

For publication

Housing Service updates on the decent homes standard, turning round a vacant property and the impact of Covid on the backlog of repairs

Meeting:	Enterprise and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee
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1.0 Purpose of the report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on each of the three areas requested by the Committee: Decent homes standard, turning round a vacant property, and the impact of Covid on the backlog of repairs.

2.0 Decent homes standard

Background and current position

- 2.1 The Decent Homes Standard (DHS) was a target set by Government to ensure all social homes meet set standards of decency. Launched in 2004, local authorities were required to set out a timetable which would assess and improve housing stock. The DHS arose from the UK Government's Housing Green Paper – 'Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All' and the standard was first published in England in April 2002. It was further updated in 2006 to take into account the Housing Act 2004 and included the implementation of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). It was expected that all homes were to be decent by 2010.
- 2.2 The 'standard' incorporates four main criteria and any property that does not meet all four criteria is deemed to have failed the standard:
- it must meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing
 - it must be in a reasonable state of repair
 - it must have reasonably modern facilities and services
 - it must provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

- 2.3 The DHS was implemented to improve living standards for our tenants, help reduce heating costs and reduce carbon emissions, and generally maintain a good standard of housing.
- 2.4 The target for decency for our stock is 100%. Currently, performance stands at 99.7%.

Actions being taken

- 2.5 Our target is to be back at 100% decency during 2023. Once this standard is reached and comfortably maintained, it is then the Housing Service's ambition to further improve our housing stock beyond the DHS.
- 2.6 The latest Housing Capital Programme includes re-pointing to help reduce mould and damp issues, improving insulation where required (wall and loft), replacement of double glazing, and ongoing kitchen and bathroom replacements.
- 2.7 The Housing Service is currently considering the further inclusion of cavity insulation renewal, floor insulation and the introduction of alternative energy sources.
- 2.8 A government review of the DHS was published in February 2021. Part 1 of the review was to understand to what extent the current Standard is the right ask of the social housing sector today, and to consider the case for change. Part 2, which began in spring 2022 following the Levelling Up white paper announcements, was to explore potential regulatory changes to the standard. Consultation on this ran to October 2022 but as yet, no further detail has been issued by government.

3.0 Turning round a vacant property

Background and current position

- 3.1 The large number of households on the Council's housing register, and the increasing pressure on homelessness services, means it is essential that we have efficient processes for turning around empty homes. During the pandemic, performance on void servicing was affected as the Council had to prioritise emergency repairs and due to the restrictions on viewing and letting properties, and this resulted in a backlog.
- 3.2 There are currently 278 empty council homes, which include 52 on Leander, Mallard and Aston in Staveley as part of the Lowgates refurbishment programme.
- 3.3 Of the 226 'management voids'
- 13 are new voids where work has not yet commenced,

- 24 are complete and with the Allocations Team for letting,
- 9 are in need of major structural works, e.g. underpinning,
- 57 are currently awaiting electrical and gas works,
- 19 are complete and waiting for cleaning and gas recommissioning, and
- 104 are currently with the Voids Team in various stages of inspection and work in progress.

3.4 The most recent annual report to tenants included performance on average relet times, which was 94.7 days for 2021/22.

Actions being taken

- 3.5 It is essential that we reduce the time taken to relet homes and a project group has been established to ensure improvements to the overall process. Current actions and progress can be summarised as follows:
- 3.6 The Voids Team is working more closely with the Gas and Electrical Teams to speed up the process for initial gas cap-offs and electrical checks.
- 3.7 The appointment of the new Senior Lead Officer for Voids has helped to improve communication between Voids, Homelessness and Allocations teams, and cross service working is helping to ensure that priority is given to the highest demand properties, including those required for homeless households, which in turn will reduce reliance upon temporary accommodation and bed and breakfast and associated costs.
- 3.8 The Housing Management team is reviewing its approach to tenant home visits, pre-transfer inspections, pre-termination visits and new tenancy visits – this will help to increase tenancy sustainment and also improve efficiency in the end-to-end process, by having less work to do in properties when tenancies end.
- 3.9 Benchmarking discussions will take place with other organisations to ensure we apply lessons learned from high-performing peers.
- 3.10 A review of the void advertising and viewing processes will help to manage customer expectations around timescales and improve the overall customer experience of moving into a new home.
- 3.11 Performance and progress will be reviewed monthly by the Housing Leadership Team.

4.0 The impact of Covid on the backlog of repairs

Background and current position

- 4.1 Between March 2020 and June 21, the Responsive Repairs team was only able to deliver emergency repairs, with non-urgent repairs suspended to

reduce contact between our workforce and tenants, and prevent the increased spread of Covid.

- 4.2 The gas servicing process was maintained throughout, but our normal access enforcement processes were impacted and as shown in the 2021/22 annual report to tenants, performance dropped to 94.7%. This has subsequently returned to 100%, and maintaining the health and safety of our tenants continues to be the highest priority for the Housing Service.
- 4.3 By April 2021 the number of overdue non-urgent repairs had reached 1591, and the service focused on dealing with the backlog while also receiving requests for new repairs and continuing to prioritise emergency repairs.
- 4.4 On 8 November 2022, the number of overdue repairs was 556. To place this in context, the overall number of repairs in progress (including the backlog) at this point was 2,139.
- 4.5 While this represents a significant reduction in the number of overdue repairs, further actions are necessary to ensure we deliver excellent services to our customers and reduce the risk of future disrepair cases.

Actions being taken

- 4.6 We are reviewing our service delivery arrangements including customer contact and ICT systems.
- 4.7 We are focusing our resources in the areas of highest need and identifying and addressing additional staff requirements.
- 4.8 We are implementing a new performance management framework to ensure clear, monthly reporting arrangements and to help identify where changes are needed to drive up improvement.
- 4.9 We are reviewing materials and supply chain arrangements, in order to improve efficiencies and the overall service.
- 4.10 We are increasing tenant engagement staff resources, so that robust tenant scrutiny arrangements can be put in place. This will help us to identify further areas for improvement and increase tenant satisfaction with the repairs service.

Document information

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