



BURY HOUSING SERVICES

Tenancy Support Strategy

2023 – 2026

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Great Communities Excellent Services Inspiring People

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Foreword

Sustaining tenancies is central to everything we do.

Welcome to our first ever Tenancy Support Strategy.

This strategy is another milestone in our quest for customer excellence. It builds on our strong track record and strengthens our approach to tenancy sustainment. It's been shaped by our customers, focuses on our priorities for the future and sets out how we will minimise tenancy breakdown and support our customers to thrive in a secure and stable home.

Providing great customer services has always been at the heart of everything we do. For us, this means focusing on the services that matter most to our customers, delivering them right first time and to a consistently high standard.

As the Council's managing agent, we are committed to ensuring our tenants receive the support and help they need to maintain their tenancies.

Tenancy support is a key priority for our customers and we know it makes good business sense to invest in services that help people to live independently and which prevent tenancy breakdown and homelessness. Not only does this lead to improved health and well-being outcomes for our customers and support community cohesion, but it also reduces ours and partner costs in the long term. When tenancies fail there are implications for us, our customers, our partners and wider society.

We have strengthened our approach to tenancy sustainment in the last year, with additional resources directed to supporting customers who need our help or where there is a risk of tenancy breakdown.

For the purpose of this strategy, the term customer refers to all residents living in a Bury Housing Services property. This includes tenants and family members living in their home.

Background

This strategy has been written at a time of economic uncertainty, widening inequalities and growing polarisation. The housing landscape is also changing, with the role of the Regulator for Social Housing strengthened to ensure tenants' voices are heard and landlords are held to account.

Homelessness is on the increase, housing supply remains challenging and the ongoing rollout of welfare reforms continue to have an adverse impact on our customers. Demographic shifts and the changing profile of our customers also means that we need to think differently and adapt our approach to ensure resources are directed towards those who need our support. This includes the rising number of customers who have complex needs or are facing increasing hardship.

The powerful push nationally and across the housing sector to ensure tenants have a genuine say in how their homes and services are managed has also shaped our approach. Central to this is a call for greater transparency and accountability across the sector following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower. Never before have we seen such a focus on customers and ensuring they have an effective voice and for landlords to be held to account.

Our recently launched Tenant Engagement Strategy will mark a shift in our approach and will ensure our customers have a genuine say in decisions that affect their home and the services we provide. Securing faster, real time feedback in ways that suit them will be the cornerstone of our new approach.

This includes adapting to the rapidly changing ways in which they engage with us and access services digitally. Our tenant Board Members will continue to play a key role in shaping thinking and ensuring customers' voices are clearly heard, understood and acted upon; as will the scrutiny work that is undertaken by our tenant led, Customer Review Group. Similarly, our work with Tenants and Residents Associations, community groups and other forums will provide valuable opportunities to secure feedback which can be used to improve services. The introduction of a new tenant satisfaction measurement framework will also strengthen our approach and ensure compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's new requirements.

The pandemic has been a particular game changer for us and has led to increased poverty, isolation and inequality in our communities. These problems have been compounded by the cost-of-living crisis, with more customers struggling to heat their homes, pay their rent or buy essentials. Insecurity, uncertainty and having to make impossible decisions about money are now everyday occurrences for many of our customers. Through customer and neighbourhood profiling, we have identified:

- Rising debt and money problems in our neighbourhoods. Rent arrears are particularly acute on the Chesham Fold, Victoria, Stand Lane / Chapelfield, Polefield and Woodhill estates.
- Above average levels of anti-social behaviour and neighbour nuisance in Radcliffe North and Moorside, with noise nuisance being the single most reported issue across the borough. On average, 120 anti-social behaviour complaints are open at any point in time, with cases ranging from low level nuisance through to serious tenancy breaches, safeguarding concerns and criminal activity.

- Rising numbers of tenants identified with mental health and / or drug dependencies, with higher levels of tenants reporting issues in Radcliffe (North and West Wards), Moorside and East Ward.
- Rising levels of domestic violence and abuse, with 317 reports received last year; up 6% on the previous year.
- An increase in tenants identified with hoarding issues across the borough.

Our experience tells us that the effects are likely to be long term and will make it even more challenging for customers to sustain their tenancies. We also know that we must respond differently to these challenges, redefine our relationship with our customers and offer more support whenever they need it on their housing journey. Listening, empathy and focusing on what matters to them are core features of our new approach.

More than ever before, we need to build community capacity and resilience, with a focus on early intervention and the adoption of trauma informed working practices if we are to manage and reduce demand for services and generate prosperity. Our strong place shaping role, together with our local presence across Bury's neighbourhoods and relationship with our customers means we are well positioned to do this.

The need to collaborate and engage with our partners and communities is even more critical in the current climate. To do otherwise, will stretch our resources even further and have a detrimental impact on our customers, the Council's rent income streams and other public services.

Bury's Let's Do it Strategy provides a valuable framework to help us do this and will ensure interventions are timely, targeted and wrap around customers who are struggling to maintain their tenancy. Going forward this will help us to work more effectively, reduce duplication and respond more effectively to issues at a neighbourhood level. Signing up to the Homes for Cathy Commitments will also ensure we continue to support the most vulnerable members of the community, along with the Council's and Greater Manchester's Homeless Prevention Strategies. Our strategy and new neighbourhood delivery model have been developed against this backdrop and take account of the feedback, lived experience and changing aspirations of our customers. It also ensures we are compliant with regulatory requirements and proposals set out in the Government's Social Housing White Paper, 'The Charter for Social Housing.' Prevention and early intervention will remain cornerstones of our approach, as we know that by intervening early, our customers are more likely to engage and work with us; preventing the need for more costly interventions.

Our strategy will be refreshed every three years, or earlier if new regulations or best practice emerge. We will continue to involve our customers and seek their views on any changes that we plan to make.

If we get it right, our customers will thrive and become more independent. In turn, this will ensure we sustain more tenancies, build trust, reduce demand for services and the risk of homelessness.

Our vision

To support our customers to sustain their tenancies and avoid unnecessary tenancy breakdown and homelessness.

Our priorities

1. We will ensure every tenant has the best possible start when they take up a tenancy with us.
2. We will ensure the right support is in place for customers who need it.
3. We will build effective relationships with our customers, based on trust.
4. We take an informed approach, risk-based approach to managing tenancies.

Our guiding principles

Customers at the heart

Listening, valuing and acting on what our customers say. In return, we expect them look after their home and respect their neighbours and be active members of their community.

Tenancy support

Offering tenancy support when it's needed to prevent issues from escalating.

Trust, respect and honesty

Treating customers with respect, being open, honest and transparent in our decision making.

Inclusive

Leave no one behind. Ensuring every customer has a voice, feels listened to and feels able to raise concerns about the things that matter to them.

Communication

Ensuring information is clear, accessible and shared in a timely fashion.

Asset-based

Recognising and valuing our customers' strengths, skills and experience. Connecting people to other community assets, supporting growth and building alliances.

Collaborating

Sharing information, ideas and decision making.

Intelligence led

Using data intelligently to make evidence based decisions

Digitally minded

Driving improvements and cost savings through automation, self service and emerging technology. Targeting resources based on risk and identified need.

What is tenancy failure?

Tenancies can fail for a number of reasons.

In some cases, it may signify a positive move, with a tenant moving to a new area for work reasons or to purchase a new home. There are also tenancies which come to an end where we accept it is not possible, or even desirable to sustain. It may also not be appropriate to sustain a tenancy where the customer is seeking to leave a situation of domestic violence or must move due to an illness.

We take a broad view to tenancy failure and do not just limit our definition to tenancies that breakdown in the first 12 months, but all tenancy failures. This is because we know that tenancy instability can occur at any time. With this in mind, we believe a tenancy has failed if:

- The tenant abandons the property;
- The tenant is evicted from the property; or
- The tenancy ends in an unplanned or unmanaged way.

Tenancies that end in an unplanned or unmanaged way include those where the tenant cannot afford to pay the rent or other bills, they do not feel safe in their home, suffer anti-social behaviour or feel they have not received the support they need.

Our approach

We take a tiered, risk -based approach to interventions, based on a range of known factors, with additional support provided to those who need it. Prevention and early help remain cornerstones of our approach. For us, it's about developing effective relationships with our customers, identifying issues early and building trust. Listening, empathy and focusing on what matters to them are core features of our approach. We also focus on our customers' assets and take a strength-based approach which supports them to take control of their lives, build resilience and make the most of the skills, strengths and talents they already have or can access in their community. It is also about working with our customers to identify how their choices or behaviour can influence their ability to maintain their tenancy. Only by doing this will our customers feel comfortable engaging and working with us.

The work undertaken by Tenants and Residents' Associations, community groups and Bury's Voluntary, Community and Faith Alliance is key to our success and for helping our customers secure positive outcomes. Going forward, we want to ensure psychological and trauma informed practices are embedded into our policies, procedures and working practices to initiate and strengthen relationships.

We will continue to work closely with our customers and Greater Manchester Police to ensure reports of criminal activity and public protection are reported to enable effective resolution. Where appropriate, we will follow up successful prosecutions, with enforcement action.

We offer three levels of tenancy support to our customers.

Level 1 Advice and information

Most of our customers need little or no support from us to successfully manage their tenancy. When they do need help, this is usually to report a repair, request a service or to obtain advice. We call this our universal offer.

Level 2 Tenancy support

Some of our customers need targeted housing support to maintain their tenancy. This can be provided at any point during the tenancy and is designed to help them to continue living independently and reduce the risk of tenancy breakdown and homelessness.

Level 3 Partnership support.

There are times when the support we put in place does not resolve the issue and tenants continue to exhibit behaviours that are of concern or place their tenancy at risk. In such situations, we may need to step up the level of support provided and call on the support of other public sector partner agencies, the voluntary sector and community groups working in our neighbourhoods.



Our tenancy support offer

Advice and information (level 1)

We provide a range of services designed to help tenants maintain their tenancies. These services are available to all our customers regardless of the status of their tenancy. This includes offering:

- Debt and money advice services in partnership with Citizens' Advice, Bury,
- Help, advice and information to tenants who suffer anti-social behaviour.
- Access to affordable credit and saving facilities, through Manchester Credit Union.
- Help with claiming welfare benefits, accessing grants and hardship funds.
- Help with accessing employment and training support.
- Energy efficiency advice and information.
- Furnished tenancy packages.
- Advice and support with aids and adaptations.
- Help to develop digital skills and access equipment.
- Support and funding for tenants and community groups which deliver critical services in our neighbourhoods, including food banks, youth clubs and support for older customers.

Tenancy Support (level 2)

Our Tenancy Sustainment Team provides specific, tailored support for customers who need additional support to maintain their tenancy or where there is a risk of tenancy breakdown or homelessness.

The team offer practical support, guidance and advice on tenancy sustainment matters. They also help customers navigate the welfare benefit system, ensure compliance with the terms of the tenancy agreement and build links in the community. Housing support plans are drawn up with customers to help them continue living independently and make lifestyle changes needed to achieve positive outcomes, with referrals made to partner agencies to ensure services are wrapped around the customer.

A dedicated key worker will work alongside new and existing tenants whose tenancies are deemed at risk. This includes:

- Households that have previously been homeless or a previously failed tenancy.
- Victims and perpetrators of anti-social behaviour.
- Tenants with mental health issues.
- Tenants with alcohol and/or drug use issues.
- Victims of domestic abuse or harassment.

- Ex-offenders.
- Households with a history of financial exclusion or multiple debts.
- Care leavers.
- Tenants with hoarding tendencies.
- Households with complex support needs.

Our aim to provide tailored support to tenants who need help managing their home.

This can be provided at any point during the lifetime of the tenancy and includes maintaining regular and sustained contact with them. We offer tenants support with:

- Settling into their new home and integrating into their community.
- Budgeting, finances and applying for benefits.
- Setting up utilities and sorting out other household issues.
- Booking and attending appointments.
- Completing forms and dealing with correspondence.
- Building links in their community and preventing social isolation.
- Improving health and wellbeing.
- Assessing specialist services they may need.

We work in partnership with a wide range of organisations who provide expert advice and support on issues such as drug and alcohol misuse, health and well-being, debts, employment and lifelong learning.

Multi-agency arrangements are in place for cases where there is a risk of eviction in accordance with our Avoiding Unnecessary Evictions Pledge.

Partnership working (level 3)

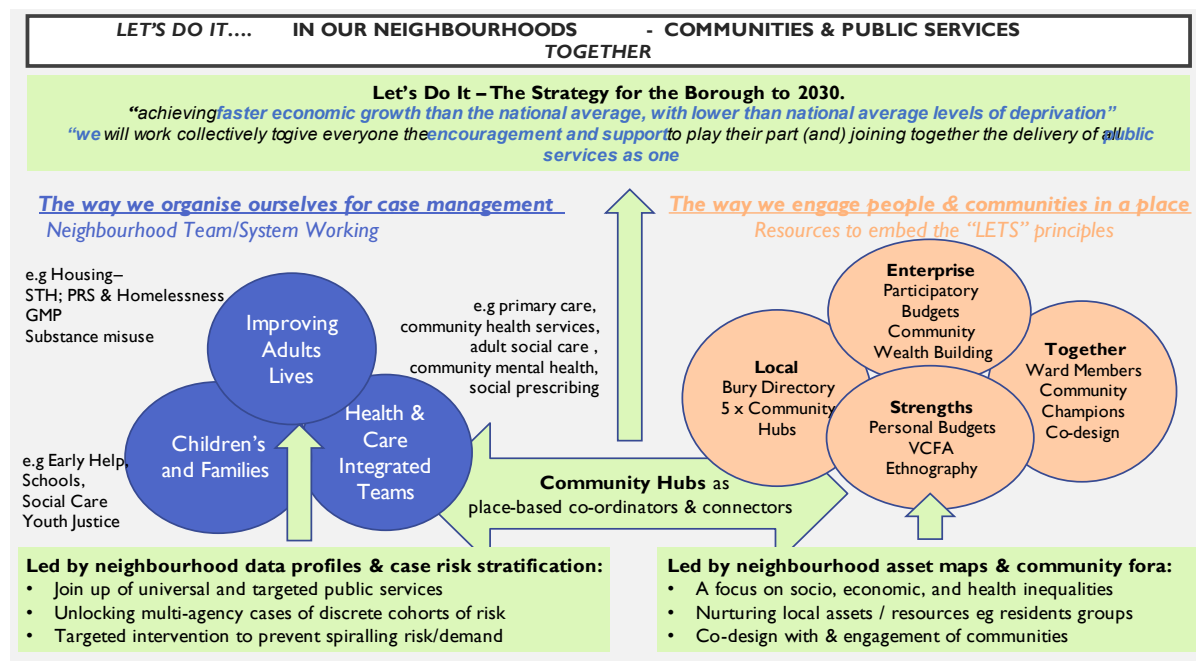
There are times when the support we put in place does not resolve the issue and tenants continue to exhibit behaviours that are of concern or place their tenancy at risk. In such situations, we may need to call on the support of other public sector partner agencies, the voluntary sector and community groups working in our neighbourhoods. We will also make referrals through to specialist or statutory services, where we believe there are significant risks of harm or safeguarding concerns. As far as possible, we will seek the consent of the tenant before making a referral.

Our work is closely aligned with Bury's Let's Do It Strategy and supports the delivery of its neighbourhood model, including the multi-agency practitioner networks and Public Sector Leadership Teams that have been established. Through the Public Sector Leadership Teams, we will:

- Gain a greater understanding of place and be able to use data to make evidence-based decisions.
- Identify and co-ordinate integrated responses to place based issues.
- Ensure oversight of case activity to ensure cases are being dealt with by the most appropriate partner agency and that this is joined up to ensure effectiveness
- Ensure connectivity between casework and community activity through the Community Hubs.

Going forward this will help us to work more effectively, reduce duplication and respond earlier to issues at a neighbourhood level, whilst reducing the need for more costly interventions. It will also ensure partnership interventions are targeted and services wrap around customers who are struggling to maintain their tenancy.

Our engagement in the Improving Adult Lives workstream will be key to delivering this strategy and the development of an integrated approach across the partnership which maximises preventative and sustainment measures, creates service efficiencies and leads to quality improvements.



This new delivery model will bring together partner agencies to ensure support is targeted and co-ordinated more effectively for adult only households identified with complex needs. This includes households who are:

- At risk of homeless
- Affected by domestic violence and abuse

- Victims or perpetrators of anti-social behaviour
- Experiencing issues related to substance misuse.

The introduction of multi-agency leadership and key worker principles will ensure issues are identified earlier and a more holistic view is taken by partners to address the underlying causes rather than the symptoms. It will also ensure services and support wrap around the customer and are provided in a sequential manner with the view to targeting community interventions that support step down activities and reduce multiple re-representation across the system.

Priority 1

We will ensure every tenant has the best possible start when they take up a tenancy with us.

We know that setting up a new home can be stressful, particularly for those who are struggling financially or who have not rented a property before. We also know it can be particularly difficult for new tenants who have experienced homelessness or need to move because of difficult personal circumstances.

Getting our relationship right with new tenants at the beginning of their housing journey is critical. This is because it sets the tone of our future relationship with them and provides a valuable opportunity for us to set out our expectations and ensure they understand the costs and responsibilities of taking on a tenancy before they commit to it. It also enables us to identify any tenancy support needs they may have, put a support plan in place and make referrals to partner agencies, if required.

Welcome visits are in place for all new tenants to ensure they have settled into their new home, with more regular contact maintained with those deemed to be at risk of tenancy failure. In some cases, this could involve weekly visits. Issues concerning the condition of property, garden or other tenancy matters are addressed at the outset, with the tenant expected to rectify the breach or face formal action. New tenants are only granted a secure tenancy on completion of a 12-month probationary period and following a visit to their home.

We understand the circumstances of tenants are different and that different levels of support are required. We are flexible in our approach and tailor the level of support offered to reflect the risk of tenancy failure and to avoid the consequences of formal action, particularly against tenants identified as needing high levels of support.

Although we have a strong track record of sustaining tenancies, we are not complacent and know there is more to do. We remain focused and want to build on our successes to deliver further improvements. To achieve this, we will:

- Sign up to the Homes for Cathy commitments and ensure our policies and working practices meet the commitments across all our business streams.
- Explore the potential to expand our furnished tenancy scheme beyond existing capacity levels.
- Review our sign-up process and work with new tenants to identify what works and what does not in terms of starting a tenancy.
- Identify what information our customers need when they start their tenancy and how they would like to receive it.
- Review how we can identify any support needs at the earliest point to enable timely, targeted support to be provided by us or other agencies.

Ensure tenancy support plans are put in place for new tenants that need help and introduce new monitoring arrangements to ensure tenancies are sustained, including regular tenancy visits.

Priority 2

We will ensure the right support is in place for customers who need it.

We know that some of our tenants struggle to manage their tenancy and need extra support. This support can range from a short intervention to help them deal with a specific issue or be longer term.

Our tenancy sustainment offer will ensure that support is provided at the right time and in the right way.

We have invested significant resources into tenancy sustainment and provide a range of services designed to support tenants. We will continue to build on our achievements in the coming years and strengthen our Eyes Wide Open campaign which enables colleagues, customers and partner agencies to report housing and neighbourhood issues of concern easily and conveniently. Our focus on community development will also ensure we build community capacity, improve skills and connect people to one another, other community assets and local services. Only by doing this will we build strong, more sustainable neighbourhoods for the future.

Planned activities include:

- Developing a new, proactive and risk-based approach to tenancy visits to ensure resources are maximised and targeted where they are most needed.
- Introducing new measures for monitoring tenancy sustainment and the impact of our interventions.

- Ensuring our staff have the necessary skills, knowledge and guidance to deal effectively with sustainment and housing management issues.
- Strengthening our approach to tackling hoarding issues, ensuring tenants are appropriately supported and risks are effectively managed and monitored.
- Refresh our Eyes Wide Open campaign to ensure members of staff pick up and report issues of concern early.
- Ensuring our approach is aligned with the Council's neighbourhood model and emerging Improving Adult Lives workstream to ensure support needs are met, information is shared, risks are managed effectively and duplication in service provision is avoided.
- Supporting community groups, local services and activities designed to improve health and well-being in our neighbourhoods.
- Supporting the delivery of the Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy and initiatives designed to build community capacity and resilience.
- Promoting mutual exchanges and the Council's incentive scheme to support tenants who are under occupying or struggling to pay their rent.

Priority 3

We will build effective relationships with our customers, based on trust.

Whilst many of our customers prefer to self-serve or resolve issues themselves, others need our support and should be able to reach out for help if they need it.

We know that some people find this difficult to do. Others struggle to engage with public sector organisations and distrust officials as a result of previous life experiences.

Building trust is a central strand of our tenancy sustainment model. We know this can take time but will ensure our customers voices are heard and the support we put in place is tailored to meet their needs.

We start by recognising people's strengths and giving them time to talk. Only by doing this will we build trust and encourage customers to take control of their lives, build resilience and make the most of the skills, strengths and talents they already have or can access in their community. Going forward, we want to ensure psychological and trauma informed practices are embedded into our policies, procedures and working practices to initiate and strengthen relationships. It is also about working with them to identify how their choices or behaviour can influence their ability to maintain their tenancy. We want to build on our work in the coming years by:

- Rolling out our new Tenancy Sustainment model to ensure staff have the time to develop effective relationships with customers who need support and at risk of tenancy failure.
- Adopting a psychological and trauma informed model of intervention.
- Ensuring regular visits and contact is made with tenants who are struggling or there is a risk of their tenancy failing.
- Ensuring relevant staff are trained on trauma and adverse experiences working practices.
- Ensuring our staff are trained on asset based working principles.
- Identifying tenants that create high levels of demand on the service and work with them to understand the cause and reduce demand.
- Developing a restorative and asset-based approach to tenancy breaches so that tenants are clear about their tenancy obligations and feel supported to take positive action.
- Reviewing our ASB and domestic violence procedures to ensure our approach is victim led, proportionate and focuses on what we can do to support customers to sustain their tenancy, but also proactively manage perpetrators. Deliver our Tenant Engagement Strategy action plan.

Priority 4

We will take an informed, risk based approach to managing tenancies.

Knowing our tenants and understanding their needs makes good business sense.

We call this 'customer insights.'

Not only does it ensure we make informed decisions and tailor our services to meet individual tenant's needs, but it also enables us to target resources in the right places, streamline our approach to tenancy management and provide better value for money.

Driving forward our 'digital by choice' agenda will enable us to manage demand more effectively and release capacity so we can provide additional support to those who are struggling or need our help to manage their tenancy. This has been identified as a key priority by our tenants and underpins our Customer Access Strategy. Our Tenant Engagement Strategy will also ensure our customers have a genuine say in decisions that affect their home and the services we provide. Planned activities include:

- Continuing to improve our understanding of tenancy failure, trigger incidents and seek to address the causes.
- Strengthening our approach to customer and property profiling, ensuring we have accurate and up to date information. 26Working with the Council and other partners to share data more effectively and use this to determine interventions and manage risks at neighbourhood and case management level.

- Create a new Customer Feedback framework, aligned to our Tenant Engagement Strategy to learn and drive forward service improvements using both perception and transactional customer feedback.
- Seek out best practice and benchmark our performance against others to identify opportunities to improve further. Undertaking periodic inspections throughout each tenancy to identify and repair, maintenance and tenancy issues before they become major issues, thus preventing the need for more costly interventions. These visits will also give us the opportunity to build good relationships with our customers and identify any potential support needs.

Year 1 – areas of focus

Embedding our new delivery model

By targeting resources where they are most needed and developing a risk-based approach to interventions and tenancy visits. Ensuring staff are trained, procedures are robust and effective referral arrangements are in place.

Partnership working

By working in partnership with the Council, the voluntary sector and local communities to tackle poverty, build community capacity and support the delivery of the Let's Do it Strategy. Ensuring risks are managed effectively and information is shared to enable joined up decisions and interventions.

Customer insights

By strengthening our approach to collecting and using customer insights data to inform our working practices, service delivery arrangements and investment decisions so that we can respond more effectively and predict future customer requirements.

Measuring the impact of our interventions.

By improving our understanding of tenancy failure reasons, trigger incidents, demand levels and what works. Showcase key achievements.

Success measures and monitoring

This strategy will be monitored by the Customer Review Group and our Board. Our detailed delivery plan sets out the key activities, success measures and timescales required to achieve our goals. Key measures we will use to track our performance will include:

- % of new tenants identified with support needs and need tenancy support.
- % / No. of tenants receiving tenancy support.
- No. of tenants reporting improvements in their well-being as a result of tenancy support.
- % of tenants satisfied with the tenancy support offered.
- Number of tenants successfully sustaining their tenancy 6 months after support plan ends.
- % of tenancies failing in the first 6 / 12 months.
- % of tenancies failing after 12 months.
- Anti-social behaviour cases relative to the size of the landlord
- No. of evictions carried out, including reason.
- We will know we are achieving our aims when: Our customers tell us we provide brilliant services, feel listened to and know we will act on their feedback.
- Our work leads to better outcomes for our customers, minimises tenancy breakdown and prevents homelessness.
- Tenancy sustainment is engrained in our culture, with services and products co-produced in partnership with our customers.

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