

Executive Member Response to Review of Housing Voids

Date Recommendations agreed by Community Select Committee:

Considered at Community Select Committee, Thursday 9 March 2023
(circulated Thursday 30 March 2023, following changes made at the Committee meeting to the report and recommendations which were subsequently signed off by the Operations Director and Chair 21 March 2023)

Date responses should be made by:

Executive responses on behalf of the Executive Portfolio Holders for:
Deputy Leader, Housing and Housing Development should be received by Thursday 25 May 2023

Recommendations:

Executive Response:

RECOMMENDATION 1 - Carry out Tenancy Audit of properties

Carry out a programmed cycle of inspections on properties. (See para 3.1.3 of report). Consideration would need to be given to how such an inspection regime would be instigated and whether there could be agreed triggers that would necessitate a visit, such as complaints from neighbours due to the dumping of rubbish,

Response supported by Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory; Operations Manager Managing Homes, Karen Long and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.

Initial HRA funding is being used to kick start a tenancy audit programme to include checking all the conventions of the tenancy agreement including standard of repair and condition of property and garden. Housing Officers will document details of the audit and

<p>non-payment of rent as well as any planned maintenance or reactive maintenance visits to the property etc. and on any such visits a checklist in relation to a disrepair/defects survey should be completed.</p> <p>Action: Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory & Operations Manager Managing Homes, Karen Long.</p>	<p>ensure action is taken in relation to disrepair and breaches of tenancy agreement. Contact with tenants will also be made as soon as notice is received to identify alterations carried out by the existing tenant, damage to the property and the level of clearance required.</p>
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 2 - Parallel processes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a tenant has given the Council notice and hands in the keys early, the voids team will carry out works and administrative processes that are required to minimise the void loss period. • In cases where it is clear that the tenant has abandoned the property, and where the Council is legally able to do so, that the works that are required in the property be carried out in parallel to the legal process of formally regaining the property via the notice to quit period and the repossession order. <p>Action: Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory & Operations Manager Providing Homes, Tracy Jackson.</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory; Operations Manager Providing Homes, Tracy Jackson and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <p>The new Voids service model will include a pre-void inspection within 5 working days of notice received. Works required will be scoped to ensure void loss is kept to a minimum. If a tenant vacates the property before the end of the notice period, permission will be gained to enable works to start.</p> <p>As soon as the Council is legally able to do so, work will begin on properties where the tenant has abandoned.</p>
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 3 - Regular sharing of useful data on voids with Members</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide data on all void properties for a twelve-month period. To see what the actual performance of Void 	<p><i>Response supported by Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory; Operations Manager Providing Homes, Tracy Jackson and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p>

<p>properties with general needs had a standard target of 26 days, and some properties with major needs had a turnaround of up to 64 days.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That until Members are confident that there are new robust monitoring procedures in place for the voids process then Members will be recommending that there should be regular monitoring of progress with voids which is shared with Members on a quarterly basis. <p>Action: Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory & Operations Manager Providing Homes, Tracy Jackson.</p>	<p>The Empty Homes Co-ordinator tracks the progress of all void properties and can provide specific information alongside the current performance measures. The Voids review project team are reviewing the proposed approach to Executive KPIs based on benchmarking and a new target service model. New operational KPIs to enable effective monitoring of project benefits and continuous improvement will also be developed. Both the new Executive & Operational KPIs will be implemented as part of the project go-live, estimated to be in November 2023 and will be reported as part of the quarterly corporate performance report.</p>
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 4 – Recruitment</u></p> <p>Provide periodic updates to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development, and in turn the Community Select Committee on the progress with recruitment and retention of DSO officers and with any temporary outsourcing of voids work to external contractors.</p> <p>Action: Assistant Director, Stevenage Direct Services, Steve Dupoy; Service Delivery Manager, Dean Stevens</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Assistant Director, Stevenage Direct Services, Steve Dupoy; Service Delivery Manager, Dean Stevens and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <p>The Executive Portfolio Holder for Housing and Housing Development and in turn the Community Select Committee will be kept updated on progress with recruitment and retention of officers working across the Voids process. The temporary partnership arrangements for the voids repairs works will also be monitored.</p> <p>Stevenage Direct Services have recently recruited a temporary project officer and will be advertising shortly for a further permanent project operative.</p> <p>To establish the new service model for voids, the Investment Team will soon be recruiting a new Voids Manager, who will manage two</p>

	<p>Project Officers and take the 'client' responsibility for managing the complete void end-to-end process.</p>
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 5 - a revised Officer data capture of end-to-end void process</u></p> <p>That officers provide Members with a detailed proposal of the end-to-end void process so they can make a view as to whether this process is likely to have the desired Impact of raising the current performance levels of the voids service.</p> <p>Action: Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory & Operations Manager Providing Homes, Tracy Jackson.</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory; Operations Manager Providing Homes, Tracy Jackson and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <p>The Voids project team will present a detailed proposal of the end-to-end void process prior to the new service model launch proposed for November 2023.</p>
<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 6 – investigate potential incentives and penalties to encourage tenants to maintain their rented properties in a reasonable condition</u></p> <p>As referred to in paragraph 3.1.7 the Committee is keen for officers to explore ways to hold tenants to account for keeping SBC's property/their home in good repair. Where there are rechargeable repairs identified in inspection activity or otherwise, throughout the term of the tenancy, that the tenant is charged, at discretion, to avoid leaving multiple repairs and a large bill at the end of the tenancy. This should include unauthorised modifications.</p> <p>Action: Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory & Operations Manager Managing Homes, Karen Long.</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory; Operations Manager Managing Homes, Karen Long and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <p>The new regime of audits will ensure rechargeable repairs and unauthorised alterations are identified during the tenancy rather than when notice is received. Housing Officers will ensure recharges are raised and the Income Maximisation team will pursue debts.</p> <p>The new Voids Service model will include an effective re-charge policy with pro-active measures around good tenancy management supported by tenancy audits with clear information about tenants' obligations.</p>

<p><u>RECOMMENDATION 7 - Pursue better benchmarking with similar local authorities</u></p> <p>Officers saw the benefit of local, meaningful benchmarking discussions and future sharing of data compared with the current national benchmarking group – Housemark (see paragraph 3.1.11 of the report). Housing officers will continue to reach out to other similar sized authorities who have a retained housing stock to share experiences and where possible data.</p> <p>Action: Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory & Operations Manager Providing Homes, Tracy Jackson.</p>	<p><i>Response supported by Operations Director, Housing Investment & Communities & Neighbourhoods, Rob Gregory; Operations Manager Providing Homes, Tracy Jackson and Executive Portfolio Holders with responsibility for Housing & Housing Development, Cllr Jeannette Thomas.</i></p> <p>Officers have gained some useful insights from working with Welwyn and Hatfield & Dacorum district councils and will maintain knowledge sharing with local providers in Hertfordshire around best practice. Separately through our involvement with the Association for Retained Council Housing (ARCH) we will identify other opportunities to benchmark with other districts with retained stock.</p>
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