Working together...

to create sustainable tenancies

"As a result of this project, Thrive Homes has identified a genuinely new approach to welcoming and maintaining thriving tenancies and communities"

- Thrive Homes

Anna O'Halloran, Director, CIH consultancy
Cath Davies, Senior Associate
The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple – to provide housing professionals with the advice, support and knowledge they need to be brilliant.

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Introduction

The project Working together to create sustainable tenancies was developed by CIH in partnership with Cath Davies (CIH Senior Associate) as a response to the most significant threat to social landlords in a generation, that tenants will be unable to sustain their tenancies due to the implications of welfare reform.

Working together... is an established CIH delivery model that differs to traditional consultancy in that the focus is on sharing learning (with other organisations on the project) and acquiring knowledge, new perspectives and developing skills, with the other organisations and also from guest speakers from within and outside of the sector.

The structure of the project was five workshops, where participants shared their knowledge and experiences and attended sessions with guest speakers and four on-site consultancy days, to be used as each organisation wished to assist them in developing services that would create tenancies that can be sustained. A workbook was supplied that gave checklists and guidance notes on:

- pre-tenancy activities
- money advice
- employment support
- rent income collection

The learning from the project is grouped under these four areas.

The workshops helped us to think not only about sustaining tenancies, but how we can help residents meet their own ambitions

- Moat

- North Tyneside Homes

Sharing our experiences and learning from other organisations’ knowledge and experience is invaluable
Between June 2013 and April 2014, the following cross-section of 19 housing associations, arms length management organisations (ALMOs) and Local Authorities in England and Wales took part in the project:
What is a sustainable tenancy?

The first workshop of the project gave participants an opportunity to think about and debate the question, “what is a sustainable tenancy”. These were some of the ideas and lines of thought that came out of that session:

- Are we looking for a sustainable tenancy or a sustainable tenant?
- Is a sustainable tenancy one that lasts forever and where the rent is paid?
- A tenancy that is ended in a managed way and as part of a tenant’s plan is not a failed tenancy
- Is “sustaining” too grudging a word – don’t we want “thriving” tenancies?
- A sustainable tenancy is one that doesn’t cost the landlord more to manage than they get in rental income

What was clear from the discussion is that each landlord needs to have its own debate and decide on its own definition so that it can create a clear strategic direction. For some of the participants, this was very new and opened up a new line of reflection and consideration around what their organisation’s business model should be – and how to blend income maximisation with supporting tenants.
Pre-tenancy activities

Overview

“Pre-tenancy activities” are almost synonymous with the “allocations process”. The term was used during the project to help make a shift in both landlords’ and applicants’ minds that whatever happens before the tenancy starts is not simply an administrative exercise of application, verifying, assessing housing need, bidding, viewing and sign up.

In reality, it is at this stage that landlords have the best possible chance of gaining an understanding of an incoming tenant - an understanding of what might prevent them from sustaining a tenancy – and getting the landlord and tenant relationship off to a good start. In effect, a landlord is risk assessing the incoming tenant and then engaging with the tenant to put support measures in place to mitigate the risk.

It was this area that often proved to be the most significant perceived challenge for organisations: how to influence the pre-tenancy process where responsibility for lettings is shared between different organisations via choice based lettings partnerships and common housing registers but where tenancy sustainability targets may not be shared?

What we learned

- There is a need to make an affordability assessment early on in the process. Housing application forms usually ask for an applicant’s income (as too high an income would make them ineligible for housing) but often the issue of affordability is not addressed until the viewing stage and, occasionally, not until the post-sign up visit.

- Organisations need to review their pre-tenancy process and decide upon the timing of when to carry out both an affordability assessment and a wider tenancy sustainability assessment. Too early and the assessment will need to be carried out again at point of offer; too late and the information is unlikely to be used in a meaningful way. Many organisations felt that an affordability check at point of registration was needed and accepted that this would need to be repeated before sign-up.

Pre-tenancy work and assessment are essential

- Trident Social Investment Group
- It isn’t just the rent that needs to be paid: making applicants aware upfront of associated costs with the property on offer, e.g. fuel bills and Council Tax (or suggesting other costs that might be incurred, e.g. removal costs, contents insurance or TV licence) would better prepare them.

- Introducing the idea of paying rent needs to be done as early as possible as landlords continue to try to distance themselves and tenants from the idea that “the Social pays the rent”; it’s too late to do this at the offer stage. The introduction of universal credit makes it even more important that applicants/tenants are clear that the responsibility to pay rent lies with them, and them alone.

- In advance of sign up, the barriers that may prevent an applicant from sustaining a tenancy need to be understood and acted upon. In addition to the standard checks on ASB and former tenancy arrears, an understanding of social and/or health vulnerabilities are key indicators.

- Following on from the point above, landlords need to have services in place (either in-house or delivered by partners) that can address any factors that may affect tenancy sustainment. For example, an issue of poor money management may be addressed by the applicant/tenant attending a budgeting skills course; or where an un-supported alcohol addiction has contributed to previous tenancies breaking down, the landlord may wish to help the tenant in accessing appropriate support services.

- There may be value in using a “Tenant Commitment” where the tenant agrees a course of action to address identified needs. This may be linked into whether or not a tenancy is granted in the first place and the adherence to it may be used in determining whether to grant a fixed-term tenancy at the end of a starter or introductory tenancy.

**We need to find out more about the tenant and their support needs before they move in to give them the best start**

- Central Bedfordshire Council
Examples of good practice

Salix Homes – increased their void turnaround target by three days in recognition of the importance of getting the pre-tenancy process right.

Curo Group - partnered with their local CAB to provide a “Passport to Housing”. This service is offered to applicants likely to be rehoused within six - eight months, taking the form of an assessment process and household income and expenditure check, culminating in a "success plan" being agreed with each applicant. The success plan will address areas such as debt, income, fuel costs and advice on setting up a home.

(See case study in the case studies section at the end of this report.)

Central Bedfordshire Council – developed ‘The Tenancy Sustainment Loop’. The Tenancy Loop was informed by the mapping of current provision, in depth analysis of tenancy failure and staff and tenant engagement to identify gaps and consider better ways of working.

(See case study in the case studies section at the end of this report.)
Money advice

Overview

Often social landlords use a combination of in-house teams, formal partnership agreements and ad-hoc referrals to local agencies to provide a money advice service.

Many of the conversations during the project have been around how to sufficiently resource this service if it were to also receive referrals as a result of a tenancy sustainability assessment during the pre-tenancy stage – a proactive, rather than reactive approach. It was clear, that for most landlords, this would present a significant challenge.

There is an obvious role for money advice at the pre-tenancy stage, when assessed concerns about an individual’s ability to sustain a tenancy may be dealt with by an appropriate intervention, e.g. attending a budgeting skills workshop or debt advice.

What we learned

- Staff across the business, not directly working in an income collection team, should be able to act as “referral agents” to the money advice service: e.g. allocations staff, estate officers and maintenance operatives. It is important that these staff understand what services exist, that they have an awareness of the kind of issues that they may encounter and what they should do about it.

- Make it easy for non-housing management staff to flag up concerns by supplying, e.g., maintenance operatives with “see and tell” postcards. Concerns can quickly be passed onto the relevant support teams in this way.

- Where an in-house money advice service is small, it is likely to be staffed by people with a high-level of skill, greater than is actually needed for many day-to-day enquiries. Equipping a wider range of staff to deal with the less complex cases frees up the specialists to deal with the more complex cases. This approach also moves money advice into the wider arena, encouraging non-specialist staff to take some responsibility for this area of work.

- Tracking the outcomes of money advice work and, to a lesser extent, employment support, was often reported as difficult – especially where ad-hoc referrals are made without the backing of a service-
level agreement. As there are some common issues with employment support, see the section on page 16 on outcome monitoring.

**Examples of good practice**

*Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing* – has reviewed the operating focus of its well-established Debt Advice Service to prioritise prevention rather than enforcement. With the support of the KNH Board, the size of the Debt Advice Team has doubled over the last year as it has dealt with an almost 100 percent increase in referrals as a result of welfare reform.

To ensure a consistent approach and standard of service the job descriptions of Debt Advice staff have been changed to include the requirement to have or work towards professional and training qualifications in debt/money advice. The Service provides internal and external training and briefing sessions on welfare reform, benefits and debt issues.

(See case study in the case studies section at the end of this report.)
Employment support

Overview

In relation to sustaining tenancies, the relevance of the provision of a comprehensive and coherent package of services around employment support should not be underestimated: increasing tenants’ chances of gaining employment or increasing the hours of existing employment is one way of relieving the financial impact of welfare reform.

One of the key issues that came out of a workshop on worklessness, was that one of the most significant barriers to gaining employment was the loss of self-confidence for those out of work. There is clearly scope to develop employment support services that deal with these issues, complementing the more traditional approach.

As with money advice, there is a role for employment support at the pre-tenancy stage, when assessed concerns about an individual’s ability to sustain a tenancy may be dealt with by an appropriate intervention, e.g. attending a CV writing skills course or interview preparation workshop or, as mentioned in the paragraph above, to look at ways of restoring or building up an individual’s confidence.

What we learned

- Similar to lessons learned for money advice, staff across the business coming into contact with tenants need to be aware what services are available and be able to recognise need. Getting the message across, then, is key here: team briefings; use of notice boards where news, team activities and successes are shared; using corporate screen savers to re-iterate information, posters around the building (in the lifts and on the back of toilet doors, for example) and handy, credit-card sized summaries of services can all play a part in achieving this.

- The more joined up a service offer is, the more likely it is to be recognised across the organisation. Ad hoc service provision without a structure behind it is likely to not permeate into an organisation’s core business activities. This, in turn, means services are less likely to be measured, monitored, reviewed or funded appropriately.
Examples of good practice

Merlin Housing Society – with tenant involvement, developed the, “Merlin Academy, Skills for Life” programme which focussed on building up confidence, knowledge and experience; it covered soft skills, technical skills and “Merlin specific” skills (aimed at helping tenants to understand the services and opportunities offered by Merlin).

Poplar HARCA – supplemented training already delivered to staff, including collecting money by phone, dealing with difficult conversations, financial inclusion and welfare reform, with a CIH-supported, tailored course from Chris Hall (CIH Associate) to help staff spot abnormalities in residents’ income and expenditure disclosures. This added a new layer to the advice staff could offer residents in that they were able to discuss how much it ‘should’ cost to run a home

(See case study in the case studies section at the end of this report.)
Rent income collection service

Overview

The last ten years or so have seen a move away from “the housing officer” being responsible for rent income collection along with other neighbourhood or estate duties (generic) to teams of officers responsible for either neighbourhood management or for rent income collection (specialist).

There is also a hybrid of this used by some organisations where responsibility for low-level arrears is given to neighbourhood officers and the specialist rent income collection deal with the higher level arrears.

Whatever the relative merits of each model, it’s timely to review ways of working to ensure that current practices are efficient and new ways of working are adopted if appropriate. With the likelihood of increased arrears as a result of the under-occupancy charge and the benefit cap, and the increased challenge of rent collection once universal credit is in place, organisations need to ensure that they are maximising the way they use their resources.

However, managing the financial impact of welfare reform and creating sustainable tenancies is not the sole province of rent income collection teams. Of course, the “arrears service” will kick in when there are rent arrears but organisations will need to get to grips with where the responsibility for arrears prevention lies – it may not be where they think.

What we learned

- Policies and procedures need to be regularly reviewed and training given to staff if there are significant changes.

- A comprehensive suite of targets should be given to individuals. For example:
  - current tenancy rent arrears as a percentage of annual rent roll
  - rent collected as a percentage of annual rent debit
  - former tenancy rent arrears as a percentage of annual rent debit
  - former tenancy rent arrears write offs as a percentage of annual rent debit
• Giving responsibility for low-level arrears to neighbourhood officers often results in the specialist team picking up cases at a much later stage where the required recovery action has not been taken.

• Following on from the above point, it is difficult to set targets for staff when cases are likely to go between teams and where the ability of the specialist officer to meet their targets is affected by the neighbourhood officer’s management of the case.

• There may be a case now for taking a more radical approach and shifting a significant amount of activity from arrears collection into arrears prevention. This fits in with the identified need that more needs to done at the pre-tenancy and early tenancy stages.

Our arrears performance was not comparable with peers and so this was an opportunity to compare, contrast and learn from others who were performing better than we were. It also offered space to think through decisions and model different ways of working using an experienced peer group as sounding board

- Poplar HARCA

Examples of good practice

Poplar HARCA - restructured their income management service using lessons learned from one of the project workshops on Appreciative Inquiry. Involving staff at every stage and being careful to identify what currently works and to keep that in the new process, Poplar HARCA is now starting to see an improvement in their income collection performance.

(See case study in the case studies section at the end of this report.)
Measuring outcomes for money advice and employment support

- Robust measuring and monitoring of activities and outcomes gives a solid platform from which to understand the impact of services and to take decisions about service developments.

- There needs to be a distinction made between target setting – e.g. response to a referral shall be made within 48 hours, and collecting data to analyse the service – e.g. how much money in new benefits has been secured for tenants as a result of an intervention. Much of the data capture around employment and money is management or information data rather than targets.

- A measurement of the success of a service is how well it has met the tenant’s needs and aspirations. Taking a simple baseline position at the start of an intervention and again at the end is important. For example, asking the following type of question at the beginning and end, “out of 10, how confident do you feel about managing your money?” At the end of the intervention, a further question might be (assuming the answer isn’t 10 out of 10), “what would need to happen for you to be able to answer 10 out of 10?”.

- Similarly, encourage tenants to identify their goals at the start and review how well they’ve been met as part of the case closure process.

- Use qualitative as well as quantitative measures: the number of tenants supported to get employment or the amount of new income generated through previously unclaimed benefits is only part of the story: have achieved goals been sustained? Three, six, nine and 12 months down the line is the tenant managing the money well? Has employment been sustained?

- The use of case studies can be a powerful tool to complement the metrics and to demonstrate the very tangible results that interventions around money advice and employment support can bring in tenants’ lives.
Conclusion

Two rounds of the project have run so far and through the workshops, consultancy support and networking, participating organisations have both been challenged and been able to challenge each other as to how they might best deliver services in order to support and enable tenants to sustain their tenancies.

The following key themes have emerged and will continue to be a focus and challenge to landlords over the medium to long-term:

1. **Pre-tenancy activities**
   
   This is an area of work that requires significant focus as it lies at the heart of getting a tenancy off on the right foot. Local Authority partners with responsibility for managing waiting lists will need to be convinced of the value to them as well as the applicant and landlord in making pre-tenancy processes more robust.

   Equally, Boards of Management and Cabinets may have some catching up to do so that their thinking around what makes good business sense and what constitutes an effective and comprehensive pre-tenancy service starts to converge.

2. **Using customer insight**

   One of the workshops focussed on this and it was clear that there is a lot that can be learnt from commercial businesses. The sector has not been quick to maximise the information it holds on its customers, in the way that private industry has. Using insight more effectively undoubtedly assists organisations in understanding where to target scarce resources for maximum impact, how to track outcomes across different customer segments and when to be sure that initiatives are, or are not, working.

*We need to invest more in understanding why tenancies succeed as well as why they fail, and make sure our recording of both is more detailed*  

- Trident Social Investment Group
3. Measuring and monitoring sustainable tenancies

There is a difference between reporting on sustainable tenancies per se and reporting on the numbers of voids, void loss and void turnaround times etc.

Deciding on an organisational definition of “sustainable tenancy” leads to the development and measurement of sustainability indicators.

4. Tenancy sustainment is not just about new tenancies

Although this project has focussed largely on new tenancies, the principle of having a service that is capable of identifying need or risk of tenancy failure, and providing sustainment interventions, is applicable equally to existing tenancies.

Whilst the driver for this project has been welfare reform, it is hard to escape the conclusion that, with or without welfare reform, having a clear strategy to create sustainable tenancies and to develop services that facilitate this is a win-win situation: better for tenants; better for landlords; better for communities and better for all parties involved in managing allocations and lettings.

A full review of termination reasons has been carried out and meaningless categories have been removed!

- Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing

Tenancy sustainment is not the responsibility of one department but needs an organisational commitment and involvement of all teams to succeed

- Trident Social Investment Group
What else did they say…?

The participants on the project were asked to share what they had learned from the project in the form of "our top three learning or action points"; some of these have been used throughout this report but there have been others that do not obviously sit within any of the four main sections and so are noted here:

The workshops helped us to challenge why we do some of the things we’ve always done: the Provident visit a property within 48 hours of someone moving in and we don’t visit for 4 weeks
- Moat

Be brave, and have the confidence to take risks
- North Tyneside Homes

Front-line housing staff increasingly have to deal with situations where the tenant is upset, angry or suicidal... staff resilience training is now included in the training programme for 2014/15 and will be delivered to a large number of front line staff
- Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing

We will introduce a flexible void standard to better meet the needs of new tenants
- Central Bedfordshire Council

Our involvement in this initiative will definitely lead to real savings, value for money and real customer focussed service improvements
- Thrive Homes
Case studies

1. Central Bedfordshire Council

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<td>Action taken:</td>
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<td>Outcomes/expected outcomes:</td>
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The Working together to create sustainable tenancies project led the project team to assess the current tenancy sustainment services provided and identify gaps in provision. This was informed by an in depth analysis of failed tenancies, mapping of current provision and staff and tenant engagement.

The gap analysis was made up of the following activities:
- A mixture of national and local research was used to understand the triggers for tenancy failure
- Mapping current provision by a desktop exercise and a session with colleagues led by CIH.
- Survey to staff and tenants to understand views on tenancy sustainment weaknesses and strengths and encourage ideas for improvement.
- CIH-led Appreciative Inquiry session to develop better ways of sustaining tenancies.
- An analysis of tenancy failure to understand the common behaviours and triggers of eviction and abandonment.

Strengths
We learnt that we offer a wide range of tenancy sustainment support services internally and externally and felt we were ahead of other housing providers as a result. We offer in-house tenancy support through our Tenancy Support Officer (TSO) team, free in-house money advice and we have an integrated voids, lettings and tenancy support team. As a local authority and especially as a unitary authority we are placed in an advantageous position as we have direct links with services such as Housing Benefit and Adult Social Care.

**Weaknesses**
Analysis showed that we did not have a full picture of who the tenant was before they moved in to the property. In the first 28 days before the new tenant visit is carried out, the tenant is typically left with no tailored support.

Our minimum void standard is the same for all properties and so we do not alter the condition of the property to better meet the needs of the tenant before they move in.

Tenants that pay their rent on time and show good tenant behaviour are forgotten.

When a tenancy fails we do not take time to reflect on what could have been done differently to get a better outcome.

**Improvements**
We developed the Tenancy Sustainment Loop model to avoid the vicious circle of a tenant moving in to a property with insufficient support and being evicted because they could not cope. This model introduces support and risk assessment before the tenant is given the keys to the property. We will now also reflect on why tenancies fail and carry out an audit after each eviction and abandonment. Those wishing to terminate their tenancy will need to make an application so that we can gather feedback as to what did and did not work well when they were a tenant.

**The Tenancy Sustainment Loop**
Practical solutions to feed the Tenancy Sustainment Loop

Tenancy sustainment tools at application stage:
- Pre-tenancy questionnaire
- Online self-assessment
- Pre-tenancy risk assessment

A new Allocations Policy will soon be implemented and a majority of applications will in future be received online. We are planning to link in an online questionnaire to capture our customers’ aspirations and any risks which may affect their future tenancy. The self-assessment tool will also signpost customers to websites that will help them achieve their goals such as accessing training or employment.

These tools should inform and empower our customers to resolve any issues they have before they become a tenant. The assessments will also inform us so that we can support the tenant from day one of their tenancy and give them the best start.

Tenancy sustainment tools at the shortlisting stage:
- Short-list questionnaire
- Pre-tenancy training
- Flexible void standard
- Accessibility register of adapted properties

The shortlist questionnaire will consolidate information given at application stage and take into account any changes in circumstances.

Fifteen members of staff across the Housing Management Service are being trained to deliver pre-tenancy skills training. This will train prospective tenants in life skills including money management and low level property maintenance to cover the tenants’ responsibilities.

The minimum voids standard is being reviewed to take into account vulnerability and the tenants’ ability to decorate their property using the decoration vouchers typically offered to new tenants. This should enable the tenant to enjoy better living conditions and reduce high void refurbishment costs at the end of the tenancy.

All of our properties are categorised to ensure that our adapted properties are allocated to tenants that need them.

Our Lettings Officers are proactive in alerting their support colleagues when they receive applications from customers who have current support in place. Action is taken to ensure that this continues especially for cross border applicants. This minimises the risk of the tenant falling in to crisis during the moving process which can be a stressful time.

Tenancy sustainment support during the tenancy:
- Tenancy support service
Referrals can be made to TSOs who can work one-to-one with tenants for as long as required to address any problems they are experiencing that could jeopardise their tenancy. TSOs also have direct links to specialist services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Community Mental Health Teams and our Adult Social Care colleagues. This collaboration across teams has led to quicker and better access to specialist help.

We are currently trialling a price comparison company who provide a service to manage the energy supplies during the void period. As an added service to our customers the company will also contact our incoming tenants and offer to find them the cheapest tariff for their individual circumstances.

At present some ‘invisible tenants’ may only have contact with us through a contractor carrying out the annual gas service. We want to be pro-active in our offer of support and will visit each tenant at least once a year to ensure that any support they may need can be put in place. We hope that this ‘meaningful contact’ will identify those who require support early to avoid a crisis situation which is typically associated with high costs for ourselves as the landlord and for our colleagues and partners in health and social care services. The visits carried out by contactors are still important as they are our eyes and ears in the community. We are planning to develop a simple system to allow our partners to record whether a follow up is required by Housing Officers should the contractor be concerned about something they saw or heard on their visit.

End of tenancy review tools:
- Monitoring outcomes
- Reviewing terminations

We monitor the benefits of the Tenancy Sustainment Loop and the support provided through a suite of KPIs monitored by senior managers and members. These indicators will evidence the outcomes, income achieved and savings made as a result of using tenancy sustainment services. We will review the lifespan of tenancies that are terminated and reflect upon the reasons they have ended. This will help us to improve our services and identify underlying issues and highlight good practice where tenants have moved on successfully.
2. **Curo Group**

### Organisational Profile

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation name:</th>
<th>Curo</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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### Case study overview / summary

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue:</th>
<th>Level of starter tenant arrears and concern about how customers will cope with universal credit.</th>
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</table>
| Action taken: | • Development of Passport to Housing & Success Plans.  
• Recruitment of Employment, Education & Training Officer.  
• Review of allocations, starter tenancy and rent arrears policy and procedure.  
• Move away from using Customer Insight purely to look at satisfaction. |
| Outcomes/expected outcomes: | • Better identification of risk and fewer failed tenancies.  
• Greater number of supportive interventions.  
• Right person, right property at the right time.  
• Better understanding of what customers need. |

### Case study

Curo were keen to pursue this opportunity to work with CIH - we recognised that tenancy sustainment activity will be a cornerstone of our approach to combating the risks that welfare reform brings.

The project provided us with a great opportunity to take a step back and think, gave us invaluable time with other RPs to discuss, debate and review ideas and the sessions with experts were thought provoking, challenging and inspiring.

Key questions/learning points were:

- We need a whole business approach to income management – everyone has something to offer and something to gain.
- Do our structures and processes support a joined up approach to tenancy sustainment?
- Do we really know the cost of tenancy failure in our business?
- What drives the customer behaviour that costs us money?
- Do we measure what customers like, or what they need?
- How can we ease customer effort?
## Case study

This has generated a long list of outputs, but for this report we will focus on Passport To Housing, a project that was inspired by one of the Working together workshops.

### The problem

We all know that moving home is difficult and stressful, even when you have adequate resources and time to plan. We also know that many of our customers have little or no disposable income, may face disability challenges or are moving after a traumatic event in their lives, yet our need to minimise rent loss and the CBL system means that they are moving with just a couple of weeks’ notice.

We have a number of pre-tenancy checks in place that identify potential problems and customers are given advice about how to deal with them, however there is no time to put this good advice into practice ahead of getting the keys. Our starter tenancy arrears are higher than the wider tenant population and we know from anecdotal evidence and other research that getting a social tenancy is a cause of debt - protracted periods awaiting a HB assessment makes budgeting difficult and the cost of carpets, curtains and furnishings can be overwhelming when you have a couple of pounds per week left after all essential bills are paid.

We know that many of our customers also have difficulty accessing affordable credit, leading them onto the debt spiral – debt profiling has shown us that 10 percent of customers have a CCJ, and in some neighbourhoods this is as high as 20 percent. These issues are set to compound under universal credit (UC) – 18 percent of customers have no IT access, 27 percent are worried about claiming on line, 40 percent are worried about monthly budgeting and years of HB direct payments mean that presently only 58 percent of customers are confident they know their rent account balance.

### The solution – Passport to Housing

We will take the opportunity to assess, advise and support new customers much earlier in the process of them moving – giving people a chance to put the good advice identified in their pre-tenancy ‘success plan’ into action well ahead of getting the keys. This could mean getting time to save up, go for debt counselling, open a Credit Union Account, or taking steps to enter the labour market if circumstances render a tenancy unaffordable.

We have partnered with our local CAB to deliver this project. CAB will deliver the assessment and advice to customers set out in the process below.

### How it works

- Data is taken from the housing register to identify customers who are likely to move within 6-8 months, targeting the highest-risk customers first.
- Credit check and thorough assessment process, including household income and expenditure is completed with the customer. They are advised early on that the tasks in their plan need to be completed if they wish to rent a Curo home in the future.
- Success plan agreed with customer. This may involve referral to support services, debt counselling and help from volunteers to put advice into practice. The Success plan will address debt, income, fuel costs, setting up home and work, where this is an option.
- Progress against the success plan will be checked periodically, as agreed with the customer.
Case study

- When the customer successfully bids on CBL the success plan is reviewed by the Lettings Officer. If the customer has not completed tasks in the plan, the decision may be made not to offer a tenancy until the resultant risk is properly addressed.
- On-going tasks identified in the success plan are work-flowed in CRM once the tenancy is live so that they are visible and managed by housing colleagues.
- Tenancies are flagged as no, low, medium and high risk so that arrears, ASB and other metrics can be tracked against the initial assessment made.

Other activities that support this project:

- Review of starter tenancy, income and allocations policies and process.
- Introduction of credit checks for new customers.
- Use of My Home Finance & Credit Union to provide affordable loans.
- Plan to join the “Rental Exchange” to help improve customers’ credit scores and help tackle the “poverty premium”.
- Use of customer insight program tailored to measure potential risks presented by UC as well as customer satisfaction.

Anticipated outcomes:

- Lower starter tenant rent arrears and reduced risk of arrears thereafter.
- Earlier and increased referrals for support, reducing the risk of ASB or abandonment.
- Customers have a sustainable household budget and if required a debt management plan to tackle problematic debt before they accrue rent arrears.
- Improved access to financial products and services for customers.
3. **Homes for Northumberland**

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<th>Organisational Profile</th>
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<td>Organisation name:</td>
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<td>Location (region):</td>
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<td>Main IT supplier (e.g. Orchard, Northgate, Civica etc)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Case study overview / summary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Issue:</td>
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<td>Action taken:</td>
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<td>Outcomes/expected outcomes:</td>
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<tr>
<th>Case study</th>
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<tr>
<td>Our involvement with this project has seen us initially focus on two areas, pre-tenancy activities and tenancy conclusion. We reviewed our existing approach with regards to both and looked at areas for improvement.</td>
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We have recently introduced screening for prospective tenants. Screenings are conducted at the earliest opportunity prior to commencement of the tenancy. This provides us with ample time to get the appropriate mechanisms in place so that on day 1 of the tenancy, all the pieces are in place and the new tenant has the maximum chance of success.

We use a variety of information sources to pinpoint those tenancies that may be at risk of tenancy failure by recognising potential financial and general vulnerabilities. We use information provided by the tenant on their housing application as well as some specific questions asked at viewing stage to decide if a more thorough assessment is needed. If an assessment is required, a tailored service is provided to work with the prospective tenant to address the risks that have been identified; this often includes signposting into our existing reactive services such as Benefit Advice, Housing Benefit Support or Debt Management.

This is a fundamental development to our previous approach, seeking to rewire the referral routes into these existing services. Historically, we may not have known that a person had debt problems until they fell into rent arrears. Now, we try and get the appropriate package in place at the beginning of the tenancy, becoming proactive rather than reactive, to ensure they have the ability to maximise their income, budget effectively and ultimately pay their rent.
Case study

As part of reviewing our existing termination process we found that we did not have a clear understanding of why our tenants were terminating or where they were going. We were able to develop our understanding of tenancy failure and acknowledge that some tenancies conclude naturally, i.e. death of the tenant or perhaps where the tenant is fledging into purchasing their own property. Clearly neither of these examples could be deemed as a failure. Consequently, we are then able to focus on those tenancies that are ending prematurely.

Due to a lack of data capture at the point of termination we were unable to state clearly which of these tenancies were reaching their natural conclusion or which were ending prematurely. We redesigned our termination form to capture this information and, crucially, ask if the tenant would like help to keep their tenancy. Where a tenant states that they would like help to keep it we will take positive steps to try and alleviate the problem. This diverts the property from the void process and all its associated costs, and ultimately sustains the tenancy.
4. Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (1)

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<th>Organisational Profile</th>
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<td>Organisation name:</td>
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<td>Issue:</td>
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<td>Action taken:</td>
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<td>Outcomes/expected outcomes:</td>
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**Case study**

KNH’s mission is to provide quality homes and services in successful communities. One of the challenges to achieving this aim over the past year has been an increase in the number of tenants leaving Council properties. The number of terminations rose by 8 percent in 2013-14 compared to the previous year with the average re-let time increasing by 4 days over the same period. Welfare reform has been a significant contributory factor with the number of terminations on larger homes seeing the greatest increase. This threatens the stability of communities and increased rent loss will ultimately impact on the level and range of services provided.

The majority of negative terminations are due to affordability and anti-social behaviour issues. KNH decided to undertake a pilot scheme involving the provision of a number of pre-tenancy workshops to determine whether investing in pre-tenancy activities has a positive impact on the sustainability of tenancies.

Between October 2013 and March 2014, KNH delivered 11 two hour workshops to 80 people who were on the shortlist for 43 apartments available in Howard Wilson Court. This is a newly refurbished block of flats located in central Huddersfield. The participants ranged in age from 17 to over 80 years old and the workshops were delivered interactively using a mixture of information, activities and a quiz.

All attendees were asked to complete a workshop evaluation form and of the 71 responses received 99 percent of attendees enjoyed the workshop, found the content useful, thought it was clear why they had to attend and felt that they were more prepared for a tenancy as a result of the workshop. Nine people
left before the end of the workshop and thus did not complete a form including one person who realised that he could not afford a tenancy and took himself out of the process.

There are currently 38 live tenancies within Harold Wilson Court, two tenancies having failed due to affordability, although in both cases the tenants left without rent arrears which could be due to information received during the workshop. Whilst the majority of tenants have only been in the properties for 3-4 months, an initial comparison with another high-rise block has shown that the number of tenants in arrears and average value of those arrears is less for tenants who have undertaken the pre-tenancy workshop. There is also a higher number with rent accounts in credit and to date no anti-social behaviour cases have been opened at Harold Wilson Court.

It is still early days but so far the piloting of pre-tenancy workshops seems to have been successful and KNH are currently considering a variety of options for delivering further workshops to a greater number of prospective tenants. Ideas being considered include targeting workshops at people who have no previous experience of running their own home, tenants in bands A and B who have a reasonable chance of being offered a property, tenants actively bidding for certain types of property and tenants whose tenancies have been identified as at risk of failing. KNH has for some time been shifting resources into prevention work within its Rent Assist Team and the provision of pre-tenancy workshops would further contribute to this work.
5. Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (2)

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<td>Organisation name:</td>
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<td>Number of properties:</td>
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<td>Main IT supplier (e.g. Orchard, Northgate, Civica etc)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Case study overview / summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue: Building our in-house Debt Advice Service in response to the needs of welfare reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action taken: Changed resource allocation and nature of job description to enable service development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcomes/expected outcomes: Capacity increase in terms of being able to handle a higher case load and to provide assistance to tenants across a wider range of financial / debt issues</td>
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Case study

Over recent years there has been a shift in the direction of the Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) Income Management strategy towards the prevention of debt as opposed to more traditional arrears enforcement. Whilst enforcement still exists the KNH Board has recognised the impact that welfare reform is having on tenants and has given its full support to a change in emphasis of the Debt Advice Service as part of this prevention approach. This support has allowed the size of the Debt Advice Team to be doubled over the last year through a combination of internal resources and additional staff funded on a temporary basis by Kirklees Council. The Debt Advice Team sit within the wider Income Management Team and has 8 experienced members of staff, the majority of whom focus on the early stages of the arrears process.

The Debt Advice Service is well established and provides a full support service to tenants. This ranges from very brief advice right through to supporting tenants to secure Debt Relief orders and bankruptcy proceedings where this becomes necessary. They also actively target Trust Funds that may provide financial or other assistance to tenants in debt.

The number of referrals dealt with by the team has almost doubled in the last year from 681 in 2012/13 to 1,251 in 2013/14. There has been a marked increase in the extent of debt being encountered and in the complexity of cases, particularly for those tenants affected by benefit sanctions. There is a process in place for CAB and other providers to refer cases concerning KNH tenants to the Debt Advice Team.
To ensure a consistent approach and standard of service the job descriptions of Debt Advice staff have been changed to include the requirement to have or work towards professional and training qualifications in debt/money advice. The Service provides internal and external training and briefing sessions on welfare reform, benefits and debt issues.

It is hoped that the investment in Debt Advice will allow KNH to take a strong role in the formation of partnerships required to deliver universal credit. The size and level of experience within the team should also allow KNH to effectively manage the move to direct payment of universal credit to tenants – both in the provision of financial and budgeting advice and support to tenants and in arranging the switch back of payments to the landlord where necessary.
6. Moat

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<td>Organisation name:</td>
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<td>Action taken:</td>
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<td>Outcomes/expected outcomes:</td>
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<th>Case study</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Customer Ambition initiative is about getting it right first time, both for Moat and residents. It’s also about recognising and supporting the different ambitions people have, regardless of their circumstances, ranging from sustaining their tenancy to buying their own home.</td>
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There are three key elements to this initiative, all of which inform the customer ambition:

Financially Fit:
- Ensuring residents can afford the property
- Helping to budget and maximise income
- Managing existing debts
- Supporting with other options if property is unaffordable

Tenancy Fit:
- On-line / face-to-face tenancy training
- Residents have a clear understanding of their responsibility
- Residents understand the consequences of poor behaviour, including 3* service with reduced repair and planned work options
- Follow up visit to discuss any areas where support is required

Work Fit:
- Working with residents on a tailored plan to get back into work or improve their work opportunities

The customer’s ambition is identified initially as part of the tenancy fit assessment. A plan is then developed with the customer to help them achieve their ambitions over a period of time.
This is our vision:

Mrs X successfully bids on number 1 Acacia Avenue. We carry out a pre-tenancy assessment which involves requesting landlord references and a credit check to identify any areas of concern.

We carry out a home visit to assess financial fitness. It is identified that whilst Mrs X should have adequate income, she’s not budgeting effectively and her current expenditure is higher than her income. We develop a budgeting plan with her as part of her tenancy condition which she agrees to.

She is asked to complete the Tenancy Fit Training on-line as she has access to a computer. Once completed, her tenancy is approved.

In the first 4 weeks she receives Financially Fit training which assists her in effective budgeting, maximising her income and ensuring her rent is paid.

At the 4 week visit we talk to Mrs X about:
- Who to contact if her neighbour plays their music too loudly (identified from the Tenancy Fit training). We have a discussion about taking ownership and speaking to the neighbour herself to try and resolve the issue, without the need for formal action. We also talk about reasonableness and people’s right to enjoy their home.
- Budgeting – she felt that the Financially Fit training was really effective and now has money left over at the end of the week.
- Her ambition which she raised as part of her Tenancy Fit training. She wants to secure a better job and own her own home.

To help Mrs X achieve her ambition we:
- Refer her to the Back to Work team who help improve her CV, interview skills and how to search for a better job for herself. As part of this service the team help her to identify any gaps that she may have in qualifications / experience and what she can do to fill them.
- Map a pathway to home ownership and agree realistic goals to achieve this. This also includes building a savings pot with her surplus income as a result of her Financially Fit training and projections from a better paid job.

Six months later, we check back with Mrs X to see how her plans are going. She has completed some training to improve her skills and has been applying for roles. She’s also managed to save just over £500 so far. She has no further support needs at this time.

A year after her tenancy starts, we check back on her plans. She has a new job which pays £5,000 a year more which she really enjoys. She’s managed to save a total of £1,400. At this stage we refer her to our Home Ownership Team to talk her through the level of savings required and properties in the development pipeline.

Two years after her tenancy starts, we check back. Mrs X is still saving, but has not yet saved enough for a deposit to buy a property outright, but has discussed the option of shared ownership with Moat and is considering this.
### Case study

Two years and nine months after the tenancy starts, Mrs X has ended her tenancy. We carry out an exit interview with her and check back on whether she’s achieved her ambitions. She’s very excited to be moving into a Moat shared ownership property and has personal goals for staircasing over the next ten years to fully own her home.
7. North Tyneside Homes

### Organisational Profile

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation name:</th>
<th>North Tyneside Homes (North Tyneside Council)</th>
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### Case study overview / summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue:</th>
<th>Too many tenants were struggling to sustain their tenancies.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action taken:</td>
<td>Development of a sustainable tenancies strategy and procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes/expected outcomes:</td>
<td>Reduction in the number of failed tenancies; reduction in rent arrears; reduction in number of voids; improved levels of satisfaction.</td>
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### Case study

We want our tenants to be able to live in their home for as long as they want to.

To achieve this we need to ensure that we allocate our homes to people who:

- a) Need them
- b) Can afford them
- c) Are able to manage their bills and
- d) Can look after themselves, their household and their property

And, we need to ensure that we provide appropriate advice, help, support and interventions when any of the above are not apparent both at pre-tenancy stage and at any point after the tenancy has started.

We are taking a risk-based approach. We recognised that we need to understand, at the outset and throughout the tenancy, whether or not each individual applicant/tenant is likely to behave in a way that breaches their tenancy agreement. We are therefore changing our processes so that we have the tools to assess people’s ability to pay the rent AND afford to live.

We know intuitively what the indicators are, what the risk factors are. We are now developing processes to capture and make use of these indicators, and we are developing new ways of working that respond to these indicators.

A key factor in creating sustainable tenancies is to improve the financial capability and confidence of our tenants to enable them to live and flourish in their homes. One of the main influencing factors is ensuring that the people who live in our homes have the understanding and confidence to make
informed choices about their money management and budgeting, savings and access to banking products and credit.

Financial capability is about developing a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to make sound financial decisions that support an individual’s well-being.

Some people are able to do this without help and support, but most people, especially those on low incomes, or with complex issues, are not equipped to do so and need some form of help and support.

NTH are developing processes, building on our safeguarding procedures, to enable us to identify those who need such help and support. We are developing a toolkit to empower staff to either provide that assistance or signpost them to where they can get it.

The key to such an approach being successful is to ensure that we are able to make use of the available information to accurately assess the level of risk. And, have a clear understanding of what we will do for each potential risk assessment outcome.

We will categorise our customers based on the level of risk and place them into one of 4 groups / categories:

1) Sustainable Group – these are the customers who do not need any help and support, we rarely see them, they pay their rent, do not disturb their neighbours etc. We need to develop ways to reward these tenants.

2) Challenge Group – these are customers who generally cope, but may need a bit of help and support or encouragement to pay their rent and comply with their tenancy agreement;
   a. provide help and support to make sure they are maximising their income and minimising their expenditure; and
   b. utilise interventions such as Direct Payments, suspension of works and non-Right to Repair repairs, engagement with support for substance misuse, referrals to statutory support services and floating support services.

3) Intensive Support Group - Need a lot of support but will be able to sustain a tenancy if they receive the necessary support. Dependent upon the nature of their need support may be provided via floating support services, voluntary sector organisations, statutory care providers, Health services or partners such as CAB, DWP, the disability forum and Age Concern.

4) Housing Options Group – This group are those that our risk assessment indicates are unlikely to be able to sustain a general needs council tenancy even if they are supported. This group will need a different housing option which may include a referral to a specialist supported housing provider.

All prospective tenants will be assessed, using our ‘sustainability checker’, during the application process to identify which category they should be placed in. The sustainability checker will assess their financial capability, their home management capability and their physical and mental health. We will then ensure that if they require help, support or training they get it.
Applicants will not be granted a ‘passport to housing’ unless they can demonstrate that they are likely to be able to sustain a tenancy (with support if applicable) and that they have positively engaged with the training and support required. We will not allocate a property unless the applicant has a ‘passport to housing’.

All new tenants will be required to sign a ‘tenant commitment’ that is bespoke to their particular needs. The tenant commitment will include descriptions of any help, support or training that the tenant agrees to positively engage with in order to help maintain their tenancy.

North Tyneside Homes will provide the tenant with a copy of our ‘Landlord Commitment’ which will detail what we will do to ensure they are able to sustain their tenancy.

Housing Officers will be responsible for delivering the landlord commitment and for monitoring the key indicators and compliance with the tenant commitment. They will review requirements over time and will reassess the category that tenants are in if appropriate. If the key indicators show that a tenant may be struggling to cope they can be moved from the Sustainable group to the Challenge group and offered the appropriate help and support. The Tenant commitment and Landlord commitment will be updated accordingly.

We now have our vision for the future of our services; we know that in order to deliver our vision we have to radically change the way we work and that this may require a lot more hard work and resilience but we now have commitment from the Council’s political leadership, Senior Management, Service Managers and staff.
8. Poplar HARCA

Organisational Profile

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Case study overview / summary

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<td>Review of structure, resources and procedures</td>
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<td>1. Earlier identification of risks</td>
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<td>2. Better engagement with those in need of support</td>
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<td>3. Prompter robust action</td>
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<td>4. Reduction in arrears</td>
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Case study

Our arrears performance was not comparable with peers and so this was an opportunity to compare, contrast and learn from others who were performing better than we were. It also offered space to think through decisions and model different ways of working using an experienced peer group as sounding board.

Having restructured in 2011 and splitting the rent arrears process between low level arrears managed by frontline housing teams, and higher level managed by a specialist income team it became obvious early on in the CIH Working together project that this model had been tried by others with similar poor income results. Whilst satisfaction from tenants had never been higher, this relationship-model was difficult to balance against the sometimes robust action required to enforce an income recovery strategy.

Key learning from the project supported a review of systems and procedures. One of the workshops offered training on an Appreciative Inquiry methodology which focuses on identifying and ‘appreciating’ what is good in an existing system, and having identified these how to build improvements on the foundation which works.

At the same time as this process, we carried out a lean systems thinking review. Both processes identified pre- and early- tenancy work as vital to arrears prevention. We also wanted to work on how we identify and prioritise casework and support. In the context of welfare reform, bespoke support to affected households mitigating the loss of benefit income was a priority.
Case study

The good points of the existing system we identified were:

- An established core team supported by rising stars, eager to learn and progress
- Orchard prompts actions and guides through the recovery procedure
- Core procedure is succinct, and in line with our peers
- Good support networks, internal and external, providing advice and support ranging through employment and training advice, coaching, family intervention, one-to-one support for vulnerable residents, benefits advice and support, money management workshops and support with utility switching

Even with this strong base results remained disappointing. We therefore implemented a number of interventions:

- Software that supports prioritising casework was developed in-house
- To supplement training already delivered to staff, including collecting money by phone, dealing with difficult conversations, financial inclusion and the welfare reform, CIH provided a tailored course to help staff spot abnormalities in residents’ income and expenditure disclosures. This added a new layer to the advice staff could offer residents in that they could now discuss how much it ‘should’ cost to run a home.
- The model of splitting the process between teams was worked through with staff who decided that a given poor performance a pilot should be run re-centralising the whole process into a single, larger team under a single manager.

Arrears are reducing, even with the impact of welfare reform on some of our residents. We believe that having a process of review which included staff at every stage has ensured that they have ownership of the pilot and have risen to the challenge of getting the money in. In turn, the bespoke support offered by our in-house employment and support team, and a whole-family intervention commissioned from our Family Intervention Team, have been targeted to best effect.

The CIH process gave us an opportunity for a peer consult and acted as a critical friend which will certainly support our decisions for the future of the way we manage this area of work.
9. Salix Homes

### Organisational Profile

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### Case study overview / summary

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<thead>
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<th>Moving from reactive to proactive tenancy management</th>
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<td>Action taken:</td>
<td>Developing our strategic approach</td>
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<th>Outcomes/expected outcomes:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Proactive, tailored services</td>
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<td>• Service delivery informed by real time, responsive customer intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Efficient use of resources focussed on those most in need of support to sustain their tenancy</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Decrease in costs invested in tenancy failure and increase in costs of proactive tenancy management</td>
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### Case study

Like most housing organisations we were aware of and started planning for the changes universal credit would bring in 2013. When we initially started looking at how we would need to respond to universal credit we were looking at it as a single issue – though one that would lead to significant change to our business.

As we started to progress our thinking and planning around universal credit it became clear to us that it was a much bigger and far reaching issue than just a change to the way we would collect rent and a change to the way our customers would receive rent. We realised it had the potential to have far reaching and fundamental changes to the way we work and to the relationship we would need to have with our customers.

We decided that as a starting point, we needed to get everyone in the organisation thinking differently about the challenge of universal credit. We created a deliberate bottom up approach to encourage discussion, ownership and a need to change, and involved and engaged all employees in an employee conference.

The conference with employees introduced universal credit and the impact it could have on customers and Salix Homes. We used the conference to ask employees;
Learning Report

Case study

- What are the challenges and barriers to the way we work currently?
- If we were setting up the business in a world were universal credit already existed what would we do? How would it be different?
- What can each team do to contribute to collecting rent and reducing arrears?
- Can we identify different ways of working?

The outcome of these sessions was at a number of levels;

- Lots of good ideas from staff about how we manage the changes
- Employees up for the challenge
- May be difficult to manage the change due to the long (and ever changing) timescales
- Ensuring the messages get out to our customers and are understood – massive culture change for customers
- Draft process for income management

More importantly, the conference highlighted that the change is not about universal credit. Employees identified that it is about the way we work to create and sustain tenancies across the business, that we need to develop or re-instating the landlord/tenant relationship and it’s about developing responsibility – both our responsibility as a landlord and our customers’ responsibility as tenants.

This work and the "Working together to create sustainable tenancies" project lead us to realise that universal credit for us is part of a bigger change and is an opportunity we need to exploit.

We then did some work with our service managers and CIH on thinking about our strategic direction. With service managers we looked at what the service would look like in 2020 for tenants, applicants, employees and partners and we distilled this down into an aim and a vision for Salix Homes around tenancy sustainability.

**A tenancy that lasts as long as the household wants it.**

**Services that sustain tenancies and maximise life opportunities**

We used the vision and aim to help map a customer journey from application through to termination based on the 2020 service looking at interventions, support, sanctions and barriers. This gave us a number of insights into our current services including;

- We manage by and react to failure – this is what drives our service delivery for most services.
- We have big gaps in real customer insight – we don’t really know our tenants or use the data we have on how our customers use our services to inform, change or develop how we deliver services.
- We have created a silo working culture which has created gaps in service handover points – we need to deliver a more seamless service.
- We are KPI driven – this approach lacks substance and KPIs don’t necessarily measure the things we need to know to help sustain tenancies.
- So far our work has been driven by responding to welfare reform/universal credit changes – the key driver is to sustain tenancies and increase life opportunities.
As a result of this work we are developing a Sustainable Tenancies Strategy which aims to ensure we focus our resources in a proactive way to increase tenancy sustainability and maximise our tenants’ life opportunities. This is a massive cultural change for both our employees and for our tenants and we know it will take a long time to get from our current traditional approach to housing management which responds to tenancy failure, to a truly proactive service that is able to anticipate and prevent where a tenant may be struggling, and, intervene before it becomes a problem.

We have started this journey by employing a business analyst who sits within the directorate. This role is in the process of using the data we hold in our management systems to create a better understanding of our customers and our customers’ behaviour. We will use this data to develop a risk and vulnerability matrix to help us identify which of our customers need the most support to sustain their tenancy and those who should be able to maintain their tenancies with no or minimal support. We will then tailor services and communications differently to different groups of tenants depending on their needs enabling us to free up resources to help support the most vulnerable tenants.

As part of the Sustainable Tenancies Strategy we have also set up a project looking in detail at our new business operating model, what support interventions we need to develop and training and communications. These are led by our service managers with representation from across the business to ensure everyone is bought into our Sustainable Tenancies Strategy and the changes we need to make to move away from our traditional approach to housing management to a more proactive service.
10. Thrive Homes

**Organisational Profile**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation name:</th>
<th>Thrive Homes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location (region):</td>
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**Case study overview / summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue:</th>
<th>Reactive Tenancy Management Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action taken:</td>
<td>Pre-tenancy workshop to determine service offer for future customers Workhop to determine service offer based on customer behaviour and tenancy segmentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes/expected outcomes:</td>
<td>Target appropriate tenancy management resources to deliver thriving tenancies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Case study**

Thrive Homes’ vision is a “thriving community where there are life choices and opportunities”. The challenges to achieving this vision have been:

- The way the tenancy management services have been structured, is geographically focussed, reactive and not focussed on successful outcomes for Thrive Homes customers;
- The established tenancy sustainment and financial inclusion services whilst successful in sustaining tenancies, involved multiple officer involvement, which created duplication and efficiencies;
- Pre-tenancy services were limited and not focussed.

From November 2013 to April 2014, the Homes and Neighbourhoods Division has been developing how services can be delivered that meet and focus on customer service offers based on cost using the profitable and non-profitable methodology; identifying how influencing customer behaviour can sustain tenancies and housing opportunities longer term; develop an approach to tenancy management that is flexible providing support and intervention where needed, to deliver low contact tenancy management services for the remainder of our tenants.

For pre-tenancy support we held a workshop with all front line staff involved in the “settling in process”, to agree the business case: we developed the approach for a pre-tenancy support service as a passport to housing and tenancy; a process mapping exercise has identified the pre-tenancy support route, and developed a new procedure and actions. The local authority and choice based lettings consortium will be involved in finalising the approach to deliver pre-tenancy support to ensure consistency and business benefits across all service providers. The initial numbers of applicants benefitting from this service offer...
will be up to 100 new tenants per year, at an average loss of tenancy cost of £7k, this would deliver a potential cost avoidance/saving of up to £700k per year if all tenancies were sustained.

We have reviewed the sign-up process, which will be launched later in 2014/15 as “exchange of contracts” and for the process to be more focussed on behaviours, payment culture and sustaining tenancies.

To follow on from the pre-tenancy support, all new tenants will automatically receive a service offer for intensive starter tenancy/pre-fixed term tenancy management [April 2015 implementation], this service will also be extended to risk-based mutual exchanges and contractual tenancies. A dedicated customer support worker will have up to 250 tenancies to support and manage during the first 12 – 18 months of the tenancy. For additional support, a dedicated Income Management resource has been employed to support starter/pre-fixed tenancies; those tenants subject to the bedroom tax and benefits cap.

We will be carrying out a review of tenancy sustainment and financial inclusion services currently provided as a separate service accessed through referrals; this service has delivered some successful outcomes for tenants, and prevented loss of tenancy either through eviction or abandonment. There is a clear business case for this service to be incorporated within the Pre-fixed/starter and intervention tenancy management service [April 2015], supporting the risk-based tenancy management solution to sustain tenancies. This approach will provide customers and Thrive Homes with an infrastructure for sustainment for all tenancy types including future customers; the benefits already realised by Thrive Homes within the existing sustainment service will ensure our vision for “thrive community where there are life choices and opportunities” are met.
11. Trident Social Investment Group

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<tr>
<th>Organisational Profile</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation name:</td>
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<td>Main IT supplier (e.g. Orchard, Civica etc)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Case study overview / summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action taken:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes/expected outcomes:</td>
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**Case study**

Trident were very keen to be involved in this project, partly, of course, out of a desire to reduce tenancy failure in the traditional sense, but also because it promised a re-examination of what tenancy sustainment or tenancy success is.

The work with CIH not only allowed us time to benchmark with other organisations but to examine how we as an organisation would define success and what we could do to achieve this. We concluded as a project group that the definition of tenancy sustainment differs widely depending upon the type of provider you are and the type of stock you have, but that there were common themes and lessons for us all.

The three key lessons for Trident were:

- Pre-tenancy work and assessment are essential
- We need to invest more in understanding why tenancies succeed as well as why they fail, and make sure our recording of both is more detailed.
- Tenancy sustainment is not the responsibility of one department but needs an organisational commitment and involvement of all teams to succeed.

The starting point for us as an organisation was the pressure welfare reform is, and will be, putting residents under, and of course the risk this potentially poses to tenancy sustainment. We had already started an examination of our internal processes and support mechanisms, and concluded that we
would need to restructure and expand our Tenancy Support Team to cope with the increasing demand and used our consultancy days within the project to help shape this restructure and clarify the goals of it.

The restructure itself took an existing team of eight Tenancy Support Officers, plus two admin staff and one manager, whose responsibilities included some generic support but also the letting of properties and management of mutual exchange, succession etc., and transformed this into a team of nine Community-Based Tenancy Support Officers, two admin staff, one Sign-up Officer, three Full-time Money and Welfare Advisors one of whom is solely engaged with dealing with supporting transfers and re-homing for anyone who is struggling with the affordability of their home (particularly in relation to the size criteria reductions).

The management of the service was also re-structured so that a team manager could concentrate on operational management, while a newly created Assistant Head of Service could focus on strategic management of the service as a whole.

The re-structure of the service was designed to support the delivery of our re-examined aims in terms of tenancy sustainment. Before starting the project we had a relatively clear picture of how our stock functions (having explored this to develop our Tenancy Policy). Trident’s stock lends itself predominantly to move-on accommodation, so in exploring our definitions of sustainment and success with the CIH project, we concluded that for us tenancy sustainment is not all about residents staying in their property for as long a period of time as possible. Instead we see tenancy sustainment as a tenant or other resident staying in their property, as long as they wish to, being able to move on with no difficulties and only for positive reasons. Clearly meeting tenancy obligations throughout is a key indicator of success but we also define tenancy success within Trident as being one where residents can explore and achieve wider aspirations, for example around employment prospects or managing finances.

We drew together our aims and the learning from the creating sustainable tenancies project into a full organisation-wide policy. The Tenancy Sustainment Policy seeks to draw together all the mechanisms through which Trident aims to improve tenancy sustainment. This includes our work on the following:

- **Pre-tenancy assessment and workshops**: it was universally agreed by the housing providers taking part that early intervention and preferably pre-tenancy identification of any potential impediments to tenancy sustainment would be essential. We discussed carrying out group session workshops with applicants to ensure they understand all tenancy obligations and identify any pre-existing issues. At Trident we are not currently able to do this for all applicants, but since a large number of tenants come internally through our hostel accommodation we are rolling out workshops for these internal applicants. We have also used the support documents provided by the CIH and our discussions to re-work the pre-tenancy assessment process and form.

- **Tenancy Audit**: One of the most oft repeated messages throughout the workshops is that getting resident information correct and keeping it up to date is integral to targeting resources appropriately. Trident are introducing regular mandatory tenancy audit and well-being checks to take place in people’s homes in order to make sure that no resident slips through the net and remains unseen or unheard, and so that we are sure our profiling information is up to date.

- **Journey Plan**: The Journey Plan is a key tool we have developed to try to encourage and assist with resident aspirations, and intervene where appropriate. We discussed a great deal during the
project that as social housing providers we are in a position to offer more than just keys to a property, and that for Trident, amongst others, our residents often need more than that.

The Journey Plan we have developed is designed not to be prescriptive but to encourage residents to think about what they want to achieve and for Trident to assist where possible and where appropriate. The Plan is entirely self-rated by residents asking how they score their confidence, competence and interest in certain areas. This self-assessment then forms the basis for a discussion with their local Community Based Support Officer who can offer internal or external referrals to help residents meet aspirations or resolve difficulties.

Although it is too early for us to comment on the tangible outcomes of our work in this area, in summary working with CIH and other housing providers has helped Trident structure what we hope to be a positive and proactive response that will mitigate against the external pressures and risks to tenancy sustainment.
12. Wulvern Housing

Organisational Profile

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation name:</th>
<th>Wulvern Housing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location (region):</td>
<td>Crewe (Cheshire)</td>
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Case study overview / summary

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue:</th>
<th>Income Maximisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action taken:</td>
<td>Evaluate customer journey; review of front line services, processes, policies and procedures</td>
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<tr>
<th>Outcomes/expected outcomes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Risk mitigation by matching the right person to the right property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Increased support / engagement provided to customers through smaller patch management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Better understanding of the ‘mutual contract’ between Wulvern and our customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reduction in arrears</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Increased customer satisfaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case study

Although we had completed a systems thinking review of how our customers access the services offered by Wulvern in early 2013, key learnings from the Working together to create sustainable tenancies project supported our subsequent review of front-line services to better respond to the impact of welfare reform.

The review of our customer journey had already highlighted that:

- Our Neighbourhood service was reactive and lacked a clear purpose
- Although our Income Team focused on prevention and early intervention, there was still a lack of customer engagement and rent wasn’t seen as a priority
- Affordability issues were worsening – 25 percent of customers had outgoings greater than their incomings
- Homes were often left in a poor condition as customers were not supported to maintain their homes
- Our Supporting Living Team were proactive, working in smaller patches, in a mobile way which enabled them to better know and support customers
Case study

The evaluation of our findings demonstrated that the most effective way to support customers was to get closer to them. This was a view which was shared by many peers on the project, and the project themes of pre-tenancy activities, income collection and tenancy sustainment activities further highlighted the need to know customers to support them in light of welfare reform.

The review of our neighbourhood services has meant that we now have a structure in place that will enable every customer to know a key contact within Wulvern who is passionate, skilled and accountable for their service. It will also mean that every customer understands what is expected of them to maintain their contract with Wulvern, which is discussed at the pre-tenancy stage and revisited during the tenancy as required. The service review has also realised:

- A team of Allocations Specialists to focus on pre-tenancy activity making sure all new customers begin their journey with Wulvern positively by matching the right person to the right property in the right place, and ensuring relevant support is in place to be able to pay and stay
- A team of generic Neighbourhood Workers managing patch sizes of approximately 250, focussing on sign up, tenancy and estate management, income advice / arrears collection, anti-social behaviour and customer engagement to ensure sustainable tenancies
- A team of Income Specialists to provide expert advice to the Neighbourhood Workers to enable effective income collection, customer support and enforcement action on the frontline where expectations have not been met
- A specialist Financial Inclusion Team focusing on welfare benefits, debt advice, budgeting support, affordable warmth and digital inclusion

Although the review has only recently been completed, we have already experienced a significant improvement in our arrears performance and income maximisation for our customers.

- Being part of the Working together project gave us an excellent opportunity to consult and share learnings with our peers. Workshop five was particularly useful as it allowed us to present our ideas around shaping services to help achieve sustainable tenancies, inviting comments and challenge from other organisations. We also used the project workbook as a check list to ensure best practice, and to refer to during the redesign of our neighbourhood services.
Further Resources

*Working together to create sustainable tenancies* has stimulated debate and broadened and deepened thinking amongst participating organisations. As a result, CIH consultancy is working with a number of social landlords to develop services to respond to issues and identified needs.

The following services are in development and will be available to the sector over the coming months:

**Measuring Sustainable Tenancies**

- A measurement tool that will take a cross-section of a landlord’s commonly held data to identify tenancies that may be at risk. Facilitating landlords to target resources to those most in need, this tool assists in delivering services that are value for money.

**CIH Pre-tenancy Charter**

- Drawing on learning from the project, providing a framework against which landlords can measure the robustness of their pre-tenancy process.

**CIH Income Management Charter**

- Welfare reforms call for a fresh look at rent income management and how the service integrates with both customer and business priorities. This new Charter, developed with representatives from the sector, brings updated thinking to this core housing management function and is a useful tool against which to assess organisations’ existing performance and to identify areas requiring development.

**CIH Income Management Charter Accreditation**

- Developed following feedback from the sector, this new accreditation will enable organisations to test their income management service through a robust and independent assessment by CIH, the home of standards.

**Our Tenancy Sustainment Unit provided by CIH Consultancy offers the following services to support landlords in developing sustainable tenancies:**

- Intensive support to develop strategic approach through working with Boards, elected Members and Executive Teams.
- Action planning workshops and systems re-engineering using a range of methods including Lean and Appreciative Inquiry.
- Assessing the business case to understand how to influence behaviour.
- Improving communication through developing a robust social marketing approach.
- Customer segmentation and demand / value analysis.
- Critical challenge and forensic assessment of policy and process – including allocations, lettings, voids, income management and other services that impact tenancy sustainment.
- Support to develop a robust and appropriate employment support offer / service.

Our work is delivered by high calibre and imaginative specialists, who provide expert additional resource to organisations.
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info@cih.org