

**Report of:** Simon Costigan, Chief Officer Property and Contracts

**Report to:** Housing Advisory Board

**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016

**Subject:** Enhancing the Lettings Standard in Targeted Areas with Low Satisfaction

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	Yes
<b>If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):</b> Moortown, Burmantofts and Richmond hill, Armley, City and Hunslet, Farnley and Wortley, Beeston and Holbeck, Burmantofts and Richmond Hill, Killingbeck and Seacroft, Bramley and Stanningley, Roundhay.	
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	Yes
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	No

## SUMMARY OF MAIN ISSUES

When a new tenant moves into a Council property it will meet the 'Lettings Standard' which is clearly defined and measurable. The 'Lettings Standard' will identify the level of work and standard of finish that will be provided for each new property that is allocated to a new tenant.

In applying the 'Lettings Standard' there is very little discretion and flexibility across the City to take account of locality, desirability, property type and customer expectations.

The current standard has been reviewed in order to apply a flexible approach which takes into account the family type, the locality, the desirability of the area and the age and type of property being offered. When analysing the levels of customer satisfaction for new tenants one of the biggest areas of dissatisfaction is the condition of the decorations

The new enhanced standard will offer a decoration scheme in a number of less popular multi storey blocks of flats and a number of terrace properties in the Recreations at Holbeck. These properties have been identified jointly across Housing Leeds through the work that has been done to identify the differential popularity of multi storey blocks across the City. There will be no change to the minimum lettings standard elsewhere in the city.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Housing Advisory Board are asked to note the content of the attached report and endorse the approach for the revised 'Lettings Standard'.

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of the Housing Advisory Board with details on the changes that have been introduced to the current 'Lettings Standard'

### **2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 As part of the service re-alignment to create Housing Leeds the previous lettings standards that were in operation were reviewed in 2014, in order to create a single standard that could be applied consistently across the City.
- 2.2 Whilst this created a consistent standard of service delivery, it allowed officers very little flexibility to take account of local circumstances when allocating properties.
- 2.3 Having undertaken a review of the satisfaction levels for new tenants, and linked into the work being done on the high rise programme, we have developed a differential lettings standard for a number of multi-story blocks across the City and a number of terrace properties in the Receptions.

### **3.0 MAIN ISSUES**

- 3.1 Whilst the previous lettings standard created a consistency of service provision it was driven by a process and didn't have any built in flexibility to respond to the human element of the service.
- 3.2 Due to the current demand for social housing across the City there is becoming less choice around location, customer choice and desirability and more focus on household requirements and availability of suitable accommodation.
- 3.3. In essence this means that many single applicants who are often moving out of the family home into their own accommodation for the first time are being rehoused into multi-storey blocks, often outside the area of the family home.
- 3.4 The focus of our service needs to concentrate on the human element of this service and apply some flexibility in order to create a homely environment where a new tenant feels comfortable and will want to remain and integrate into the local community
- 3.5. We need to understand that in order for a new tenant to create a sustainable tenancy they need to feel financially secure and have enough disposable income to undertake some basic home improvements.
- 3.6 Our proposals is to create a decoration scheme for the properties identified below, which will provide full decorations to the kitchen and bathroom and one other room of the tenants choice.
  - Alderton Heights
  - Boston Towers
  - Burnsall Grange
  - Clayton Court / Grange

- Clyde Court / Grange
- Cottingley Heights / Towers
- Cromwell Heights
- Gledhow Towers
- Parkway Towers
- Ramshead Heights
- Raynville Court
- Wortley Heights / Towers
- Recreation Grove / Place / Row / Street / Terrace / View

3.7 This will be agreed with the new tenant as part of the viewing process to allow choice and flexibility of rooms, with a commitment that this work will be completed within 14 days of the tenancy starting.

3.8 The above proposals have been developed in partnership across Housing Leeds and are closely linked to the 'High Rise' report that is being presented as a separate report to HAB.

3.9 Linked to the 'High Rise' report are proposals to look at further changes that may be required to the lettings standard in family friendly blocks.

3.10 These proposals look at the option of providing floor covering in certain circumstances to reduce any noise transference between floors and provide for additional storage provision to accommodate storage for toys & prams etc.

3.11 Further proposals will look at any specific needs for the retirement / sheltered as identified in the 'High Rise' report and will look at issues such as raised plug sockets, removing door sills for each of mobility, level taps throughout etc.

#### **4.0 CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS**

##### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 The attached proposals have been developed through involvement of service managers across Housing Leeds and front line who have attended a number of workshops.

4.1.2 The attached proposals have been presented to the three repairs focus groups for consultation and comment

##### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

4.2.1 Housing Leeds will undertake an EIA to identify any positive and negative impacts of the changes to the 'Lettings Standard'.

##### **4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities**

4.3.1 The proposals within this report will contribute towards the delivery of the Best Council Plan and the following priorities for 2016/17;

- Keeping people safe from harm
- Supporting communities, raising aspirations
- Providing enough homes of a high standard in all sectors
- Supporting children to have the best start in life
- Supporting healthy ageing

#### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

- 4.4.1 In order to develop the changes to the current letting standard the cost of any additional decorations will be approx. £700 per property.
- 4.4.2 Further analysis shows that during 15/16 there were 242 void properties in the properties identified at 3.6 which would equate to an annual expenditure of £170k
- 4.4.3 Ongoing analysis will be undertaken to evaluate future void rates to ascertain if these numbers reduce with additional analysis to see if the introduction of these measures helps create more sustainable tenancies by increasing the turnover rates in these properties.

#### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

- 4.5.1 No implications identified.

#### **4.6 Risk Management**

- 4.6.1 Progress is reported to the joint SMT for Housing Leeds which will identify risks and assign a risk owner to any identified risks.

#### **5.0 CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 The proposals contained in this report are intended to improve the standard of property on offer for new tenants across the City while allowing flexibility to deliver a product that helps match the aspirations of new tenants and responds to the different needs of customers in certain property types and specific localities in the City.

#### **6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Housing Advisory Board are asked to note the content of the attached report and endorse the approach for the revised 'Lettings Standard'.