

POSITION STATEMENT ON TENURE

March 2012

Introduction

We recognise the severe pressure which exists for social housing and we agree that it should be available to those in most need. As such we are supportive of the concept of flexible fixed term tenancies. Used well it can go a long way to alleviating the mismatch between over-crowded and under-occupied properties. It will also allow those who can afford home ownership an added incentive to move into this market as their need for social housing diminishes.

We feel however that the opportunities presented by flexible fixed term tenancies are not the same for landlords and tenants of older people's supported housing as they are for general needs tenants. In many ways the introduction of such a system of tenure could be harmful both to the support services provided and to the well-being of the residents.

This document sets out our position statement on tenure. It explains our rationale and how we can work with local authorities to help address the housing pressures they may be facing. We hope it will be of use in helping our local authority partners pull together their tenancy strategies.

Retirement housing and lifetime tenancies

Sheltered retirement housing promotes and sustains independence in older people. It does this in a number of ways:

- By providing low level support and/or emergency alarm services which help residents to stay independent and receive help in an emergency.
- By fostering an active and supportive community environment in which tenants are prevented from becoming socially isolated.
- Providing a secure and safe home environment

The benefits of a stable long term home for older people within such a setting are clearly recognised by the Government.

Good housing for older people can enable them to live healthy, independent lives and reduces pressure on working families in caring for older relatives. It can also prevent costs to the NHS and social care¹.

and;

¹ Laying the Foundations – page 48

A guarantee of social housing for life for some new tenants

Many of those provided with a social home should, over time, be able to move out of the social sector into the private rented sector or low cost home ownership, as their circumstances change. However, we recognise that the needs of some are likely to remain broadly constant over the long term and social housing (although not necessarily the same social home) to remain permanently the most appropriate form of tenure for them because of the stability and security which it provides. This is likely to be the case particularly for older people and those with a long term illness or disability².

Good quality retirement housing with a guarantee on tenure has many benefits and means older people are less likely to need higher-cost accommodation related services, such as residential care.

We believe that uncertainty over where a person may be living in a few years' time would affect an older person significantly more than other categories of tenants who may be more able to adjust to a new environment in response to their changing family and economic circumstances. This is even more so the case when:

- The resident may have a number of ailments and disabilities and;
- The housing provided to that older person is tied into support which has been tailored specifically for them.

Our policy at Anchor then is to give all those moving into a retirement housing setting a periodic assured, (lifetime) tenancy. There may be the occasional exemption in circumstances:

- When a customer has to be temporarily decanted from their permanent home or;
- On new developments which have not had public funding and we decide to let some unsold properties at a market rent on an assured short hold tenancy.

Tenancy turnover and move on support

To further justify our position on providing lifetime tenancies it is useful to provide some additional information which explains what is usually witnessed with tenancies within a retirement housing location.

Tenancies are typically not of long duration. In 2010/11 the average length of tenancy of those residents within Anchor who terminated their tenancy was just under 6 years.

The turnover of tenancies is also significant compared to general needs housing - with 16% (approximately 3,500) of tenants ending their tenancy in this year.

² See section 2.50, page 28 of *Local decisions: a fairer future for social housing*

Therefore, though we provide lifetime tenancies the actual experience of many of our customers is that their tenancy may typically be of a shorter duration than tenants of a general needs provider. This is not unique to Anchor but reflective of the age group and the type of housing.

One reason for the higher rate of turnover could be a by-product of the support we provide customers who start to struggle with their home. In these circumstances we will work closely with them, the medical and care services and, where applicable, their relatives to explore opportunities for more suitable and supportive housing. Where it is their choice such support often leads to the customer, with our assistance, finding more suitable housing for themselves.

To help such moves we are developing a number of initiatives to inform our customers about life in an Anchor care home. This will often help customers make this important decision.

Size of accommodation and our allocation policy

A concern of the Government is that there are too many people under-occupying their home when there are large numbers of people on waiting lists living in overcrowded accommodation.

We have a lettings policy driven by the desire to maximise occupancy. This means we will always seek to prioritise applicants whose household size or medical need for accommodation best fits that property.

94% of our stock is also either studio or one bed accommodation – therefore there is never any question of most of our property being under-occupied.

In contrast we know that many under-occupied homes within the general needs sector will be tenanted by households whose children have grown up and left and who now have reached retirement age or be getting near to it. It is also our belief that a lot of these households may not be aware of the advantages of living in a retirement housing complex. We see many advantages for such tenants, namely lower rents and running costs, socially vibrant and supportive communities, a feeling of security and access to the services of a location manager who looks out for their welfare. It is not a housing choice for everyone but it will be for many. If there is any way we can promote the benefits of retirement housing to help address the under occupation challenge facing our local authority partners then we would be happy to discuss these with you.

Establishing balanced communities

The average age of an Anchor tenant is 77 years. 11% (2,700 tenants) are aged 90 or over. We also have a number of tenants in their late 50s.

Though it is hard to generalise it is clear that we will have a broad range of age groups on most locations with varying levels of support needs. Our location manager will do a lot to help support tenants but often the most beneficial aspects of living in a retirement housing setting will come out of the

relationships that are forged with neighbours. The wide age distribution evident at most locations therefore helps in making sure that there is an active and supportive community. An age profile which is too old can be detrimental to the life of the location. We believe our allocation policy helps foster these communities.

As part of our lettings process we invite the applicant to the location before allocating a property. This allows the applicant to visit us, meet the location manager and their potential neighbours and decide if the property, services and facilities would meet their requirements. It also allows us to identify and start to address their support needs.

Rent

All our assured social housing rents are set by reference to the Government's rent restructuring framework. Where we have secure tenancies we will still use target rents as the basis of our application to the Rent Service. We will not set rents above the target rent even if the Rent Officer allows this.

The only time we might provide housing at affordable rents would be on new privately funded developments where we can't secure planning without its inclusion on the site. At the time of writing we have no projects in the pipeline with affordable housing included.

Succession

Our policy on succession has always been to seek to provide our assured tenants where possible with the same level of tenancy rights as those tenants who have a secure tenancy. On succession we will therefore allow a non-spouse family member a right to remain (with a new tenancy) as long as they satisfy all the following conditions:

- They lived with the tenant for 12 months immediately prior to their death
- They meet our age eligibility criteria
- They are not under-occupying the property
- They did not, in our opinion, contribute to any breach of tenancy by the late tenant.

Where a resident does not meet these criteria we will work with them to find more suitable alternative accommodation.

Next steps

This statement on tenure is to help us explain our position to our local authority partners. We will be interested to learn what you feel about the tenure needs of older people and will produce a final policy position by April 2013.