

# Approaches to Promoting Tenancy Sustainment

*Hal Pawson, School of the Built Environment  
Heriot-Watt University*

- Why tenancy sustainment matters
- Tenancy sustainment interventions
- Social landlord perspective
- Impact of choice-based lettings on tenancy sustainment
- Conclusions

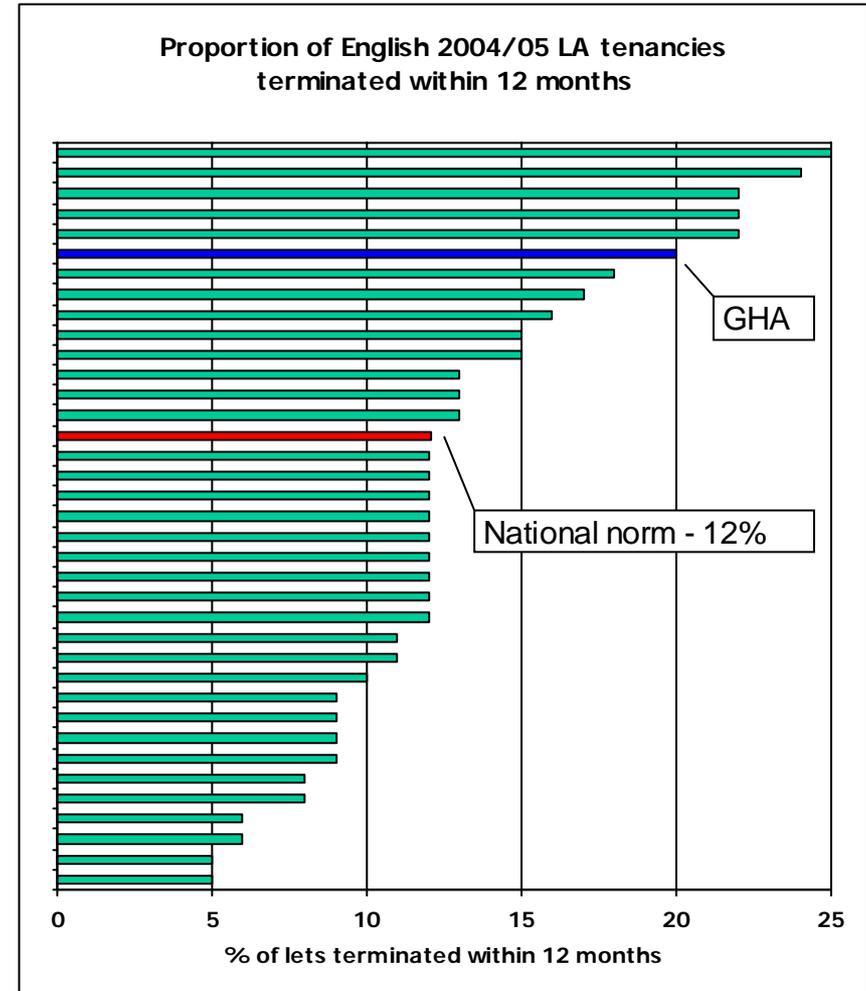
Presentation draws on:

- Investigating Tenancy Sustainment in Glasgow (GHA)
- Evaluating Homelessness Prevention Activities (Scottish Exec)
- Monitoring the Longer-term impact of CBL (ODPM/CLG)

- Potentially important contribution to preventing homelessness
- Waste of resources invested in the lettings process
- Efficiency considerations for social landlords because every additional property falling vacant generates additional costs through:
  - Rent loss during void period
  - Costs incurred in preparing property for reletting (repairs, cleaning)
  - Staff costs associated with lettings processes

# Defining 'tenancy failure'

- 'Premature' end of tenancy
- 'Disorderly' end of tenancy
- Early termination=tenancy ended within 12 months
- Audit Scotland propose to add to LA statutory PIs from 2008/09

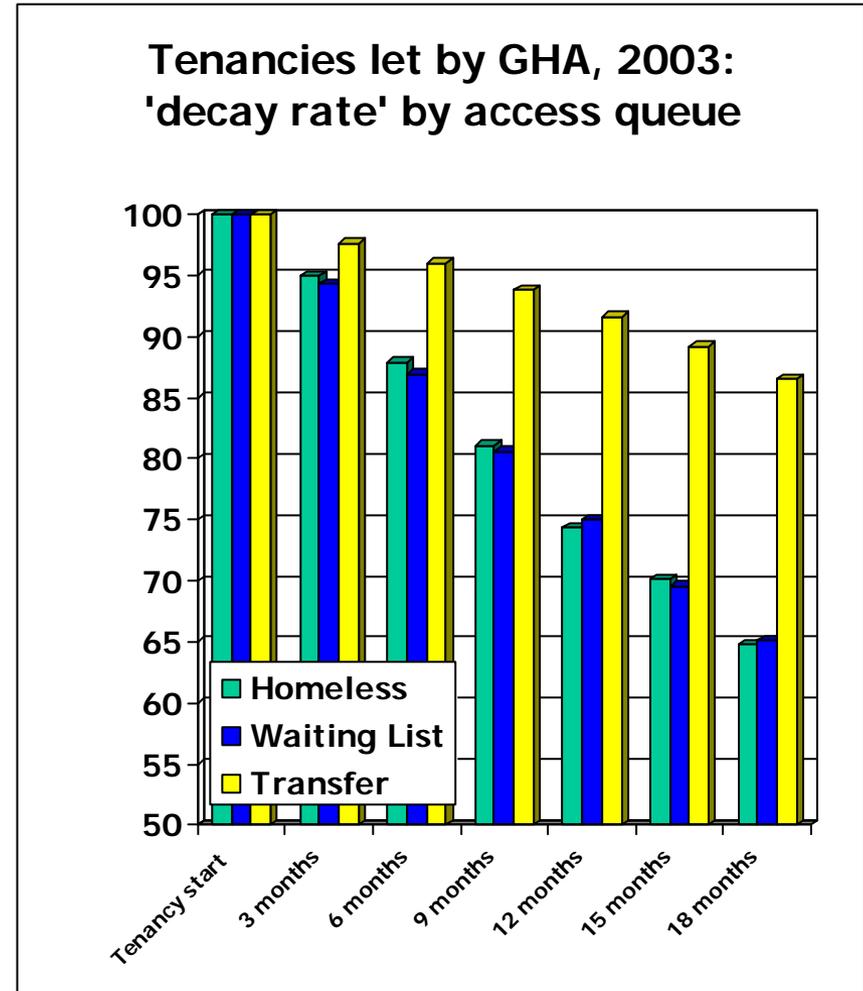


- Support schemes to promote tenancy sustainment rated by Scottish LAs as the single 'most significant' and 'effective' form of homelessness prevention
- Operated in most LAs for LA tenants, often involving substantial staff resources
- Both in-house and contracted out approaches
- Often funded through Supporting People
- Often seen as primarily relevant to people rehoused via the 'homeless route'
- Referrals usually made by housing officers
- Particular emphasis on preventing 'early tenancy terminations'
- Hence, stress on newly rehoused tenants identified as 'potentially at risk' – e.g. those needing help to access essential furniture
- Referrals also sometimes triggered by tenancy management problem – e.g. rising arrears

- Faith in 'service effectiveness' rarely evidenced
- LAs in our study did not appear to have clear criteria for 'success'
- Not straightforward because need to be able to compare actual 'sustainment rates' against what *would have happened without intervention*
- As for any 'precautionary' service, the accurate identification of those at substantial risk is crucial to assuring cost-effectiveness
- Future prospect of services needing to justify their relatively heavy demands on limited funding due to abolition of SP ring-fencing

# Tenancy sustainment from a social landlord perspective

- Overall GHA tenancy failure rate: 20%
- Failure rate modest for transfers but identical for homeless and waiting list
- Approx half of new tenancies terminated within 2 years
- Decay rate appears steady over first 18 months
- Since GHA waiting list lets are double those to homeless the latter account for only 1/3 of tenancy failures



- Two-way analysis suggests lets at greatest risk of tenancy failure
- But...need to isolate effects of explanatory factors
- Are 'regeneration' properties implicated only because disproportionately occupied by high risk group?

Stock class: homes for regeneration	34
Hhld type: single adults aged 18-25	34
Hhld type: single adults aged 16-17	32
Housing market area: Easterhouse	27
Property type: multi-storey flats	25
Access queue: waiting list	25
Access queue: homelessness	25
GHA-wide norm	20

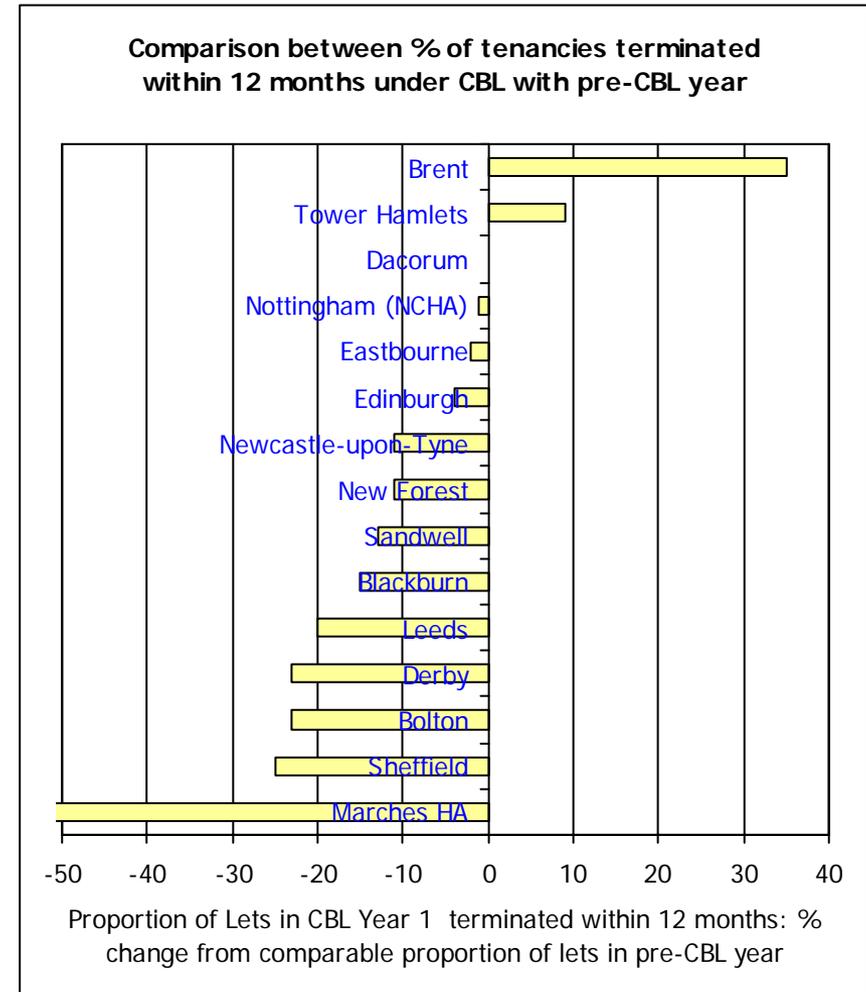
# Tenancy failure causal factors implicated from ex-tenant testimony

- Being allocated a home in an unwanted area
- Inability to secure adequate furniture and equipment
- Dissatisfaction with property condition
- Debt problems resulting from poverty and an inability to maximise income and/or manage money
- Social isolation
- Anti-social behaviour (being a victim or being accused of perpetrating ASB) – cited by at least half of ex-tenants

- Promoting tenancy sustainment not just about tenancy support schemes
- 'Prematurely failing tenancies' to some extent a function of 'effective housing management'
- The problem can therefore be addressed through:
  - Lettings policies which are customer-focused rather than bureaucratic and inflexible
  - Effective tenancy sign-up and 'settling-in' procedures
  - Early, supportive intervention on rent arrears
  - Responsive, sympathetic handling of ASB complaints
- Recommendations taken on board by GHA (see report on website) addressed all these issues

# Can choice help? - Impact of CBL on tenancy sustainment

- Claimed prospects of improved tenancy sustainment a major justification for CBL
- Most direct measure: % of lets terminated within 12 months
- General – though not universal – tendency for significant reductions in ‘early termination’ rates after CBL launch
- Non-CBL LA ‘early termination’ rates generally falling by about 3% p.a.
- Improved tenancy sustainment generally recorded for tenants across all ethnic backgrounds



- There is a need for greater focus on judging 'risk factors' which justify the relatively substantial resources typically involved in tenancy support
- Similarly, more clearly defined objectives and measurement of impacts are needed
- Promoting tenancy sustainment not just about 'homelessness prevention' interventions
- Need to recognise that 'tenancy failure' reflects assumptions about proper role of sector and aspirations of those moving into it