



## **Innovative Local Authority Re-use Partnership**

Working in partnership with a furniture re-use organisation can provide many benefits to housing providers.

If your local authority is interested in:

- Saving money
- Making its budget go further
- Increasing tenancy sustainment
- Helping tenants settle into their homes,

then working with a furniture re-use organisation could be the way forward.

It is well known that providing furniture to tenants in need is an effective means of increasing tenancy sustainment. Glasgow Housing Association found that where 25% of all homeless lets failed within the first twelve months, this figure reduced to 14% if furniture was provided (Glasgow Housing Association and Heriot Watt University, 2006). This is a staggering 44% reduction in the number of failed tenancies and could result in significant monetary savings to your local authority, given that the average cost of a failed tenancy is £23,000 to £25,000.

Many Scottish local authorities are finding innovative ways of working with furniture re-use organisations to promote tenancy sustainment and reduce failed tenancy costs. Below is a case study, detailing the innovative approach taken by Midlothian Council and MARC Contracts, a furniture re-use organisation based in Dalkeith. It shows how working together can bring inspiring solutions to some of the most basic problems faced by your tenants.

### **Midlothian Council and MARC**

Midlothian Council is currently working in partnership with Midlothian Advice and Resource Centre and its trading arm MARC Contracts. MARC has a community store in Dalkeith selling good quality second-hand furniture donated by people throughout Midlothian and the surrounding areas. As well as supplying second-hand goods, MARC is also working with a national supplier for new furniture and white goods.

MARC is a Revolve accredited re-use organisation, which means it has met Scotland's national quality standards for re-used goods. Being Revolve

accredited, MARC can show it is committed to delivering quality, good value, clean and safe second-hand furniture with the addition of excellent customer service.

MARC has found Revolve accreditation gives additional confidence to partners when working with them, it shows commitment to continuous business improvement and enhanced professionalism.

To find out more about Revolve, visit [www.revolvereuse.com](http://www.revolvereuse.com)

### **Referred clients have a choice**

When a client requires furniture or white goods, Midlothian Council emails MARC detailing what the client requires. The request includes a price, taken from a list of new goods prices, for example £200, for a new cooker. When the client visits MARC, they can then choose either new or recycled goods to the agreed value. This allows them the choice of receiving a new cooker for £200, or a second hand cooker for £60 plus a 3-piece suite or beds with the remainder. Anecdotal evidence suggests that providing tenants with a choice of furniture increases their feeling of ownership which can in turn lead to sustainable tenancies.

One advantage of being able to access new goods through MARC is that if someone requires specialist equipment such as an orthopaedic bed, this can be bought through the supplier.

If the client chooses new goods, then MARC invoices Midlothian Council for the cost of the goods inclusive of VAT (second hand goods are not VATable). Midlothian Council can then claim back the VAT, which is put back into the 'pot', therefore extending its life.

### **Advance against grants**

Midlothian Council Homelessness Department also works with MARC to assist those people receiving a grant when leaving care. The local authority pays up front for new and second hand furniture, plus a starter pack of smaller household items for the client. The client is expected to agree a payment plan at point of buying the furniture and then is expected to make affordable, regular repayments. The client is usually in private accommodation as a temporary measure so is unlikely to have received their Scottish Welfare Grant at this point. The client chooses what they want and then is recharged automatically by the Homelessness Department.

This grant advance system alleviates the problem of a tenant being without furniture for several weeks whilst they wait for their grant to be processed. In

turn, it increases the chance of the client sustaining their tenancy, reducing any failed tenancy costs for the council.

### **A circular solution**

MARC also plans to pick up furniture from abandoned tenancies and will have a container at the local amenity site, creating a virtuous reuse circle for the furniture in the local authority area and reducing costs associated with landfill.

### **Handyman service**

MARC also runs a handy man service which gives older people in Midlothian the ability to access a handyman service for low level repairs in their houses thus allowing them to stay longer in their own homes. This service has been running successfully as a pilot for one year and will shortly be awarded on a 3-yearly basis.

If you would like to find out more information about this partnership, please contact:

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