Conversely, it would appear that tenancy non-sustainment rates are particularly high for specific categories of homeless household – notably:

- 'Family/friend exclusions' – homeless households asked to leave by parents, friends or other relatives
- Homeless households fleeing violence from outwith the home.

“It was hard at first because it weren't that nice inside and there was dampness and that... that was actually how we ended up giving the house up eventually, because it was just affecting the wean's health.”

The areas where tenancies are least likely to be sustained are Easterhouse and Greater Pollok. The prospects for formerly homeless households in Easterhouse appear particularly challenging. Whilst it is difficult to explain such a finding, it does seem to suggest that special attention should be paid to supporting homeless households rehoused in Easterhouse, and to all new tenants housed in Greater Pollok.

This may be because significant numbers of such households return to their former home, having been reconciled (however temporarily) with families and/or former partners. Rather than suggesting that these groups ought to be targeted for special assistance to sustain GHA tenancies, it may be more appropriate to concentrate resources on preventing such forms of homelessness from occurring in the first place. This could be achieved through family mediation and 'sanctuary' projects.

Although it is widely believed that 'homeless households tend to be housed in the least popular areas' this is not supported by the statistical evidence. The proportion of



THE EXPERIENCES OF GHA EX-TENANTS

Ex-tenants' testimony highlights a number of areas where more support may be needed or where service provision appears inconsistent or inadequate. Causal factors implicated in early tenancy termination include:

- being allocated a home in an unwanted area
- the inability to secure adequate furniture and equipment
- dissatisfaction with property condition
- debt problems resulting from poverty and an inability to maximise income and/or manage money
- social isolation.

According to ex-tenants' own testimony, however, the most common single reason for giving up a tenancy within its first year is anti-social behaviour.

ALLOCATIONS AND OFFERS

A number of respondents expressed concerns about the allocations process, with some feeling that preferences are not taken on board by staff and that the system generally lacks transparency. Some tenants accept an offer 'in desperation' or (especially in the case of homeless applicants) feel coerced into doing so. Inevitably, these tenancies have a high risk of early termination.

"She's like make up your mind if you're going to take the house' and I was like, I'll just take it because there was nothing else to take, if you know what I mean, so. In a way I feel as if I was pressured into it a bit."

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

As most tenants have a limited income and no savings, they mainly rely on loans or grants or the charity of family and friends when setting up their home. Furnishing and decorating a flat can be difficult for many tenants and some quite vulnerable tenants take up a tenancy with no means of being able to make it into a 'home'.

Few people receive grants or loans to help them with furniture or decorating, although there is evidence that the involvement of advocates such as social workers or voluntary agency staff improves a tenant's prospects of success. Those securing such funding can, however, wait weeks or months for the money to materialise.

"I put in for a community care grant and... was told... I wasn't getting anything, and I appealed it, I took my social worker up there, and my social worker she says, 'this boy's got nothing, he's not anything to move in here with him', and they... reviewed it all, but, see because this lassie was speaking on (my) behalf... two days later I got a cheque through the door and they gave me £700..."

Although arrears do not commonly lead to eviction, many tenants are uncertain whether they have arrears, or have technical arrears due to gaps in Housing Benefit. Some people receive advice about Housing Benefit, others do not, and some quite vulnerable people have been evicted as a result of arrears (a factor also noted in recent Communities Scotland research on evictions by social landlords).

PROPERTY CONDITION

Some properties are in a very poor condition when they become available for letting. This may be due to the lack of modern bathroom or kitchen facilities or due to the vandalism or squatting, which sometimes takes place between tenancies. Others have decorative defects but these can pose a major financial challenge to tenants who have limited finances available to decorate. These factors can lead to tenancy breakdown early on if a tenant accepts a property mistakenly believing such issues will be resolved shortly thereafter.

Other properties have re-emerging or worsening problems such as dampness and/or condensation. This can lead to tenancy termination if it is felt that the repair needs are being ignored by the landlord or if the health of family members is considered at risk.

"It was hard at first because it weren't that nice inside and there was dampness and that ... that was actually how we ended up giving the house up eventually, because it was just affecting the wean's health."

GHA's plan to introduce a new letting standard in 2006/07 is intended to encompass a minimum standard of decoration in key rooms. It is hoped that the new regime will help to address the kind of property condition issues, which clearly contributed to the decisions of some ex-tenant interviewees to leave their homes. It is also important that, where prospective tenants are viewing (and, potentially, signing up for) homes not yet ready for letting, housing officer undertakings to make good identified defects are clearly and unambiguously communicated.

“You know, it would have been nice maybe to have somebody on your side, you know, that was maybe fighting my corner a wee bit more, but you're never really made aware of anybody that you can contact.”

TECHNICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES

Most tenants receive some guidance about operating systems in their home – the heating and power at least. However, some tenants have this explained only when they are viewing the property when they are unable to absorb the information, or never receive any basic information or instruction at all.

Tenants do not generally appear to have a ‘settling in’ visit from their housing officer, at which they could discuss any outstanding practical concerns. Neither does there seem to be reliable and consistent provision of advice or information about decorating or furniture. Such visits are potentially a very important opportunity to assess the risk that a tenancy might not be sustained. It is also important that the contact is recorded and described in the tenancy file.

“Maybe a visit to see how things are going would be good. Just something a bit more substantial.”

Tenants for whom a furnished tenancy might be appropriate are not always informed about the existence of the service. There are also gaps in knowledge about the eligibility, costs and availability of furnished lets. Both GHA and GCC need to ensure that new applicants (and their advocates) are made aware of the scheme. GHA also needs to ensure that the terms of the scheme are as attractive as possible.

“My friends helped a lot and family helped. I had the essentials. I was staying at Mum’s before so I was fortunate that I could save some money for a fridge, a cooker etc. I bought stuff second-hand.”

Some local authorities (and charitable organisations) run furniture recycling schemes designed to provide for ex-homeless households. Whilst such schemes are

believed to be already operating in Glasgow, it would seem that they do so only on a relatively small scale. There must be a strong case for assessing the financial costs and benefits of setting up a GHA-funded scheme or supporting and encouraging local furniture recycling schemes.

“I think it was quite a good idea if there was somebody there to help you. Cover like all your paperwork and go through everything with you, and like give you help through things like, grants and that. I mean that would just kind of start you up, get you on your feet a bit.”

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

For those with mental health issues or drug or alcohol dependency issues, access to addictions workers and other support workers is very important. These workers are valued and highly regarded. Consequently, many ex-tenants with support workers face the prospect of taking on a new tenancy optimistically. However, some ex-tenants take a long time (and a number of failed tenancies) to access the support they need and others still have only limited support in place.

“It was my fault I lost (the house), you know, I should have (come) off the drink... I was drinking quite a lot and I was inviting people in and all the young ones and all that, and it just ended not my house any more.”

In some cases, homelessness caseworker post-tenancy contact can be confined to signing cases off almost immediately after a tenancy is taken up.

“She just asked if everything was okay, if it was fine, and I said uh-huh, everything was fine. She asked if I was settled in, and I just uh-huh, I was in and everything was fine. And then that was it. She had to do the phone call so she could sign the case off.”

Tenants without an established, ongoing support issue and who do not have a support worker at the outset do not appear to have any mechanism to discuss support needs – whether practical, emotional or social. This is important for young first-time tenants in particular who may feel isolated, lack social networks and lack some ‘life-skills’ in accessing services.

“It was my fault I lost (the house), you know I should have (come) off the drink... I was drinking quite a lot and I was inviting people in and all the young ones and all that, and it just ended not my house any more.”

The ex-tenant interview evidence suggests that there is considerable scope for improvement in the way that LHO staff relate to new tenants. Whilst some interviewees recounted positive interactions with housing officers, others described unsympathetic and unhelpful staff attitudes. Interviewees with queries or complaints to report often found housing officers to be difficult to contact.

LHOs need to adopt a more pro-active, customer-focused approach to housing management. Whether this is accommodated within the existing largely generic framework or whether it involves the designation of specialist posts is a matter to be considered. However, the need to develop close working relationships with external support provider agencies could be seen as an argument in favour of the specialist approach. From a managerial perspective, this might also be the most reliable means of ensuring that support-related duties are not at risk of being ‘crowded out’ by other ‘more urgent’ housing officer tasks.

It is recommended that GHA considers the possible establishment of new customer officers (NCOs). NCOs attend tenancy signups to emphasise the tenant’s rent-paying responsibilities, to ensure that the tenant appreciates the range of payment options and to ensure the accuracy of tenant contact details. Crucially, responsibility for a tenancy is handed on by an NCO only when the account is ‘in order’ – i.e. payments are being made, Housing Benefit claims resolved, and when it is judged that a ‘payment habit’ has been established. This is seen as consistent with placing an overwhelming priority on preventing the accumulation of rent arrears which might, over time, result in loss of the tenancy either through eviction or abandonment.

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND NEIGHBOURHOOD ISSUES

Antisocial behaviour is a very important issue for GHA tenants, accounting in part for at least half of tenancy terminations among the ex-tenants interviewed. Some tenants experience problems at a very early stage, which leads to them failing to ever properly take up the tenancy. Others are victims of sustained and long-standing neighbour disputes or harassment.

“For the first three months it was okay, but then I started getting problems off the local youths which resulted in windows getting smashed and things like that, things getting poked through my letterbox and things, so it wasn’t really too good.”

Many are too frightened to approach the police or GHA or feel the response to any logged complaint is ineffectual. Tenants are generally not aware of policies and procedures or the work of the GHA Neighbour Relations team. They would welcome more clarification on what response to expect at different stages of their dispute.

“They wanted to prosecute, but I had said, no, I was too frightened, because I don’t know anybody in that area, I only know the neighbours up the close.”

In addition to antisocial behaviour, there is evidence that some early tenancy terminations result from general but less specific dissatisfaction with neighbourhood quality.

“They were ... just asking me to stay a bit longer but they weren’t even offering any kind of support for me to stay. It was just a case of ‘just stay another couple of weeks’ it was. I was going to bed at night and wasn’t feeling safe, it was horrible.”

More effective action to counter antisocial behaviour is a GHA priority and it is seen as beyond the scope of this report to make detailed recommendations on improving GHA’s management of antisocial behaviour. However, it is understood that GHA intends to carry out an evaluation of its antisocial behaviour policies and procedures in 2006/07.

AWARENESS AND INFORMATION

Ex-tenant interviewees were generally unaware of the various services offered by GHA, GCC or voluntary agencies. Although most were unconcerned by this, local partners may wish to review their information provision. Tenants may find more practical information about local services of use such as furniture initiatives, credit unions, community initiatives and information resources. Unless it can be more appropriately provided through another medium, it is essential that such information is included in the new version of the GHA tenant handbook.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR GHA

- Push forward the introduction of choice-based lettings (CBL) configured to incorporate homeless households and monitor its impact, not only on tenancy sustainment (separately for each rehousing category), but also on the aggregate rehousing outcomes of potentially disadvantaged groups.
- In establishing CBL arrange a programme of events for support provider and advocacy agencies, caring professionals and others to publicise the rules and processes of the system.
- Monitor the continuing use of 'direct lets' in meeting the specific needs of individual tenants and applicants where there are compelling reasons for rehousing a household outwith CBL.
- Improve recording of reasons that tenancies end by adopting a simplified classification using mutually exclusive categories. The coding framework used in the SCORE log provides a potentially suitable model.
- Monitor the incidence of tenancy terminations classified according to SCORE categories, separately for 'early terminations' and for all terminations.
- Periodically monitor the incidence of early tenancy termination, identifying separately tenancy non-sustainment rates for different rehousing groups (e.g. homeless households, waiting list applicants), different household types (e.g. young single people versus single parent families) and for former asylum seekers and other groups specifically thought to be at risk in this respect.
- Look at expanding the furnished Lets scheme, making its terms more attractive (e.g. by offering different packages incurring different charges) and ensuring that all prospective new tenants are offered either a furniture package option or a furnished tenancy.
- Investigate the possibility of supporting and encouraging local furniture recycling schemes.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of the new letting standard, to ensure that it improves the quality of lets (and reduces tenancy offer refusals).
- Establish systematic procedures for establishing the support needs of prospective tenants being rehoused through the GHA waiting list.
- Ensure that the LHO staffing resources freed up through the introduction of CBL and the Housing Services Review are redirected into providing support for prospective tenants needing help in navigating the system, as well as recently-housed tenants potentially at risk of failing to sustain their tenancies.
- Consider the possibility of establishing designated tenancy support staff or new customer advisors in LHOs.
- Incorporate specific requirements within the new 'settling in visit' procedure, to record the contacts made in this way and the need for possible future actions identified. Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the new procedure.
- Encourage new tenants to report antisocial behaviour problems and harassment. Ensure that LHO staff are trained to provide advice and effective support.
- Provide training and guidance on accompanied viewings.
- Monitor rent accounts of new tenants particularly carefully and use early non-payment as a trigger for additional tenancy support and advice, including referrals to GHA Welfare Benefits Officers and external agencies.
- Ensure that concierge staff receive appropriate training to assist in tenancy sustainment.
- Support and encourage the use of external agencies as providers of debt counselling and budgetary advice services.

FOR GHA AND GCC

- Establish a working party involving homelessness caseworkers and LHO staff to agree a working definition of nominee details 'relevant' to facilitating appropriate rehousing and tenancy sustainment.
- To promote mutual understanding, arrange for joint training, exchanges and secondments involving homelessness casework staff and LHO housing officers.
- Provide joint training on assessment for support needs and ensure that housing staff are aware of the range of support provision available (particularly in relation to addictions and mental ill health).
- Work to establish better information sharing on support provision and to establish three-way protocols with GCC Supporting People Team, GHA and support providers.
- Develop a protocol on management transfers, backed by joint training and monitoring, to ensure that these are used appropriately.
- Develop improved information sharing and support for refugees making the transition from asylum seeker status.
- Improve joint working on domestic abuse – jointly develop leaflets on support available etc.
- Improve joint working in relation to tenants in arrears and at risk of eviction, via review of GHA rent arrears policy. It may be appropriate to replace the existing obligation on GHA to notify GCC in respect of all eviction actions initiated by a more specific requirement for notification only in respect of cases going forward to court.
- Roll out the findings from this research and encourage wide joint discussion about how to reduce tenancy breakdown and prevent homelessness (including repeat homelessness).

FOR GCC

- Place greater emphasis on the need for homelessness caseworkers to 'drill down' to get full information on the reasons why applicants leave former addresses, including enquiries to previous landlord.
- Ensure an equitable spread of homelessness referrals to LHOs and other RSLs to prevent concentrations in particular areas and to ensure that the burden of rehousing homeless households is fairly shared between social landlords.
- Review homelessness casework procedures as to the appropriate 'sign off' point for newly rehoused (formerly homeless) tenants – to ensure that the settling in process is successfully completed.
- Routinely notify GHA/LHOs in respect of formerly homeless nominees where (voluntary agency) support is in place – and when it is withdrawn.
- Map and list housing support provision.
- Establish family mediation and 'sanctuary' provision as means of preventing homelessness of specific types.
- Consider development of more supported accommodation for young people (GenR8 model). Ensure that care leavers are not placed in independent tenancies too soon – and that they continue to receive appropriate support.
- Commission research on reasons for very high level of repeat homelessness – to see whether changes in practices (assessment and support) would lead to reduction.

Contact us on:

08459 001 001

www.gha.org.uk

Registered office:

The Glasgow Housing Association Limited,
Granite House, 177 Trongate, Glasgow G1 5HF



Better homes, better lives

The Glasgow Housing Association Limited is recognised by HM Revenue and Customs as a Scottish Charity, Scottish Index No. SC034054 and is registered with Communities Scotland under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 as a Registered Social Landlord. Registered No. 317