

Appendix 1 - Tenant Scrutiny Panel – VOID review action plan

Tenant Scrutiny Panel – VOIDS review

Action Plan update June 2017

No.	Recommendation from panel	Update June 2017
1	It is understood that the void lettable standard is to be reviewed and it is recommended that this is completed with tenants' involvement, taking into account the HCA standards. It needs to be established and recorded which department is responsible for managing, reviewing and monitoring the standard in the future. There needs to be agreement in terms of the standard being aimed for, where the priorities lie and how the standards compare to other similar Councils	The lettable standard is in the process of being reviewed by Property Services. It will be presented to a tenant focus group for comment.
2	That staff work with the tenants to produce target and performance information that can be understood and shared with tenants in an annual report and the tenant magazine as required in the HCA Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard (HCATIES) Item 2.2.1. This should include comparisons with other similar Councils. This should be used routinely by all staff involved in the voids process so they know what they are aiming for and how the Councils are performing. It should be clear who this information is reported to, eg, which officers and which Council meetings	<p>VOID times are monitored monthly and staff receive regular performance updates</p> <p>Performance is also available on the Babergh and Mid Suffolk websites under Facts and Stats.</p> <p>For 2016/17 the average re-let time for all properties was 29 days in Babergh and 35 in Mid Suffolk. For those requiring only standard repairs it was 31 days for each council.</p> <p>HouseMark, a benchmarking organisation, shows that the highest quartile of similar landlords with whom we were compared in 15/16 had an average time of 19.50 days for standard repairs, with the median being 28.47 days.</p>
3	Efforts should also be made to see if improvements to the service could be made by looking at similar organisations' practices. For example to find out how many visits are made to voids and ensure best use is made of them.	<p>The process for managing void properties has changed with the introduction of Babergh and Mid Suffolk Building Services (BMBS). It was developed by an interim Corporate Manager who had experience of working for other social landlords.</p> <p>As an example there are now fewer visits to vacant properties. BMBS operatives are the first to visit properties once they become vacant. They are tasked with bringing them up to the lettable standard with a team leader supporting and monitoring the process. This removes the requirement for an initial inspection and schedule of work to be carried out.</p> <p>Two members of staff from Suffolk County Council with systems thinking experience looked at our data and procedures and offered to carry out more work once BMBS was established. This has now been picked up by Luke Godley Improvement and Involvement Officer who is carrying out a review of the void management process using a similar approach.</p> <p>The move to Endeavour House will require some changes to procedures to ensure teams work effectively together and to provide a good service for customers.</p>
4	The Councils should invest in supporting staff to adapt to the changes and share good practice across the two Councils and teams	<p>BMBS came into existence at the beginning of April with a new Corporate Manager, Justin Wright-Newton, starting work in December last year. There is now one staff team for both Councils.</p> <p>To support officers and operatives through a period of change, team building events have been held as well as Tool Box Talks at which any current issues can be discussed.</p>

Appendix 1 - Tenant Scrutiny Panel – VOID review action plan

		BMBS is working collaboratively with the Property Services Team and in order to develop good working relationships and procedures regular meetings are held with staff who allocate vacant properties.
5	Tenants continue to be involved to help to monitor performance to ensure a smooth transition from the current contractor and DLO to the new DLO from April 2017 to cover both Councils (HCATIES item 1.2c & e). Tenants need to be kept informed of the transition and any changes made. Interim arrangements need to be made regarding supervision and cleaning.	The latest edition of the Tenants Newsletter featured an article about BMBS on the front page. Justin Wright Newton has also attended the Tenants Forum and the Joint Housing Board.
6	Guidance factors are produced so that staff feel empowered to make the right decision and proceed confidently in using their discretion. This will also ensure the needs of different tenants are taken into account. For example, elderly or disabled tenants may need properties to be ready before letting.	The lettable standard dictates the work which is carried out in vacant properties and Property Services, in the client role, gives approval for improvements such as kitchens or bathrooms.
7	Tenants should be able to view items left by previous tenants and opt to keep and be responsible for items, unless there is a health and safety or clear maintenance issue. The tenant could be given a period of time (say a month) to decide if they want to keep the items. If they are not wanted they could be removed by the Council as a low priority (as opposed to high priority prior to letting) item. The Councils to review rechargeable policies and guidance for tenants, in consultation with tenants if the above is agreed to. Also guidance for voids officers regarding factors to consider such as the condition of the left items, the outgoing tenants (or tenant relative's) situation, choice and helpfulness for incoming tenants who may be on a limited budget. This will allow voids officers to use discretion within a framework	Items such as carpets which are in good condition are identified at the pre-termination visit and can be left for the new tenant, however safety issues and ongoing maintenance are of paramount importance.
8	The Councils give priority to ensuring voids are let in a clean condition. The Panel believes this would be cost effective as it would result in fewer refusals and a better relationship with tenants at the outset. The Panel believes that tenants are then more likely to respect the property and leave it in a good condition.	The lettable standard which operatives work to includes the cleanliness of properties. Team leaders, who inspect properties once repairs have been completed, will ensure that a good standard of work and cleanliness is maintained.
9	That the Councils introduce a new tenant survey which captures views from ingoing tenants to a new property.	We were unable to use an application such as Survey Monkey as for data protection reasons we are not able collect personal data such as names and addresses. As an organisation we are keen to increase opportunities to communicate with customers electronically rather than using paper forms as we have done in the past. We are in the process of procuring software to schedule repair jobs which includes the facility to message customers. This could be used in the same way as businesses such as hotels or garages routinely survey their customers and receive instant feedback.