

**Report of Scrutiny Officer**

**Report to Tenant Scrutiny Board**

**Date: 14 June 2017**

**Subject: Lettable Standard**

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

## 1.0 SUMMARY OF MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 This year, Tenant Scrutiny Board has undertaken an additional piece of work, looking at Housing Leeds Lettable Standard, with a view to providing a tenants perspective. This item of work has not been a full Board Inquiry.
- 1.2 The project group conducted meetings with relevant officers of Housing Leeds and also conducted visits to four void properties in West and South Leeds to assess the lettable standard in practice.
- 1.3 This piece of work has now concluded and the Board is in a position to report on its findings from the evidence gathered.

## 2.0 FINDINGS

- 2.1 It was explained by Officers that the Lettable Standard was introduced to ensure a consistent city wide approach is adopted. In addition, it was explained that prospective tenants would have clear information in terms of what to expect in their new tenancy. Further it was explained that a sample of pre and post void inspections are carried out to ensure consistency and maintain standards.

The project group were informed that a viewing is undertaken with prospective tenants accompanied by Housing Officers and on occasion Sheltered Support Officers may also be in attendance.

The group were also advised that Housing Officers use a void schedule to explain what works have been carried out to the property to prospective new tenants.

The project group noted that some properties were deemed to be harder to let than others for a variety of reasons. As part of their evidence gathering, the group received a copy of the variable letting standard which is applied to a number of properties which have been identified as being difficult to let.

## **2.2 VARIABLE LETTABLE STANDARD**

The variable letting standard allows for a property to have certain rooms decorated; this applies to the kitchen, bedroom and one other room of the tenants choice. However it would usually be carried out once the property has been relet.

The group noted it is easier to decorate a property whilst it is unfurnished and given it is being decorated to a standard magnolia colour rather than the tenant choosing the colour carrying this out during the void would be more beneficial to the new tenant.

The Board acknowledged that this may impact on relet times, but it is felt that the time spent on decoration may improve the speed by which it can be relet. It would also help tenants who may find it difficult to decorate a property give them a good start in their new home and improve tenant perspective of the service received.

## **2.3 VISITS TO READY TO LET PROPERTIES**

Though any review, the 'theory' of how the service should work is often different in practice. In order to experience what tenants see when they visit a property, Board Members visited four properties during November 2016 which were recorded as ready to let, repairs complete, with the exception of final fix items.

The four properties were chosen randomly by the Board from a selection of ten properties which had been returned the Friday before the visits which took place on the Monday morning.

The group wanted to see a wide range of property types, and so selected a low rise flat, a house, a bungalow and a high rise flat. The key findings from each property visited are summarised below.

### **Low Rise Flat (Upper floor)**

It was noted that at the time of the Boards visit, void work was still in progress and so not ready to let, including not been washed down.

#### **Defects noted**

- One of the windows had no safety catch on it.
- One part of the garden which the flat would have been responsible for had not been cut back

Group members were concerned that this property was said to be ready to let when in reality there was work still ongoing and therefore did not meet the lettable standard at the time of viewing.

### **Bungalow**

Members felt whilst this property had a few outstanding issues that needed to be corrected, it met the lettable standard.

- Board members felt as this was a sheltered property ideally there should have a grab rail along the footpath from the doorway as there was a considerable difference in levels of the garden which could pose a potential hazard to the new

tenant.

- Gas pipe was still in the living room when this shouldn't have been there.
- Loose pipe cover in the bedroom. Potential risk hazard for being burnt as this was loose.
- Loose shower seat which would become further damaged under the weight of a person.

### **Multi Storey Flat – (property subject to the variable letting standard)**

This property gave Board Members many questions which given its difficulty in letting already, further highlighted concerns.

- One smoke detector fitted.
- A number of protruding nails had been left in the skirting board.
- Kitchen and lounge of the property had been decorated.
- The bathroom was painted but had a toilet in a separate room and this had not been painted.
- Kitchen had been painted but cutting in not done which resulted in visible red paint from the previous decorating on windows and around plug sockets.
- Pantry door in kitchen was stuck
- Property had the floors washed but not done the edges.
- Stiff windows
- Damage to some of the floor which has not been fully levelled up.

The project group did not feel this particular property had met the lettable standard.

### **House**

This property out of the four visited raised serious concerns and it was the opinion of both Board Members and the Officer in attendance that this property should not have been returned as ready to let. The majority of issues related to poor condition of plaster, but other issues were noted including:

- Front door was sticking and not easy to open.
- Nails protruding in flooring.
- Couldn't check windows as property still had steel sheeting on
- Rubbish had been left in the garden.
- Loft hatch needed repair.
- Polystyrene ceiling tiles removed but not made good leaving an uneven surface.

The group were surprised at the major differences between standards of repair at each of the properties. This was in contrast to previous evidence received which said all properties in Leeds were returned to the same standard.

The project group therefore had concerns about the number of properties which are potentially being returned in this way and the impact this has on both customer satisfaction and also relet times. The Board acknowledged the need to have good performance on relet times but felt this shouldn't compromise the standard of properties returned. The Board also noted that where properties were returned unfinished or where they did not meet the lettable standard this is likely to have an impact of perception by the new tenant. The group also queried why the contractor felt that this was an acceptable standard to return a property in.

The Board asked if a record was kept of properties which are returned and found to not meet the lettable standard and where new tenants had raised concerns or complaints. The Board was informed a record was not kept, however they were advised the contractor returns immediately to complete work.

Whilst the Board felt this was a positive step when the contractor returns immediately, it becomes apparent this must be at the expense of other void properties and so there is potential to have a knock on effect. Also the property visited where major issues were identified would take more than a few hours to bring this property up to the lettable standard which will have a further impact on rent loss which the Council are unable to recover.

### **3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider appropriate recommendations and provide feedback and agree as appropriate the Board's report following its inquiry into the lettable standard.