



Low Demand Strategy

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1. Aim of this strategy

1.1 The primary aim of this evolving Strategy is to overcome the problem of Low Demand properties and to make properties that fall into this category more appealing. In doing so, ACHA will seek to:

- Understand and recognise the triggers that may indicate difficult to let properties
- Put in place timely and appropriate solutions to resolve emerging low demand issues
- Minimise the number and the impact of low demand properties
- Create sustainable communities

2. Objectives

2.1 Empty properties need to be turned around quickly to ensure we:

- Meet Customer Demand
- Reduce rent loss
- Reduce risk of vandalism

2.2 The aims will be achieved through the following actions:

- Regular monitoring and review of relevant key performance information to ensure that low demand properties are quickly identified and dealt with
- Make use of a range of initiatives to address low demand properties in the short term
- Take a “Tailored Approach” where required (see options at 5.2 and 9.2)
- Links to our Asset Management Strategy to ensure longer term solutions for properties that are continually difficult to let
- Regular review and monitoring of our Common Allocations Policy (HOME Argyll) to ensure this has a positive effect on areas that are difficult to let
- Monitoring of environmental spend, where properties are difficult to let and suffer from high turnover

3. Background

3.1 ACHA operates a Common Housing Register in partnership with the Local Authority and the 3 Registered Social Landlords’s operating within the Argyll & Bute area. We aim to provide good quality, affordable housing for those in housing need and to create and maintain sustainable communities where people want to live.

3.2 Having only one common database for everyone who wants to be housed in Argyll & Bute makes it much easier to match applicants to the social rented housing available at any given time. This means that applicants have a much better chance of being offered the type of accommodation that suits their particular needs.

3.3 This is a key objective for ACHA as experience shows quite clearly that when people are living in properties that suit their needs, in an area they want to live in, they are far more likely to stay there and this in turn helps to keep that community viable for both current and future generations.

- 3.4 ACHA is the largest Housing Association in Argyll and Bute and has accommodation across the whole local authority area. Most properties are general needs homes, but the Association also has sheltered housing for older people some amenity housing and 3 Travelling Person Sites.

4. Definition of Low Demand

- 4.1 A low demand property (empty or occupied) is a property where one or more of the following symptoms are exhibited:
- a small or non-existent waiting list for the property
 - tenancy offers on a dwelling are frequently refused for reasons other than personal reasons
 - higher than normal rates of tenancy turnover for a property in an area.
- 4.2 For the purpose of this strategy, a property is difficult to let if it has had three or more refusals, or it is within a scheme where there is a turnover of 20% or more in any year.

5. Initiatives to address Low Demand:

- 5.1 Where a property or development has been designated as Low Demand, Initiatives can be implemented for that property or development. The reasons and possible solutions are likely to be different in each case.
- 5.2 The Initiatives can include, but are not limited to, one or more of the following:
- **Analysing Refusal Reasons and Exit Surveys**
 - **Consulting with remaining tenants in scheme**
 - **Consulting with tenants who have left the scheme**
 - **Consulting with applicants on the HOME Argyll Waiting List**
 - **Consulting with Community Groups and other Organisations etc, operating within the area**
 - **Advertising properties through HOME Argyll website and Association Website, local offices and local and national press**
 - **Advertising at Local Community Events, surgeries, hospitals, CAB**
 - **Extending times for convenient viewing appointments (include evenings and weekends)**
 - **Offer to applicants not usually eligible for the property (i.e. permit under-occupation) where waiting lists have been exhausted**
 - **Enhanced new tenant pack (i.e. light bulbs, cleaning materials, batteries)**
 - **Enhance Minimum Letting Standard**
 - **Offering a “garden tidy”**
 - **Offering a White Goods Allowance**
 - **Enhanced Décor Allowances**
 - **Bringing forward Scottish Housing Quality Standard works**
 - **Environmental Improvements**
 - **Offering rent free weeks**
- 5.3 Many of the possible solutions are relatively minor gestures that may achieve an allocation of the property.

6 Sheltered Housing

- 6.1 ACHA has 11 Sheltered housing schemes within the Argyll & Bute area, providing 204 units of supported accommodation.
- 6.2 The introduction of Service Charges in 2009 has made the cost of sheltered housing accommodation much more expensive, particularly to those who have to fund this themselves.
- 6.3 Care in the community means that elderly people can remain in their properties for longer, with tailored care packages and community alarms. Elderly people are therefore more unwilling to leave their own properties to accept a smaller property in a sheltered housing scheme.
- 6.4 There is a need to identify means of raising the profile of particular difficult to let sheltered housing schemes through the implementation of effective marketing strategies and the promotion of particular schemes to the local and wider community through community events and publicity. For example:
 - Issuing of scheme specific marketing and promotional leaflets, posters and brochures
 - Arranging promotional open days to promote schemes, including opportunities to view properties and facilities
 - Promotion through website
 - Advertising in local and national publications aimed at older people
 - Promotion to Social Work, Health Care Workers & Agencies/Voluntary Organisations /Churches, who deal with the client group on a regular basis.
 - Initiatives detailed in Section 5 above will also be considered

7. Travelling Person Sites

- 7.1. ACHA has 3 Travelling Person Sites within the Argyll & Bute area, providing 32 pitches for caravans.
- 7.2. In some sites there is an emerging pattern of reduced demand with some pitches being empty for lengthy periods before they are re-let
- 7.3. Annual consultation will take place with tenants at the 3 sites and local meetings will be held to discuss tenants' thoughts on current services provided and to identify and determine priorities for any site improvements
- 7.4. Pitches advertised in relevant publications
- 7.5. We will provide easily accessible information on the full range of housing options for Gypsy/Travellers including access to pitches
- 7.6. Initiatives detailed in Section 5 above will also be considered

8. Financial Costs

- 8.1 The financial implications of implementing this strategy must be seen in the context of the amount of rent loss currently being incurred through properties remaining void for long periods. Without these initiatives properties will remain void and difficult to let.
- 8.2 Costs in implementing any of the above initiatives are to be met from the relevant Void Budget.
- 8.3 A Report, detailing the Initiative and the estimated budgetary cost must be submitted to the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services, for approval prior to any initiative being carried out.
- 8.4 The positive and negative financial impact of this strategy will be reported to the Board of Management on a regular basis.

9. Links to Asset Management Strategy

- 9.1 There is a need to identify exactly what makes particular properties unpopular and identify measures to make them more lettable and consider other measures to address issues which contribute to their unpopularity.
- 9.2 This links to a wider Asset Management Strategy to make better use of existing properties and related land. Measures could include:
- Refurbishment Programmes
 - Alternative Use
 - Re-Modelling Programmes
 - Demolition and Rebuilding
 - Transfer to other organisations
- 9.3 Before undertaking any of the above, individual scheme appraisals need to be carried out to identify:
- Tenant satisfaction levels
 - Void performance
 - Reasons for leaving
 - Reasons for refusal, demand for the scheme and/or type of accommodation
 - Technical and cost analysis to undertake improvements and conversion to meet the needs and aspirations of tenants
 - Comparisons with other providers of similar accommodation in the area
 - Consideration of management issues within the area
- 9.4 For properties where a major refurbishment, redevelopment or significant expenditure is required this will be subject to a separate project appraisal presented to the Board of Management.

10. Performance Monitoring & Reporting

- 10.1 Low Demand trends will be discussed within local teams and reported to the Senior Staff meeting.
- 10.2 Reports will include information regarding remedial action taken, or highlight areas where longer term solutions are required. Financial costs will also be detailed, along with any identified risks.
- 10.3 Outcome information obtained through, for example, exit surveys, will provide direction and Action plans will be developed to monitor these outcomes.
- 10.4 Individual Feedback will be given to Communities
- 10.5 General feedback will be given via the Website and Tenants Newsletter
- 10.6 Performance will be measured against defined targets, and may be specific to individual areas of low demand. These targets will be set annually by:
- Reviewing the performance of the previous year,
 - Benchmarking the performance of other Registered Social Landlords,
 - Taking into account any developments that might impact on staff workload and any external factors, for example a lower demand for particular properties.
- 10.7 It is the responsibility of the Regional Managers, Housing & Neighbourhood Services to monitor Key Performance Information (KPI), and to submit regular reports to the Board of Management and Area Committees highlighting performance.

- 10.8 The following Key Performance Information will be reported:
- Re-let periods of stock (not low demand)
 - Re-let periods of stock (low demand)
 - Rent lost through voids
 - Current Void figures
- 10.9 Key Performance Information will be reported Annually via the Annual Performance & Statistical Return

11. Review of Strategy

- 11.1. This Strategy will be reviewed every three years to ensure it remains up to date, consistent and compatible with our Allocations Policy (HOME Argyll), Void Policy, and the context of difficult to let properties for ACHA.