
REPORT TO:	HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 6
DATE OF MEETING:	25 APRIL 2023	CATEGORY:
REPORT FROM:	STRATEGIC DIRECTOR (SERVICE DELIVERY)	OPEN
MEMBERS' CONTACT POINT:	PAUL WHITTINGHAM Paul.whittingham@southderbyhsire.gov.uk	DOC:
SUBJECT:	COUNCIL HOUSE LETTINGS AND VOID PROPERTIES	
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE: HCS01

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 That the progress towards the targets and improvement plan agreed in the Report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee of 4th January 2023 are noted by the committee.
- 1.2 That the revised dates in the Improvement Plan are agreed by the committee and that the performance at the end of Quarter 1 , 2023/24 will be included in the Corporate Performance report.

2.0 Purpose of the Report

- 2.1 To update the Committee on progress against the actions to improve performance that were presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4th January 2023.
- 2.2 To identify the next series of actions that are to be implemented to improve performance.

3.0 Executive Summary

- 3.1 The Corporate Performance Indicator for the average time to relet council homes has been well above target throughout this financial year.
- 3.2 A series of actions were proposed to the Housing and Community Services Committee on 19th April 2022 with additional actions proposed to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4th January 2023
- 3.3 Progress has been made in all of these areas. Unfortunately the need to resurvey properties, the completion of major works and staff absence have prevented the Council from hitting its first "milestone" target for the end of the financial year.

However, further actions have already been taken to overcome these obstacles in order to achieve the overall target by the end of the first quarter of 2023/24.

4.0 Detail

4.1 Performance

The Corporate Plan Performance Report presented to the Housing and community Services Committee on 9th of March 2023 reported that the average relet time for Council properties in the third quarter of this year was 189 Calendar days. Prior to this a report had been presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4th January 2023 outlining an action plan to improve this position by the end of the current financial year and to reduce relet times to thirty days by the end of the first quarter of 2023/24.

A comparison of performance from the end of Quarter 3, to January and February does show progress in reducing relet times for major works, standard works and over all void properties.

	Quarter 3	January 2023	February 2023
Overall	189 days	177.5 days	128.9 days
Major Works	225.25 days	196.75 days	175 days
Standard works	149.33 days	172.00 days	127 days

4.2 Performance in February 2024 showed that overall relet times had reduced to 128.9 days from 189 days although the average time for “standard “ works did increase in January before reducing during February.

4.3 Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4th January were advised that there were 104 properties vacant and being prepared for letting. Of this figure seventy-nine properties still remain vacant and under repair or being prepared for reletting although sixteen are now ready to be let and in the process of being offered and viewed to new tenants. Twenty-five of these properties have been let to new tenants.

4.4 The Action Plan presented to Committee did highlight the need to resurvey a number of empty properties. Whilst this has a time-consuming exercise it has proved valuable in that it did reveal several major property safety issues. All these issues have had to be resolved before property can be legally and safely let to a new tenant. Of the sixty-three properties from the original report that are not yet let or ready to let thirty-two were found to have these major works.

- 8 properties were found to be damp and required new damp proof course to be fitted by specialist contractors
- 10 properties were found to have unsafe internal glazing which had to be replaced
- 11 properties were found to contain asbestos usually in fractured floor tiles – this has had to be either removed or contained
- 3 properties were found to have major structural issues

4.5 A consequence of the need to resurvey all properties is delayed progress towards the first milestone to reduce the number of properties vacant for eight

weeks by the end of the financial year. The current position with these backlog properties is shown below.

Void status	Number
Ready to Let	16
Under Repair	38
Safety Checks	16
Re survey	4
Meter Checks	3
Clearance	1
Major Works	1
Total	79

The responsibility for completing surveys, ordering asbestos surveys and works and completing the necessary documentation before placing orders lies mainly with two "Project Officers" in the Repairs Team. One of these posts is currently filled by an Agency member of staff after recruitment to the full-time post was unsuccessful. Unfortunately, the other post holder has been absent due to illness and this post has also had to be covered by an agency colleague.

Members of staff from other areas of the Housing Team are being trained to carry our survey and inspection work and the possibility of staff from other areas of the Council carrying out survey works are also being explored.

The current contracts and Schedule of Rates does include the provision for surveys to be completed by contractors. This option will only be deployed with robust controls in the Housing Team.

- 4.6 Since the original report was produced in December a further 49 tenancies have been terminated. 32 of these were ended in February and March .Their current status is shown below.

Void status	Number
Ready to Let	7
Under Repair	4
Safety Checks	17
Survey	18
Meter Checks	0
Clearance	0
Major Works	3
Total	49

Whilst the overall number of vacant properties has increased, this has been affected by the glut of new vacancies during February and March. As the table above shows some of these more recent vacancies are already Ready to Let and Under repair.

The safety checks involved now include more robust electrical, damp/mould , gas and asbestos checks

- 4.7 Of the total forty-seven properties have already been advertised, offered, and accepted by potential tenants. Five properties are currently being advertised with forty-eight ready to be advertised.

4.8 The report to Housing and Community Services committee on 19/4/2022 identified a series of actions aimed at improving the performance of services to relet council homes. A further set of actions were presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4th January 2023. The remaining outstanding actions are all shown below with revised target dates.

Actions Identified in April 2022	Revised Target	Complete	Owner	Comment
Performance				
Property				
Greater control of repairs that are chargeable to the tenant	June 2023	No	Repairs Manager	Improvement Project
Information Technology				
Enhancing the use of the Lifespan Stock condition systems to update property safety information.	June 2022	Partial	Asset and Compliance Officer	Further work in progress to automate stock condition updates.
Greater use of the Jigsaw system to identify demands and trends	May 2023	Partial	Housing Solutions and Support Manager	
Allocations				
Control of transfers to reduce tenancy terminations	June 2023	Partial	Tenancy Manager Services	New Transfer procedure in development.
Streamlining Sign Up processes	June 2023	No	Tenancy Manager Services	“Secure Sign “ electronic document system in process of being procured
Hard to Let Properties				
Possible Declassification of Sheltered Housing Stock	TBC	No	Internal Audit	Audit review of current classification of sheltered properties
Electrical				
Electrical project officer recruitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency officer appointed Advertising complete Interviews arranged		Yes Yes No	Asset and Improvement Manager	No applicants for full time post, agency staff in place.
IT	Target	Complete	Owner	Comments
Direct IT Link from	July 2023	No	Head of Housing/IT	Will improve

Orchard contractors	to			Project Support/NOVUS	process for placing orders for all repair work
PROCESS /PROCEDURE					
Clarify “Lettable standard”		July 2023	In Progress	Head of Housing/Novus	To reduce number of variation orders

4.9 Electrical Works

4.10 Whilst recruitment for a full time Project Officer (Electrical) has not been successful, the agency member of staff has been able to improve the position with all electrical certifications including for void properties. The Councils method for managing the handling certificates has also improved. This means that major works such as rewiring are identified earlier in the void process reducing the knock on delays to other works in void properties

4.11 Recruitment/Staffing

4.12 As described above recruitment in the key area of electrical safety has been difficult. Elsewhere in the Repair and Maintenance team further additional resource has been sourced to cover absence and sickness where necessary .In addition to this staff from other areas of the Housing service are being trained to especially assist the repairs team in handling the documentation for empty properties especially safety certificates and the handover of properties to the Housing Solutions Allocations team.

4.13 Property

- 4.14 As reported to the Committee earlier, the clearance of debt from prepay meters has been a major obstacle to be overcome before any work can start in a vacant property. New arrangements are in place with utility providers to make this process quicker allowing for the earlier start of works in empty properties.
- 4.15 Part of the re survey process has also included making improvements to the process for identifying and either removing or safely containing asbestos within properties. This will be compliant with the new performance indicators required by the housing Regulator from April 2023 which were previously reported to the housing and Community Services Committee.

4.16 Information Technology

4.17 As reported earlier the whole voids process is now being managed through the Orchard Void Management module. Further changes are being made to this system to improve performance

4.18 Allocations/Hard to Let Properties

4.19 The actions identified in the plans for the Housing Solutions team to advertise properties more widely have proved to be successful with currently only two properties being considered “hard to let” by the team.

Managing the Plan

4.20 Weekly operational meetings which include NOVUS and SDDC staff are in place. These meetings review progress of each individual property. This is complemented by a weekly Management Overview meeting attended by the Head of Housing and NOVUS contract managers.

4.21 Following the publication of an “expression of interest” document to contractors in the Efficiency East Midlands (EEM) Framework the Council has been able to secure another contractor with the capacity to carry out void works. This contract will commence on 24th March 2023 and work is underway to implement the financial and other systems necessary in order to place and manage works orders with the new contractor. Additional contractor capacity will improve the time taken to complete the repair work stage of the relet process.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 The Financial Implications section of the report to housing and Community Services Committee on 19th April 2022 stated that “One of the aims of the improvements identified is to reduce the overall rent loss to the Council of properties being vacant which is reported to Committee on a quarterly basis. Reports to Finance and Management Committee throughout 2021/22, have highlighted the loss of income from void properties compared to that included in the HRA’s Budget. As reported to that Committee on 17 March, the overall reduction in rent due to voids, was expected to total £450k in 2021/22 compared to a budget provision of £215k.

6.0 Corporate Implications

Employment Implications

6.1 There are no direct employment implications contained within this report

Legal Implications

6.2 There are no direct Legal implications contained within this report.

Corporate Plan Implications

6.3 The contents of this report directly contribute to the aims within the Corporate Plan to: Support and safeguarding the most vulnerable. With partners encourage independent living and keep residents healthy and happy in their homes.

Promote health and wellbeing across the District.
Improve the condition of housing stock and public buildings.

Risk Impact

- 6.4 A number of Risks have been identified that could impact on the delivery of this plan.
- A higher number of terminations than expected.
 - Loss of skilled contractor labour
 - Loss of Skilled SDDC supervisory colleagues (electrical /gas Project officers)
 - Harder to let properties becoming vacant. Around 20% of vacant properties are consistently first and second floor sheltered flats with low demand.

7.0 Community Impact

Consultation

- 7.1 The process for reletting Council properties has been discussed with the Tenants Voice Group.

Equality and Diversity Impact

- 7.2 There is direct Equality and Diversity impact contained within this report.

Social Value Impact

7.3

Environmental Sustainability

- 7.4 There are no direct environmental sustainability impacts within this report.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 Relet performance has improved overall and for both major and minor works during January and February 2023.
- 8.2 The need to re survey more properties than expected and the identification of major property safety works has meant that progress towards the target for the end of the financial year has not been as planned.
- 8.3 Additional internal resources to assist with the administration and surveying of empty properties will enhance progress with these stages. The appointment of a new contractor will also assist with the completion of repair works with more properties being under repair at any one time. This will assist the Council in achieving its target by the end of the first quarter of 2023/24.

9.0 Background Papers

Housing and Community Services Committee 19th April 2022 Council House Reletting
Overview and Scrutiny Committee 12th October 2022 Novus Presentation
Housing and Community Services Committee 17th November 2022 – Corporate
Performance Report.

Notes:

- * Category – Please see the Committee Terms Of Reference in [Responsibility for Functions - Committees](#). This shows which committee is responsible for each function and whether it has delegated authority to make a decision, or needs to refer it elsewhere with a recommendation.
- ** Open/Exempt - All reports should be considered in the open section of the meeting, unless it is likely that exempt information would be disclosed. Please see the [Access to Information Procedure Rules](#) for more guidance.
- *** Committee Terms Of Reference in [Responsibility for Functions - Committees](#).