

# **Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

## **Void Improvement Project Update**

### **20 September 2018**

#### **Introduction**

Phase 1 of the Voids Improvement Project has now ended, having been running from December 2017 to August 2018. It was tasked with reducing the standard void re-let time by 10 days, employing external consultants to assist with this aim.

In September 2017 the monthly void re-let time for standard voids had increased to 54 days in Babergh and 51 days in Mid Suffolk.

Longer void times meant a longer wait for families and individuals before they can move into much needed accommodation. Many of those people could be living in very unsuitable homes or temporary accommodation, and every day counts.

In addition, longer void times cost a significant amount of money. The average rent for one of our homes is £11.43 per day. If an average property is empty for 52 days, then that will cost £594 in lost income. In 2017/18, 545 properties were let across both Districts. Using the average daily rent, and average void time of 52 days, that is almost £324,000 of lost income.

#### **Achievements**

The project has brought about a lot of change, both in BMBS and in the Tenant Services team, with new procedures, processes, re-allocated resources, co-working and culture change delivering improved performance.

As of July 2018, standard void times have been reduced to 23 days for Babergh (a 31-day reduction) and 19 days for Mid Suffolk (a 32-day reduction). This far exceeds the 10-day target and gives us an average standard re-let time across both Districts of 21 days, the target set out in the HRA Business Plans (see table 1 below).

**Table 1: BDC and MSDC Monthly Standard Void Re-let Times in Days**

	<b>BDC STANDARD VOIDS</b>	<b>MSDC STANDARD VOIDS</b>
SEP 17	54	51
OCT 17	44	66
NOV 17	41	51
DEC 17	71	57
JAN 18	54	51
FEB 18	49	45
MAR 18	44	48
APR 18	34	43
MAY 18	38	30
JUN 18	17	34
JUL 18	23	19

## Next Steps

A longer-term void improvement plan is now in place, and its key actions are set out below. We intend to achieve consistent standard void re-let times of 21 days by March 2019, and 15 days by March 2020, further reducing lost income, and getting those in need housed as quickly as possible.

Ref	Recommendation	Tasks	To be actioned by	Date to be completed
<b>1</b>	<b>All Teams</b>			
1.1	Embed change and new procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All teams to ensure new procedures are being used and reviewed regularly</li> </ul>	BMBS-CM TSCM	31.3.19
<b>2</b>	<b>Allocations Team</b>			
2.1	Introduce viewings during the notice period.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CBL advertise in the same weeks cycle as receipt of NTT/NTQ</li> <li>VLO's check property condition and Tenant suitability during Pre-term insp.</li> <li>Aim to achieve 80% of viewings within notice period. Taking into consideration some properties with no access or not suitable.</li> </ul>	TSPL	31.3.19
2.2	Carry out Affordability and sustainability verification checks on all applicants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry out budgeting, financial/credit checks, evidenced with proofs.</li> <li>Sign post if identify any risks/vulnerable customers to relevant officers to develop support plan – including issues with debts/furniture etc.</li> </ul>	TSPL	31.12.18
2.3	Use of external promotion and advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use other external websites such as Zoopla, Homeswapper and</li> </ul>	TSPL	31.10.18

Ref	Recommendation	Tasks	To be actioned by	Date to be completed
		<p>Gumtree etc. to advertise vacancies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce robust verification process to mitigate fraudulent applicants.</li> <li>Pro-active networking – e.g. other LA's/HA's, local councilors, charities and events.</li> </ul>		
<b>3</b>	<b><i>Voids Admin Team</i></b>			
3.1	Manage all allocation customer contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up and manage generic email inbox, telephone and text number for all allocation inbound and outbound enquires.</li> <li>Manage requests regarding RTL updates, m/x exchanges, viewings/sign ups etc.</li> <li>Proactively send out customer updates and appointment reminder texts.</li> </ul>	TSPL	30.09.18
3.2	Take on Mutual exchange administration from Allocations Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor end to end and ensure 42-day consent deadline met.</li> <li>Check applicant's eligibility</li> <li>Send &amp; receive Landlord references</li> <li>Book property inspections in VLO's calendar</li> <li>Prepare deeds and arrange sign up</li> </ul>	TSPL	31.12.18
<b>4</b>	<b><i>Tenancy Services Team</i></b>			

Ref	Recommendation	Tasks	To be actioned by	Date to be completed
4.1	Introduce new tenancy visits within first 4–6 weeks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to build rapport with customer and to identify and vulnerabilities or support needs.</li> <li>• Check customer has moved in, property condition/used decorating vouchers, paying rent and understands tenancy terms &amp; conditions.</li> </ul>	TSPL	31.01.19
4.2	Carry out property condition audits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enforce tenancy terms regarding condition of property to help deter property deterioration and costly voids.</li> <li>• Plan in phases / run a pilot scheme</li> <li>• Potential to run across services, stock condition, repairs visits etc.</li> <li>• Enforce reduced banding for those on the housing register in breach.</li> </ul>	TSCM	31.3.19
<b>5</b>	<b><i>Voids Liaison Team</i></b>			
5.1	Reduce appointment times for further efficiencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce viewing times from 20mins to 15mins</li> <li>• Reduce pre-termination inspections from 60mins to 30mins</li> </ul>	TSPL	31.01.19
5.2	Carry out void progress checks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit void properties in same area as appointments set to check on progress and feedback to BMBS/Allocations.</li> </ul>	TSPL	31.10.18
5.3	Carry out mutual exchange inspections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These take lower priority over viewings and pre-terminations. Follow same checks</li> </ul>	TSPL	31.01.19

Ref	Recommendation	Tasks	To be actioned by	Date to be completed
		as pre-term and free up housing officers.		
5.4	Reduce travel time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilize mobile technologies to reduce unnecessary travel to offices for scanning etc.</li> <li>Set measures and objectives</li> </ul>	TSPL	30.11.18
<b>6</b>	<b>BMBS</b>			
6.1	Mobile technology role out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optimise use of mobile technology for completion of works and operatives to make variations.</li> </ul>	BMBS-PL	31.12.18
6.2	Introduce scheduling software	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once mobile technology in place utilise online scheduling of jobs. N.B. This is a separate project for the whole of repairs.</li> </ul>	BMBS-CM	31.3.19
6.3	BMBS to manage void safety certificates rather than tenancy services void Admin.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To gain assurance all checks have been completed before handover BMBS raise orders for safety certs. Asbestos, Electrical, Gas and EPC.</li> <li>BMBS provide customer copies to tenant services team on handover.</li> </ul>	BMBS-PL	31.12.18
6.4	Full review of re-let standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Current re-let standard is open to interpretation needs to be more specific.</li> <li>Improve standard VOIDs are let to improve their return condition.</li> </ul>	BMBS CM	31.10.18
<b>7</b>	<b>Key Targets</b>			

Ref	Recommendation	Tasks	To be actioned by	Date to be completed
7.1	For standard VOIDS achieve an average re-let time no greater than 21 working days by 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set individual and team objectives and review</li> </ul>	TSCM	31.03.19
7.2	For Major VOIDS achieve an average re-let time no greater than 42 working days by 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2019.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set individual and team objectives and review</li> </ul>	TSCM	31.03.19
7.3	For standard VOIDS achieve an average re-let time no greater than 15 working days by 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set individual and team objectives and review</li> </ul>	TSCM	31.03.20
7.4	For Major VOIDS achieve an average re-let time no greater than 28 working days by 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2020.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set individual and team objectives and review</li> </ul>	TSCM	31.03.20
<b>8</b>	<b><i>Customer satisfaction</i></b>			
8.1	Customer survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sent out a survey link with the welcome email to all new tenants.</li> <li>Send out communications on common themes.</li> </ul>	TSCM	31.03.19
8.2	Review and monitor lessons learnt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Log and monitor complaint trends.</li> <li>Send out communications on lessons learnt.</li> </ul>	TSCM	31.03.19
<b>10</b>	<b><i>New Developments &amp; Acquisitions</i></b>			
10.1	New build procedure and acquisitions review and implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow up and report progress</li> <li>Use draft procedure and document templates provided to agree and implement.</li> </ul>	TSCM	TBC

Ref	Recommendation	Tasks	To be actioned by	Date to be completed
<b>11</b>	<b><i>Technology</i></b>			
11.1	Implement Open Housing – Work Flow for Void management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More work required to commission workflow. Will be a project.</li> <li>• Is on the ICT Road map / Pipeline with a deadline 2020.</li> <li>• Review at meeting ICT project steering group meeting on monthly basis.</li> </ul>	TBC	TBC
11.2	Open Housing Re-configuration – (Scrutiny Report to BDC 18.9.17 – para 10.4) Data cleanse, data migration and integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilise 'VOID actions' on Capita. Although currently no workflow prompts built in, embeds the system management approaches. Reduces the dependency on spreadsheet data. Improves system data held.</li> </ul>	TBC	TBC
<b>13</b>	<b><i>Review of Sheltered Scheme provision</i></b>			
13.1	Lower demand for this type of housing. Suggestion to rebrand to 'retirement homes/living'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and improve the services and facilities offered. Update allocation policies/criteria's lower age limits etc. Look to dispose of hard to let locations. Separate project.</li> </ul>	TCSM	31.03.19
13.2	Very sheltered schemes - review of contract with Orwell expires 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2019.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify responsibilities</li> <li>• Re-tender</li> <li>• Review offer of services provided, alternative specialist care units such as dementia.</li> </ul>	TSCM	31.03.19
<b>14</b>	<b><i>Health and safety</i></b>			
14.1	Review of management of VOID sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce controls including attendance logs</li> </ul>	BMBS-PL	31.10.18

Ref	Recommendation	Tasks	To be actioned by	Date to be completed
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear site codes of practice – including safety of site visitors such as customers attending viewings.</li> </ul>		
14.2	Legionella awareness and checks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carry out Legionella checks and mitigate risks on all voids.</li> </ul>	BMBS-PL	31.03.18
14.3	Gas Capping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cap Gas before void works start, uncap and test once occupied</li> <li>Property services review Blue flame contract renewal (18 months)</li> </ul>	BMBS-CM	TBC
<b>15</b>	<b><i>Longer term voids (Property Services)</i></b>			
15.1	Void viability reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review viability of up and coming voids. Look to dispose of major work, hard to let, or on location of stock.</li> </ul>	TSCM	TBC
15.2	Visibility of long term void progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide visibility and monitor long term void properties progress</li> <li>Claim rental loss through insurance (Current insurance contract not inclusive).</li> </ul>	BMBS-CM	TBC

KEY:

TSCM	Tenancy Services Corporate Manager
TSPL	Tenancy Services Professional Lead
BMBS-CM	BMBS Corporate Manager
BMBS-PL	BMBS Professional Lead