

Report to: Performance Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 14th July 2016

Lead Member / Officer: Lead Member Modernisation & Housing/
Head of Facilities Assets & Housing

Report Author: Lead Officer – Community Housing

Title: Re-Letting of Council Homes

1. What is the report about?

This report is to provide an update on the performance outcome for the re-letting of Council homes.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To update the Performance Scrutiny Committee on the background to the process involved with the re-letting of Council homes and the current thinking around the service provided by Community Housing for our customers.

3. What are the Recommendations?

To consider the contents of this report, comment accordingly and support the approach adopted by the Council with respect of the re-letting of Council homes and the associated revised performance target.

4. Report details

The performance target for re-letting homes has historically been 26 calendar days to include all stages from the ending of one tenancy to the start of another at the same property.

Whilst this “void” period results in rent loss for the period that the property is not tenanted, there are a number of factors to consider between letting a home in the shortest possible time frame, whilst ensuring that a property is let to a reasonable standard, and the right household is allocated, and able to sustain their tenancy.

This is a joint target in terms of the Community Housing team having to identify a suitable new tenant, and the Property teams carrying out the necessary cleaning, clearing and repair works required to bring a property up to an appropriate standard for the new household to move in.

Re-let performance during 2014/15 was consistently between 25 and 30 days. This is currently 43 days as at May 2016.

Significantly Improved Letting Standards

Community Housing has commenced a review into the standards of how we let properties, and are developing a common understanding across teams as to what standards we expect.

Whilst we have achieved Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) overall for our stock, homes are often returned to the Council in poor condition, particularly in terms of decoration and cleanliness.

The approach had been taken to carry out essential repairs to ensure health and safety requirements are adhered to, in order to ensure that properties can be re-let as quickly as possible with the performance target in mind. The decorative condition of the property relied mainly on the state that the property was left in by the outgoing tenant.

Since the appointment of the Head of Facilities, Assets and Housing and new Lead Officer group, the culture has changed to ensure that homes are re-let to the highest possible standard.

Pride & Efficiency

A key factor in significantly improving the standards is to encourage an increase in the pride that customers have in their homes and garden areas, and in the longer term to increase our efficiency and reduce our on-going expenditure on responsive maintenance and programmed capital works.

Internal redecoration and garden works have generally not been prioritised in the past but this is now key to ensuring that families have a higher quality home to move into with significantly better outside space to use and play. The new standard is attached in appendix 1.

The Benefits of Higher Re-Let Standards

The increase in the re-letting standards will increase costs, however there are a number of benefits that this culture will bring to the community housing service:

- Significantly raise the standards of service for customers
- Clearly set out the standards we expect for new tenants to the Council
- Encourage tenants to take pride in their new home
- Enable new tenants to move in quickly and avoid prolonged disruption with on-going work, and the expense of bringing the house to an appropriate standard
- Address long standing poor garden conditions
- Reduce future ongoing maintenance
- Reduce new tenants repair request and queries

Adhering to the new standard will require a more appropriate target of 35 days to allow for redecoration of the property, and work to provide a safe quality garden space. Over time we expect efficiency and performance to improve once we have

established the correct level of resources and developed improved co-ordination of our services.

Performance Monitoring

Performance is monitored at Lead Officers Group and we will continue to benchmark our performance with other Landlords in Wales and also similar Landlords in England.

Customer satisfaction with the re-let process is also closely monitored.

The Service has requested an internal audit of Allocations and Voids processes and this work commenced on 27th June 2016.

It is common practice for other social landlords to require a new tenancy to start before carrying out the majority of repair works, in order to facilitate the shortest possible re-let performance. We are now taking the approach that new tenants are best served by having all work completed to the highest possible standard before the tenancy commences.

A void property has been completed to the new standards with visits carried out with Housing and Property teams to view the standards. The Lead Member for Modernisation & Housing has also visited, for information.

Efficient Lettings

The implementation of SARTH (Single Access Route to Housing) later in 2016 will deliver a more accurate indication of housing need, and support a more efficient lettings process.

Best Use of Housing Stock

Despite significant demand for housing, the very limited numbers of properties that become available does mean that it is increasingly difficult to meet the range and complexity of needs of our customers.

Work is also underway to implement neighbourhood housing strategies, which will give us a detailed understating of housing needs now and in the future, to enable us to ensure that our stock will be fit for purpose.

In response to this evidence, in addition to building new homes, we are likely to review the suitability of some of our existing stock with the potential to demolish and replace if necessary, reclassify if more suitable for another household type, and refurbish, to ensure homes are attractive and have modern facilities for households.

Considerable progress has been made in key pressure areas of Rhyl and Denbigh, through acquiring suitable land and sites, and to identify potential properties where a different use may be more appropriate.

In addition work is underway to identify the impact that further welfare reforms will have on lettings issues and the sustainability of tenancies.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The Council's Corporate Plan has a priority for "Ensuring access to good quality housing" and this recommendation supports this priority, to enable customers in Denbighshire to get the best possible service when looking to access housing.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The re-letting process has an impact on costs in terms of the rent loss during the period a home is unoccupied, and the repair and maintenance costs associated with the re-letting standards. These are both closely monitored.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision?

An Equality Impact Assessment was not required as there is no specific impact on any of the protected characteristics.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

The revised re-letting standards will be discussed with DTARF the Federation of Denbighshire residents groups, however support is likely as the standard is being increased significantly.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The rent loss and repair and maintenance costs are contained and accounted for within the Housing Revenue Account, and are closely monitored.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

The risk is loss of rent due during the period when properties are empty. The report identifies the actions that are to be taken to keep this to a minimum.

11. Power to make the Decision

Article 6.3.4(b) outlines Scrutiny's powers with respect of performance monitoring

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