



PREVENTING EVICTIONS FROM SUPPORTED HOUSING

An Eviction Protocol for Supported Housing Providers

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1 Introduction

- 1.1** Gateshead Council and its partners are committed to preventing homelessness and rough sleeping through early interventions. Ensuring that accommodation is sustainable is integral to the Council's response to preventing homelessness. Supported housing providers should ensure that an eviction is only carried out when there are no other options available.
- 1.2** Due to the nature of supported housing provision the people who access the services may have complex issues which need to be managed in a structured way. We appreciate that there will be difficulties and it is not always easy to meet people's needs. We also know, however, that when someone loses their accommodation because they are evicted they risk becoming excluded from other forms of accommodation and being made street homeless.
- 1.3** It is clear that when someone is evicted it can escalate existing problems or result in new ones which makes it more difficult for a person to become independent and make positive changes. An eviction can undermine efforts to tackle substance misuse, undermine efforts to reduce re-offending, have a negative impact on health, cause financial difficulties and disrupt relationships with family and friends.
- 1.4** The intention of this protocol is to build on the good practice and formalise existing arrangements to ensure there is a consistent approach to preventing evictions.

2 Objectives of the protocol

- 2.1** This protocol has three stages:
- Stage 1:** Action to be taken before a service user moves into accommodation to identify support needs and what steps could be taken to minimise any risks that could lead to the loss of the accommodation.
- Stage 2:** Action to be taken when a person is accommodated to deal with any problems that arise.
- Stage 3:** Action to be taken where there is a threat of eviction and the loss of accommodation is likely to happen.
- 2.2** The principle behind this protocol is when a person living in supported accommodation is at risk of being evicted a Senior Housing Options Officer is notified at an early stage. The Senior Housing Options Officer should be notified when a notice is being considered. The Senior Housing Options Officer will work with the provider to identify opportunities for additional support and/or agree a

pathway into more appropriate accommodation. It is expected that no eviction will occur unless this discussion has taken place and all options to prevent the eviction have been exhausted.

3 Eviction protocol procedures

Stage 1: This outlines what action should be taken before someone moves into a supported housing project to identify support needs, existing support networks and to take reasonable steps to minimise the risk of the placement failing.

3.1 Access into supported housing is via Gateshead Councils Supported Housing portal. The referral form should help to identify any risks and support needs which may make a person more vulnerable to eviction, for example, previous evictions, substance misuse, history of rough sleeping or homelessness.

3.2 It is essential that before a person is admitted to a project consideration is given to how someone can sustain the accommodation. We appreciate that it is not always easy to identify vulnerabilities prior to placement but it is essential that as soon as any concerns materialise which could make the person vulnerable to losing their accommodation action is taken, i.e. support to address substance misuse issues or debt problems.

3.3 The supported accommodation provider should identify other agencies who are involved and ensure they are consulted in the support planning process and are updated with how the person is managing in the accommodation.

Stage 2: This outlines what action should be taken when a person is accommodated to deal with any problems that arise.

3.4 The supported accommodation providers in Gateshead have internal policies and procedures for managing people in their projects and they can recognise the signs and triggers that can lead to the loss of the accommodation. Providers use a range of sanctions and warnings which give people an opportunity to address the issues which may result in their eviction.

3.5 Recognising and understanding behaviour and actions which could result in the loss of accommodation is essential in preventing evictions.

3.6 The table below provides examples of problems that could arise and suggestions of how to deal with them:

Warning signs	Actions that could be taken to prevent potential eviction
Not engaging with support	<p>More informal contact or building relationships during other activities or meal times.</p> <p>Opportunities such as room inspections could be used as a way of engaging a person.</p> <p>Client may engage better with another support worker.</p> <p>Link lack of engagements to sanctions.</p> <p>Consider a referral to Fulfilling Lives (see appendix 1).</p>
Not staying at the project or spending a disproportionate amount of time out of the project	<p>Consider an engagement contract where the client agrees to spend a certain amount of time in the project.</p> <p>Discuss with the client where they are going – is this an opportunity for a positive move on?</p> <p>Why are they not spending time in the project – is this due to the environment or support offered?</p>
Arrears	<p>Record all discussions and contacts in regards to arrears that identifies what support was offered.</p> <p>Have all opportunities to maximise income been exhausted in regards to benefit entitlement, including DHP's?</p> <p>Can direct payment via DWP be applied for?</p> <p>Are benefits an issue and if so would a referral to a Social Justice Coach be appropriate (see appendix 2)?</p> <p>Are there substance misuse issues which are leading to arrears and what actions can be taken to support the person with this?</p> <p>Are there mental health issues which are leading to arrears and what actions can be taken to support the person with this?</p>
Not happy with the environment	<p>Encourage feedback and complaints and plan changes based on this.</p> <p>Encourage participation in house meetings.</p> <p>Is there scope for a sideways move to a different project?</p>
Isolation and no social networks	<p>Encourage involvement at social events within the project or elsewhere.</p> <p>Consider a planned move to an area where their social networks are.</p>
Never lived in a similar environment	<p>Ensure materials are produced for potential residents and referrers which outline what the project can offer.</p> <p>Carry out a tour of the project at interview stage.</p> <p>Intensive support for a short period of time when moving in.</p> <p>Develop a 'buddy' system to help new residents integrate.</p>
Risk of offending	<p>Arrange diversionary activities.</p> <p>Work closely with probation and the police.</p>

Stage 3: This outlines what action is to be taken where there is a threat of accommodation and losing the accommodation is likely.

3.9 If despite the use of internal warning systems and sanctions it is likely that an eviction will take place projects should ensure that a Senior Housing Options Officer is notified before the notice is served. It is essential that contact is made before the

notice is served so Housing Services are aware that the placement is breaking down in order for alternatives to be explored and so advice can be given.

3.10 Alternatively for under 18's, the Young Persons Homeless Prevention worker should be contacted on 0191 433 2540 before the notice is served.

4 Outcomes following notification that an eviction is likely

4.1 Additional support

If the standard package of support is not working for the client but the placement is thought to be suitable for them, it may be possible to identify additional support or care services to meet their needs for a short period to see if this makes a difference. The Senior Housing Options Officer and the project manager will agree possible interventions and make suitable arrangements to try and prevent the eviction.

4.2 Finding alternative accommodation

It is hoped that in the majority of cases, other accommodation will be identified before the client has to leave the project. A sideways move to a sister project may help where the client is in conflict with another resident or staff member. The project manager and the Senior Housing Options Officer will agree this move as it may affect other residents in the alternative accommodation.

4.3 Rent arrears

It may be possible to secure financial support around arrears in order to prevent an eviction and put support in place, i.e. to support the client resolve benefit issues, debt advice, one off payments to prevent homelessness.

Appendix 1

Fulfilling Lives

Fulfilling Lives mission is to work with those people in Newcastle and Gateshead who experience a number of difficulties across alcohol and drug dependency, mental health, accommodation or offending, and who are not benefiting from the current service provision. Our aim is to develop and support new ways of working by challenging both the system and stereotypes so that people can improve their overall physical and mental health, find safe accommodation and have the opportunity for paid work: so that they can lead Fulfilling Lives.

If your client is struggling to engage with support and has multiple complex needs, i.e. at least three issues around housing, mental health, substance misuse and/or offending) please consider a referral to the Fulfilling Lives programme. Referrals can be made via the website at www.fulfillinglives-ng.org.uk or if you have any queries contact 0191 2565044.

Appendix 2

Social Justice Coaches – Contact Details for Gateshead

Gateshead and Felling

Sandie Andrews	0191 4514211	sandie.andrews@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
	0771 7815542	
Lynn Bricknall	0191 4514258	lynn.bricknall@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
	0778 9174744	

Blaydon and Hexham

Sharon Connelly	0191 4516921	sharon.connelly@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
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Key barriers that the Coaches support clients to deal with:

Drug and alcohol addiction	Multiple sanctions
Disability	Severe indebtedness
Family breakdown	Educational failure / low skills
Troubled Families	Mental ill health
Care leavers	Vulnerable customers
Domestic Violence	Ex-offenders
Homelessness	Ethnic minorities