



Comhairle Cathrach na Gaillimhe
Galway City Council



Galway City Council Housing Estate Management Strategy 2019 - 2023

November 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Context
- 1.3 Strategy Themes
- 1.4 Aims of the Strategy

2. PEOPLE

- 2.1 Tenancy Support
 - 2.1.1 Housing Estate Liaison Officer
 - 2.1.2 Tenancy Training
 - 2.1.3 Tenancy Agreement and Handbook
 - 2.1.4 Case management
- 2.2 Tenancy Participation
 - 2.2.1 Residents Associations
 - 2.2.2 Promotion of Campaigns and Initiatives
 - 2.2.3 Grant Schemes
- 2.3 Feeling Safe at Home
 - 2.3.1 Anti-Social Behaviour
 - 2.3.2 Nuisance and other complaints
 - 2.3.3 Liaison with other agencies
 - 2.3.4 Closed Circuit TV (CCTV)

3. PLACE

- 3.1 Repairs, maintenance and improvement works
 - 3.1.1 Reactive Repairs
 - 3.1.2 Planned and Cyclical Maintenance
 - 3.1.3 Capital Works and Adaptations
 - 3.1.4 Void Repairs
 - 3.1.5 Recording of Repairs
- 3.2 Environmental Protection
 - 3.2.1 Enhancing the Environment
 - 3.2.2 Environmental Enforcement
- 3.3 Community Facilities
- 3.4 Control of Horses

4. PROCESS

- 4.1 Allocation of Properties
- 4.2 Differential Rent Scheme
- 4.3 Transfer Policy
- 4.4 Vacant Properties
- 4.5 Dealing with Complaints
- 4.6 Enforcement/Tenancy Warnings
- 4.7 Working in Partnership
- 4.8 Estate Management within Halting Sites
- 4.9 Information and Communication
- 4.10 Data Protection

5. ACTION PLAN

6. PERFORMANCE AND MONITORING



1. INTRODUCTION

Estate Management is described as “securing or promoting the interest of any occupiers, individually or generally, in the enjoyment of any house, building or land provided by the local authority and the avoidance, prevention or abatement of anti-social behaviour”

Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1997

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Galway City Council is the main provider of social housing support in Galway City. The Council is responsible for the management of over 2,200 tenancies located throughout the city, with a mixture of tenures and property types. Proper management of these tenancies and their associated housing estates is key to achieving a peaceful, safe and good quality living environment for Galway City Council tenants and their neighbours.

This Housing Estate Management Strategy sets out how Galway City Council’s Housing Department will take the lead in ensuring high quality management of its tenancies and estates. It outlines core themes, as well as specific actions, and is focused on delivering quality outcomes for the resources invested.

The development of strong relationships between Galway City Council and our tenants and between Galway City Council and other stakeholders is a key focus of the strategy. By fostering these relationships, in conjunction with other good estate management practices, Galway City Council aims to facilitate the creation of stable and sustainable communities that people want to live in, work in and visit, now and in the future.

1.2 CONTEXT

The Housing Estate Management Strategy has been developed in the context of national legislation and the overall housing policies that underpin social housing provision in the State.

In addition, Galway City Council will comply with any general policy directions and have regard to any guidelines issued by the Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government to housing authorities in relation to the performance of their functions under the Housing Acts 1966 to 2014. The strategy also complements and is consistent with the core strategies of the Galway City Development Plan 2017-2023, Local Economic & Community Plan 2015 - 2021 and other local strategies and policies, including those of the Housing Department such as the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy adopted in 2017 and Vacant Homes Strategy 2017

1.3 STRATEGY THEMES

The Housing Estate Management Strategy will focus on themes, objectives and actions in three

inter-related categories:

PEOPLE	A focus on tenants, their relationship with Galway City Council and the positive role they can play in their neighbourhood and community.
PLACE	A focus on the physical environment of Galway City Council housing estates, including housing stock maintenance and the protection and enhancement of the natural environment.
PROCESS	A focus on the procedures and policies which underpin the work of Galway City Council's Housing Department, with an emphasis on fairness, inclusion and partnership.

The strategy supports the overarching themes of social inclusion and sustainability. Galway City Council will promote actions that are socially inclusive of all and in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When delivering the objectives and actions detailed in this strategy, Galway City Council will work to create conditions for interaction, participation, understanding, respect and equality of opportunity and outcome.

1.4 AIMS OF THE STRATEGY

The main aim of this strategy is to set out how Galway City Council will take the lead in ensuring high quality management of its housing estates and tenancies, thereby protecting and enhancing the quality of life and well-being of communities in Galway City.

The specific objectives of the strategy are:

People	To ensure that all residents are aware of their respective responsibilities and play an active part in maintaining a high-quality local environment.
Place	To manage the environment around our properties and common areas effectively.
Process	To develop a pro-active approach to the management of our properties, estates and neighbourhoods.

As part of these objectives, the Council will strive to achieve the following:

- Meet the standards expected by our tenants, as set out in the Tenant Handbook.
- Ensure a peaceful, quiet and clean environment.
- Safeguard the future of Galway City Council's housing stock.
- Communicate with our tenants in a clear, transparent and prompt manner.
- Allow tenants who comply with their tenancy agreement to live peacefully and free from interference.
- Work in partnership with other agencies to support the development of stable and sustainable communities.



2. PEOPLE

“People form the core of Galway City. They are a key asset and should be wholly supported, regardless of their socio-economic, gender, ethnic or cultural background.”

Local Economic and Community Plan 2015-2021

2.1 TENANCY SUPPORT

Galway City Council provides a range of supports and interventions to assist tenants sustain and gain value from their tenancies. This allows tenants to contribute positively to their neighbourhoods and helps create stable and sustainable communities.

2.1.1 Housing Estate Liaison Officer

The Housing Department employs three Housing Estate Liaison Officers (HELOs). Each HELO is designated to a group of estates across the City and provides a high profile presence on the estates. Each HELO has a designated direct phone number, which is freely circulated to tenants in their area. HELOs are available to meet with tenants in the tenant’s home, at local community facilities, in City Hall or in any other place suitable for the tenant. In the event that a HELO is not readily available to any tenant, housing staff will provide the tenant with as much information as possible, record any issues or complaints from the tenant and ensure they are forwarded to the HELO for action.

2.1.2 Tenancy Training

Galway City Council recognises that provision of training to tenants is both integral to and a prerequisite for good estate management. Tenancy training must be inclusive and must meet the needs of the tenants.

All tenants are required to attend pre-tenancy training prior to moving in to their property and all tenants are provided with a copy of the Tenant Handbook (Section 2.1.3). In the case of single property allocations, the HELO carries out this training with the tenant in City Hall and it provides the tenant with the opportunity to meet the HELO and discuss the services available to the tenant.

When a number of tenants are allocated properties at the same time, as is the case with new housing developments, a pre-tenancy training seminar will be held with additional input from the Gardaí, Health Service Executive, Money Advice and Budgeting Service, Citizens Information Centre and Community Wardens.

In addition to the pre tenancy training, this strategy commits to the provision of post tenancy supports to all our tenants. These supports may include training on topics of assistance and interest to tenants such as committee skills, parenting skills, budget management and drug awareness, as well as training on tenancy rights and responsibilities.

2.1.3 Tenancy Agreement and Tenant Handbook

All tenants are required to sign a tenancy agreement prior to taking up their tenancy. The tenancy agreement, known as the Standard Letting Conditions for House and Flat Dwellings, is a legal document and it sets out the rights and duties of the tenant and the Council. The Tenancy Agreement is discussed with incoming tenants before it is signed and the consequences of a breach of tenancy are explained.

All tenants are also provided with a Tenant Handbook which provides information on all aspects of a Galway City Council tenancy, including rent, waste management, maintenance and useful contact numbers.

2.1.4 Case management

Every tenant is responsible for managing their tenancy and complying with the conditions of their tenancy agreement. However, Galway City Council has a role to play in identifying tenants or households with particular needs, or who may otherwise be vulnerable, and to offer them support either directly or by referring them to relevant external stakeholders for appropriate advice and assistance. This strategy recognises the importance of intervening early where support is needed and in acting together in a joined up way where action is required. By providing support and services using a holistic, joined-up approach throughout the life-time of a tenancy, Galway City Council aims to minimise tenancy breakdown and promote the development of stable communities.

2.2 TENANCY PARTICIPATION

Galway City Council promotes and encourages tenant participation and involvement to achieve good estate management.

2.2.1 Residents' Associations

Resident representatives play a pivotal role in representing the interests of residents in Galway City Council housing estates and they enable residents to play an active part in matters which affect their local environment. It is important that inclusive and independent Residents' Associations are established and this can only be achieved through the active voluntary involvement of residents.

The HELO works directly with Residents' Associations in Galway City and will assist residents in the formation of new associations and try to ensure a genuinely representative resident group. The HELO will facilitate meetings, provide information, invite consultation and devise work programmes. Residents' Associations will be encouraged to monitor and demonstrate support to all members of the community.

2.2.2 Promotion of campaigns and initiatives

Galway City Council encourages tenants and Residents' Associations to get involved in national and local campaigns that promote citizen engagement, such as National Spring Clean Month and National Bike Week. The HELO can provide information on these campaigns and can assist Residents' Associations to make links with Galway-based projects, such as Let's Get Galway Growing and Galway Healthy Cities. Galway City Council recognises that involvement in local and

national initiatives can contribute to an improved quality of life, can enhance health and wellbeing and can lead to a stronger sense of pride of place.

In addition, Galway City Council sees a clear role in participating in medium to long-term initiatives, which will have a positive impact in the development of its estates. The Housing Department will liaise with other departments in Galway City Council, including the Community & Culture Department and the Galway Sports Partnership, to research potential projects and funding streams.

2.2.3 Grant schemes

The Housing Department will provide an annual grant scheme which will be open to Residents' Associations, with a particular focus on start-up associations. Funding can also be made available for local, small-scale projects, such as estate enhancement projects and community gardening initiatives. The HELOs can provide information and assistance to groups in relation to other local and national funding opportunities, such as the Galway City Council Amenity Grants and Local Agenda 21 Environment Partnership Fund.

2.3 FEELING SAFE AT HOME

Galway City Council is committed to tackling anti-social behaviour and nuisance in order to create safer and better communities for tenants. Galway City Council recognises that the vast majority of its tenants live in, and wish to enjoy, the peaceful occupation of their dwellings and that only a very small number of tenants are involved in anti-social behaviour. The Council will not allow a minority to spoil it for the majority.

2.3.1 Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2014 defines anti-social behaviour as:

(a) The manufacture, production, preparation, importation, exportation, sale, supply, possession for the purposes of sale or supply or distribution of a controlled drug (within the meaning of the Misuse of Drugs Acts 1997 to 2007)

(b) Any behaviour which causes or is likely to cause any significant or persistent danger, injury, damage, alarm, loss or fear to any person living, working or otherwise lawfully in or in the vicinity of a house provided by a housing authority under the Housing Acts 1966-2014 of Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 or a Housing Estate in which the house is situate and, without prejudice to the foregoing, includes-

1. violence, threats, intimidation, coercion, harassment or serious obstruction of any person,
2. behaviour which causes any significant or persistent impairment of a person's use or enjoyment of his or her home, or
3. damage or defacement by writing or other marks of any property, including a person's home.

Galway City Council adopted an Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy in 2017, in line with the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. While there is an explicit obligation on the part of the tenant to adhere to the Tenancy Agreement, there is an equal obligation on the part of Galway City Council to enforce the Tenancy Agreement where breaches arise. In the case of the minority of tenants who engage in anti-social behaviour, Galway City Council will take steps, as appropriate, to address this behaviour. This will take the form of the planned interventions, as outlined in the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy.

Galway City Council will attempt to resolve all disputes and issues before resorting to legal action.

A balance must be struck between the needs of individual tenants and the needs of the wider community. The Housing Department's approach is to try to maintain people in tenancies, which are the subject of breaches, unless the circumstances are so severe as to merit enforcement action.

Where enforcement action is necessary, statutory Tenancy Warnings will be issued under the relevant Section (7, 8 or 9) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014, followed by a repossession order in court, where necessary.

2.3.2 Nuisance and other complaints

Anti-social behaviour, as defined in the Housing Act and detailed above, involves significant or persistent danger, injury or damage to persons and property. This definition does not include less serious behaviour, such as noise, nuisance or other activities, which can have a detrimental effect on the quality of life of tenants. The perception of anti-social behaviour can vary as normal standards of behaviour for one household or individual may be unacceptable to another.

The HELOs investigate valid complaints relating to nuisance in a fair, impartial and objective manner and will attempt to resolve issues through dialogue, mediation and liaison with other agencies. In the case of excessive noise, the complainant should first approach the person causing the noise, explain it is a nuisance and try to come to a mutually acceptable solution. If this does not resolve the issue, the complainant can take legal action through the District Court under the Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992.

Complaints in relation to dogs and dog barking are dealt with by the Environment Department of Galway City Council. The control of dogs in Galway City is monitored by the dog warden and the community wardens.

If you wish to complain about nuisance or noise, it is recommended that you keep a diary of the dates, times and details of any alleged incidences.

2.3.3 Liaison with An Garda Síochána and other agencies

Anti-social behaviour is often symptomatic of social problems, such as drug or alcohol abuse, which Galway City Council cannot address on its own. In many instances, successful resolution of anti-social behaviour can only be achieved using a multi-agency partnership approach to include An Garda Síochána, Health Service Executive, TUSLA and community groups. Procedural mechanisms and protocols will be agreed to advance this inter-agency approach in supporting tenancy sustainment but, also, in taking enforcement action against breaches of tenancy.

2.3.4 Closed Circuit TV (CCTV)

Galway City Council will investigate and consider the use of CCTV for monitoring and enforcement, in specific cases, subject to the development of a CCTV Policy for Galway City Council.

Operation and monitoring of the CCTV system must be linked to the overall objectives of the Housing Estate Management Strategy and will be dependent on resources and compliance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).



3. PLACE

“Achieve a high quality of life for all citizens through the provision of a good quality, attractive, built environment, through the protection of the unique natural environment and through facilitation of key economic, cultural and social supports.”

Strategic Goal, Galway City Development Plan 2017-2021

3.1 REPAIRS, MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT WORKS

A well maintained housing stock greatly enhances the quality of life and the social well-being of tenants. It is the tenant’s responsibility to ensure that the property is maintained in a clean condition and good state of repair.

The key objectives of the Housing Department’s maintenance policy are:

- Protect the asset value of the stock and minimise the risk of defects
- Anticipate future repairs expenditure and make provision for this in the overall financial planning of the Department
- Carry out efficient programme of planned and cyclical maintenance to prolong the useful life of buildings
- Inform tenants of their rights and duties regarding repairs.

Repair and maintenance works are defined as:

- Reactive repairs (including emergency repairs)
- Planned, cyclical maintenance
- Capital works
- Voids

3.1.1 Reactive Repairs

Reactive repairs refer to day-to-day and emergency repairs. The Housing Department will:

1. Facilitate easy reporting of repairs, through various methods convenient to tenants.
2. Prioritise the urgency of repairs.
3. Arrange a convenient appointment for both the tenant and the maintenance crew.
4. Inform tenants of the likely outcome of a request for maintenance.

The Tenant Handbook confirms the responsibilities of the Housing Department as landlords and the responsibilities of the tenant. Repairs will be sorted into priority categories, briefly described

below. Details of the types of defect and work in each category are detailed in the Tenant Handbook.

Emergency: Any defect which puts the health or safety of the tenant or third party at immediate risk or which affects the structure of the building adversely

Urgent: Defects which need to be repaired quickly in order to avoid damage to the property.

Routine: Defect that can be deferred without serious discomfort, inconvenience or nuisance to the tenant or a third party or long term deterioration of the building.

The Housing Department has a policy of giving priority to elderly, vulnerable or frail tenants in relation to carrying out certain repairs.

3.1.2 Planned and Cyclical Maintenance

As well as carrying out day-to-day repairs, Galway City Council also execute routine maintenance work on a pre-planned basis. This is because it is more cost efficient to do the same repair to a number of homes at once (e.g. replacing windows & doors) and, also, tenants can be forewarned, ensuring minimum disruption. The Council intends to implement a boiler replacement programme over the lifetime of this strategy.

3.1.3 Capital Works and Adaptations

Galway City Council has a rolling Capital Programme. Refurbishment work is carried out to replace outdated properties to bring them to a higher standard of specification.

The Housing Department recognises that over time the housing requirements of its tenants may change and is committed to assisting with the provision of adaptations to properties whenever such needs have been identified and subject to available funding. Tenants requiring adaptations to their home to enable them to remain in it will be examined on an individual basis. Financial provision for adaptations is made annually in the Housing Budget.

3.1.4 Void Repairs

In line with Galway City Council's Vacant Homes Strategy, a number of practical measures will be introduced to reduce vacancy times between re-letting vacant properties. These include:

- Classification of voids in terms of level of works required to allow for prioritisation of units that require minimal works, allowing for quick turnaround of these units.
- Reduced inspection times.
- Framework agreements to streamline the procurement process and minimise procurement delays.

A monthly Void Management Meeting has been established to include key senior staff responsible for managing voids and repairs and staff involved in the allocation of homes to persons on the waiting list.

Any property returned to Galway City Council will be secured on the day that the tenant surrenders the property and the keys are returned. Typical void repairs are painting and decorating, repairs or renewal of heating system, repairs of kitchen presses, chimney cleaning etc. In general, void repairs will be carried out within 6-8 weeks. This will depend on the type and extent of works required. In some cases, significant works may be required and the void period will be extended.

3.1.5 Reporting of Repairs

Tenants have a responsibility to report repairs as soon as they are aware of any defect. Repairs may be reported to the Housing Department by the following methods: telephone, to the housing office at City Hall, post, email, or in person to staff who are on estate visits.

All repair reports will be logged and recorded in the property history. The property history will be checked to find out if the defect has already been reported. Future planned maintenance programmes and programmes of major work will be checked to identify if the repair can be included in these programmes.

3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The attractive appearance of a housing estate is a tangible sign of effective housing management. Areas that influence this appearance include conditions with regards to litter and maintenance of communal areas.

3.2.1 Enhancing the environment

Galway City Council will support Resident's Associations to take the lead in maintaining their communal areas and will work with residents on delivering enhancement projects in their areas. The Housing Department will link in with other departments in Galway City Council to deliver collaborative projects based on enhancing the local environment. An emphasis will be placed on projects that promote sustainable development by meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

3.2.2 Environmental Enforcement

All tenants have a responsibility to manage their waste correctly. Illegal dumping and/or burning of waste will not be tolerated. The Housing Department will utilise a cross-departmental approach to ensure that all tenants are aware of their responsibilities in this regard and enforcement action will be taken, when necessary.

3.3 COMMUNITY FACILITIES

There are a number of community facilities and other non-residential properties situated within Galway City Council Housing Estates, including properties which have been provided to agencies for the provision of community development services. Galway City Council will carry out a review of these facilities to ensure that they are being used to their full potential and continue to be compliant with relevant building and fire safety regulations.

Community groups that wish to avail of space within a community facility should contact the HELO to discuss possible options. Written submissions, outlining group details, space requirements and intended use, will be considered by the Housing Department and can be submitted through the HELO for the area. Lease agreements must be signed by the groups and organisations using community facilities and these agreements will be subject to review. Rent will be charged for use of the facilities and the cost of utility bills must be borne by the tenants.

The continued provision and enhancement of facilities and amenities close to Galway City Council Housing Estates remains necessary and the Housing Department will liaise with other departments in Galway City Council to ensure that development works are cognisant of the needs of our tenants and communities.

3.4 CONTROL OF HORSES

Galway City Council will liaise with An Garda Síochána, the Department of Agriculture and animal welfare organisations to protect public health and safety and to protect the public from the nuisance of stray animals.

Complaints in relation to stray or abandoned horses can be made to Galway City Council's Customer Services Department or to the Housing Department. If the horse is on public lands, the complaint will be investigated and, if deemed necessary, the horse will be seized and impounded. Galway City Council will engage with a service provider to manage the provision of this service under a framework agreement.

A review will be carried out in relation to the Control of Horses in Galway City and in other local authority areas and the introduction of bye-laws to strengthen the powers of Galway City Council in this regard will be considered.



4. PROCESS

"The objective of the Housing Department in Galway City Council is to provide suitable housing accommodation and a responsive and supportive service for those in need of housing support".

Galway City Council Corporate Plan 2014-2019

The Housing Department of Galway City Council have a suite of policies and procedures in place to provide responsive and supportive services for our tenants. These policies and procedures must be robust and they must be delivered in an open, transparent and inclusive manner. Effective working methods and suitably trained staff are essential to this.

4.1 ALLOCATION OF PROPERTIES

In Galway City, properties are allocated to tenants under the Scheme of Letting Priorities 2017. When allocating dwellings, it is important that a balance is achieved between the needs and preferences of the applicants and the well-being of existing tenants and community. The Scheme of Letting Priorities aims to develop mixed tenure estates and to create communities that are balanced in terms of household structure. Steps are taken at allocation stage to identify and prevent issues which may affect estate management. Galway City Council may refuse to allocate or defer the allocation of a dwelling to a housing applicant where the Council considers the applicant is or has been engaged in anti-social behaviour or that a letting to that applicant would not be in the interest of good estate management.

4.2 DIFFERENTIAL RENT SCHEME

Galway City Council operates a Differential Rent Scheme whereby rent payments are based on household income. All tenants are required to notify the Housing Department if there is a change in their household income. Rent charges take into consideration the economic cost of running the City Council's housing estates and the maintenance of housing stock. Details of how social housing rent is calculated in Galway City, as well as other terms and conditions relating to social housing rent, are set out in the Galway City Council Differential Rent Scheme. If and when a proposed national rent scheme is introduced by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Galway City Council will implement this scheme in line with national guidelines.

The Debt Management Unit of Galway City Council's Finance Department monitor all rent accounts and will intervene when a tenant is showing four week of arrears of rent on their rent account. The use of MABS and Household Budget will be encouraged with tenants experiencing money management difficulties.

Tenants receive quarterly rent statements. Statements will also be issued to a tenant whenever it is requested. Non payment or withholding of rent cannot be justified in cases where estate management or anti-social behaviour has been reported or where the tenant has requested or is awaiting maintenance works.

4.3 TRANSFER POLICY

Galway City Council considers requests from tenants to transfer from one local authority property to another under certain circumstances, namely overcrowding, downsizing, medical grounds and exceptional circumstances. Approved requests are kept on a transfer list and are considered under the Scheme of Letting Priorities.

Applications for a transfer should be made to the Housing Department using the designated Transfer Application Form. If an applicant is not satisfied with the decision made in their case, there is an appeals process in place.

Extract from Galway City Council Scheme of Letting Priorities 2017

"Allocations to households on the transfer list will be made taking into account all relevant information furnished by the household in support of its transfer application together with all other relevant information known to the Director of Services, Housing & Social Inclusion or the duly delegated housing officer, the date of entry of the household onto the transfer list and the household's stated preference area(s), family size and type of dwelling required.

Priority will be determined to households in this category by the length of time that the household has been entered on Galway City Council's record of households that have applied to transfer to another dwelling to which section 22 of the Act of 2009 applies and have obtained Galway City Council's consent to such transfer and the availability of suitable units.

Prior to the allocation of a dwelling on foot of a request for a transfer, Galway City Council reserves the right to have the following requirements met by the household in respect of their existing tenancy:

- (a) The household must have resided in the dwelling the subject of its existing tenancy agreement for a minimum period of two years prior to the date of allocation.

- (b) The household must have a clear rent account for a period of six months prior to the date of allocation;
- (c) The household must have a clear refuse and service charge account (if any) on the date of allocation;
- (d) The household's existing dwelling must be maintained in a manner satisfactory to Galway City Council;
- (e) The household must be compliant with all the conditions of its existing tenancy agreement;

Refusal of offers of a transfer from social housing supports will be treated by Galway City Council as a refusal of accommodation. “

4.4 VACANT PROPERTIES

Galway City Council has prepared a Vacant Homes Action Plan 2017-2021, in line with Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. The plan outlines a number of actions aimed at reducing the level of vacant properties in the private market and within Galway City Council housing stock.

Effective management of voids is a key aspect of the action plan and is important in achieving good practice in housing estate management. Galway City Council strives to maximise the quick turnaround of properties between lettings, through an efficient programme of maintenance and repair, combined with prompt allocations. Choice Based Letting will be introduced in 2018 and will become the preferred method of allocation of properties, excluding certain specified categories such as older persons homes or houses required for persons with a disability.

Properties that have been abandoned by the tenants are repossessed by Galway City Council using Section 15 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014. A notice is served on the property requesting that the tenant confirms in writing within 4 weeks that they intend to occupy the dwelling as a normal place of residence. After the end of the four week period, a further notice is issued terminating the tenancy with immediate effect.

4.5 DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

Complaints will be accepted by telephone, in writing, in person or by email. Complaints received via email may require verification and should provide contact details for the complainant. Once received, the complaint is assigned to the relevant section within the Housing Department for action and follow-up, be that maintenance, rent or estate management.

Complaints relating to anti-social behaviour and nuisance are referred to a Housing Estate Liaison Officer (HELO) for investigation, based on the geographical location of the complaint. The HELO initially categorises the complaint, from high priority to low priority, and gives the complaint a reference number. The Council will seek to prioritise the more serious allegations of anti-social behaviour. At this stage, a decision may be made to not proceed with the complaint if, for example, there is reason to believe that the complaint has no substance or is vexatious in nature.

Anonymous complaints will generally not be considered except in the case where a large number of such complaints are received relating to an individual or household. Such matters will only be dealt with in exceptional circumstances, as considered appropriate.

All valid complaints will be investigated in a fair, impartial and objective manner by the HELO,

under the direction of the Administrative Officer for Estate Management. A complaints form is available online or from City Hall.

4.6 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

A key element of the Estate Management Strategy is the fostering of strong working relationships between Galway City Council, our tenants and key statutory partners in all areas of estate management, from tenancy support to enforcement actions. This strategy will help to establish protocols with these partners and, in doing so, demonstrate our commitment to helping to support and protect our most vulnerable tenants.

Galway City Council will:

- Liaise with other sections of Galway City Council to support and develop estates.
- Work in partnership with the Gardaí to reduce anti-social behaviour on our estates.
- Work with residents to make each neighbourhood a safe place to live.
- Meet regularly with local tenants and resident associations or community organisations to identify any issues on our estates.
- Work with agencies to support the needs of our tenants and to avoid duplication of service provision.

4.7 ESTATE MANAGEMENT WITHIN HALTING SITES

The objectives, themes and actions outlined in this strategy relate to halting sites, as they do to housing estates. However, there are additional factors to be considered in the management of halting sites and these will be explored in more detail in a separate Halting Site Estate Management Strategy to be developed in line with the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024. Specific policies will be developed to deal with breach of tenancy, including the cutting of barriers, illegal waste activity, illegal trading from halting sites and vandalism.

4.8 DATA PROTECTION

In performing its functions in relation to providing social housing support, Galway City Council is required to process significant amounts of personal data. Galway City Council respects the privacy rights of those whose personal data we process. We are obliged to protect personal data in accordance with the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Acts 1988 – 2018. For more information on the privacy notice, see www.galwaycity.ie.

4.9 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Galway City Council recognises that dissemination of information and open communication is vital in achieving good estate management. Communication is important in building trust, in strengthening relationships and in creating the conditions for active citizen engagement.

Effective internal communication systems are also important and are vital in ensuring strong flows of information within the Housing Department and across all departments within Galway City Council.

The Housing Department will continue to look at new and innovative ways to communicate with tenants and others and will use all means of communication available, in line with the Galway City Council Communications Strategy. Up-to-date information is essential and the Galway City Council website www.galwaycity.ie will be used as a platform for the provision of information on news,

events and other relevant information. It is recognised that some tenants may not wish to use or have access to the internet and we will work with support agencies to develop alternate methods of communication for these individuals.

5. ACTION PLAN

As part of the Estate Management Strategy, Galway City Council will commit to undertaking a number of specific actions. This is not an exhaustive list and there is recognition that the action plan will evolve and change as time passes and following further discussion with our partners and stakeholders.

Theme	Objective	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeframe
People	To ensure that all residents are aware of their respective responsibilities and play an active part in maintaining a high-quality local environment.	Prepare a new Tenant's Handbook	Provision of up-to-date and relevant information to all tenants	Q1 2019
		Revise wording of Tenancy Agreement	Greater clarity on tenant and landlord responsibility	Q1 2019
		Review current tenancy training arrangements and establish procedures for pre- and post-tenancy	Improved tenancy training and support	Q1 2019
		Host an annual event for Residents' Association	Strengthened relationship between GCC and residents	Q2 2019
		Expand the existing Estate Management Grant Scheme for Residents' Associations	Increased activity by Residents' Associations	Q2 2019
Place	To manage the environment around our properties and common areas effectively.	Carry out an audit of housing stock and estates	Cyclical planned maintenance programme in place	Q4 2019
		Carry out an audit of community facilities	Ensure compliance with building standards and proper governance	Q2 2019
		Continue to work with the cross-departmental estate management team	Greater efficiency and effectiveness in dealing with estate management issues that relate to several	On-going

			departments within GCC	
		Establish a schedule of meetings with the Environment Department	Greater linkages between Housing & Environment Departments leading to joint initiatives and more effective work practices.	On-going
		Review work programmes relating to Control of Horses in Galway City and other local authority areas.	Introduction of Control of Horses Bye-Laws	Q4 2019
		Investigate and consider the use of CCTV for monitoring and enforcement in specific areas.	Reduced anti-social behaviour and nuisance.	Q1 2021
Process	To develop a proactive approach to the management of our properties, estates and neighbourhoods.	Continuous review of GCC policies	Robust policies, good governance.	On-going
		Carry out an audit of current transfer list	More effective use of GCC Housing Stock.	Q1 2019
		Establish and strengthen connections with the Joint Policing Committee	Partnership approach to tackling anti-social behaviour.	Q4 2019
		Establish a Central Record Management System for Tenancy Warnings	Greater enforcement in relation to nuisance and anti-social behaviour	Q4 2019
		Development of a Halting Site Estate Management Strategy	Enhanced estate management within halting sites	Q3 2019

6. PERFORMANCE AND MONITORING

The Council recognises that continuous monitoring and review of the Housing Estate Management Strategy is required to ensure consistency and the highest standards of delivery. This is particularly important given the challenging conditions of the housing sector at present and the expected increase in social housing allocations in the coming years. The Housing Estate Management Strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis, as part of the Housing Team Development Plan

process, to ensure that the strategy reflects up-to-date legislation and best practice. The monitoring and review of the action plan will be undertaken by Housing Senior Management Team and progress will be reported to the Housing Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) on a quarterly basis.