Stevenage
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Meeting	Cabinet
Portfolio Area	Housing and Housing Development
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VOID MANAGEMENT POLICY AND LETTABLE STANDARD

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KEY DECISION

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To present a new Void Management Policy and revised Lettable Standard for approval.

1.2 To meet good practice and promote transparency within the Council it is important that a Policy is in place that outlines how Void properties are managed. There is no existing policy. There is a Void management guide published October 2015.

1.3 The key objective of the Void Management Policy is to outline how the council manages properties within the housing stock when they become vacant. The Lettable Standard will manage future tenant's expectations of their new home and to ensure consistency in the standard of properties when they are relet which reflects regulatory and legal obligations.

1.4 This policy supports the Council's Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan 2024-2029 and the key priority of maintaining good quality homes.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Cabinet approve the new Void Management Policy (Appendix A) and revised Lettable Standard (Appendix B).

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 The management of empty homes (voids) is an important service provided by a social landlord. In conjunction with a Lettable Standard the Council this provides the platform for those with a housing need to obtain a tenancy and maintain a suitable home, improving quality of life and the overall level of satisfaction with their new home and SBC as a landlord.

3.2 The provision of good quality council housing is one of the Council's key priorities; with social housing supply reaching crisis levels across the UK, the effective turnaround of void properties through a fit for purpose voids service is an essential part of maintaining and improving housing supply. Maximising rental income and reducing maintenance costs are essential in achieving these objectives.

3.3 The Council manages approximately 7,900 homes of which approximately 5.6% become vacant each year.

3.4 Following issues with the capacity and performance of the in-house voids team in 2022/23, a backlog of works to around 100 voids had been generated by early 2023. This was in part due to the aftereffects of the Covid-19 pandemic, material supply delays and significant recruitment challenges, where service capacity dropped below 50%.

3.5 Due to these challenges, it was agreed that works to voids properties should be outsourced to a contractor and various interim contractor arrangements have been in place since early 2023.

3.6 An independent expert review of the voids service was commissioned through Ridge and Partners, a built environment consultancy practice, in Q1 of 2023/24. The review considered the various issues which the service had experienced and identified key areas for improvement.

3.7 In October 2024 a report to Cabinet set out a proposed future delivery model for voids based on a hybrid approach, a core internal team supported by contractors, which was agreed in principle. The report also provided an update on progress with implementation of the voids improvement plan. A transition from the current 100% contractor delivery model is being implemented with the procurement of support contractors in progress – a report seeking delegated authority to award the associated contracts was included on the Cabinet agenda in February 2025.

Stakeholder engagement

3.8 Tenant consultation on the Void Management Policy and revised Lettable Standard commenced in May 2024. The Lettable Standard Survey is ongoing and has targeted tenants who started a new tenancy in the last 12 months.

3.9 During 2022/23 the Council's Community Select Committee (CSC) undertook a scrutiny review of voids management. The scope of the review was to look at the issues facing the Housing Property Services teams in managing the end-to-end voids process and to identify ways to improve the time taken to carry out works and relet properties.

3.10   The outcomes were incorporated in a voids improvement programme which includes an action to introduce a Void Management Policy and a revised Lettable Standard, which sets out clear roles and responsibilities of the Council and clearly manages Tenants expectations.

3.11   An internal agreement is in place between Housing Asset Management Decent Homes Programme Managers and the Empty Homes Team to deliver decent homes work to void properties using recently procured contracts.

4   REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

4.1   The draft Voids Management Policy is attached at Appendix A and the revised Lettable Standard is attached at Appendix B.

4.2   As a Registered Provider, the Council is required to meet a range of legal and regulatory obligations. To ensure good practice is met there is a need to have a suitable level of oversight, awareness and understanding of key issues and responsibilities of maintaining good quality homes for the allocation of properties.

4.3   The development of this policy and the revised lettable standard supports this approach and will form part of the strategic framework which will ensure that homes are well managed and maintained, whilst managing expectations for new and transferring tenants of their new home.

5   IMPLICATIONS

5.1   Financial Implications

5.1.1   The implications of the policy have been reflected in the development of the current HRA Business Plan, MTFS and 2025/26 approved budget. However, the ongoing application of this policy will be used to inform development of future budget requirements and will be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect any other legislative or service-related pressures.

5.1.2   The implementation of this policy will aid in assessing and maintaining the condition of the Councils housing stock and managing costs associated with void properties. It will also support actions being taken to reduce void turnaround times and the related rent loss.

5.2   Legal Implications

5.2.1   The policy has been developed in line with the legal and regulatory requirements as set out in the Policy.

5.3   Risk Implications

5.3.1   There is significant reputational risk if the Council does not provide good quality homes to those with a housing need. This policy and monitoring of the policy will allow for this risk to be mitigated. It is essential to ensure the policy and lettable standard are appropriately embedded into working

practices. To ensure effective implementation both will need to be underpinned by supporting procedures and associated training for staff.

5.3.2   The risks are mitigated by the tracking of performance against key performance indicators (KPI's) and ensuring the Lettable Standard is achieved resulting in Tenant satisfaction.

5.4   Equality and Diversity Implications

5.4.1   Equality and Diversity implications are monitored and evaluated within the delivery of the service. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been produced and is attached at Appendix C. This will be updated in line with the review process for this policy.

5.4.2   The EqIA has not identified any negative impacts on any groups with protected characteristics with positive implications for older people, people with a disability and socio-economic groups.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- BD1: Void process map.
- BD2: SBC Current Lettable Standard.
- BD3: Lettable Standard Survey consultation responses.

APPENDICES

- A: New Void Management Policy.
- B: Revised Lettable Standard.
- C: EQIA.