



## THE LIVING ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 7TH SEPTEMBER 2010

**SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO THE WALES AUDIT OFFICE INSPECTION OF THE  
MANAGEMENT OF EMPTY COUNCIL HOMES – PROGRESS REPORT**

**REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide information to Members on the feedback from the Tenants & Residents Forum on the summary and recommendations of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) on the management of empty council homes.
- 1.2 To advise Members of the progress made to date with regard to the CCBC action plan put in place.

### 2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The WAO provided the final report of the inspection in December 2009 following their investigations, which included scrutiny of documents and meetings with relevant members of staff.
- 2.2 The WAO concluded that the CCBC management of empty homes is not 'fully effective' and produced a series of recommendations for the council to consider.
- 2.3 An initial report was presented to Members on 4th May 2010 on the summary and recommendations of the Wales Audit Office (WAO) following their presentation to Scrutiny Committee on 16th March 2010 on the management of empty council homes.
- 2.4 Members were invited to provide any initial comments on the recommendations and actions taken to date, for referral to the Empty Property Management Group (EPMG) for their attention.
- 2.5 A further report was requested by Members for feedback following consultation with tenants on the matters raised.

### 3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 **National Housing Strategy:** The Welsh Assembly Government's National Housing Strategy 'Better Homes for People in Wales' (2001) has key themes of quality and choice. The WAG vision for housing "*wants everyone in Wales to have the opportunity to live in good quality, affordable housing*".
- 3.2 **Community Strategy:** Living Environment Objective A: "*Encourage the development and maintenance of high quality, well designed and efficient, sustainable homes and residential environments that can meet all needs*" which promotes the vision of good quality housing.

- 3.3 **Local Housing Strategy 2008-2013:** Property Theme: “Providing the opportunity for everyone to live in affordable, sustainable, good quality housing, regardless of tenure.” And links specifically to Strategic Aim 6: Housing Management, “To provide good quality, well-managed homes in communities where people want to live, and offer people housing choices which meet their needs and aspirations.”

#### 4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 A special meeting was held on 6th August with the Tenants & Residents Forum (TRF). Eleven representatives of a membership of 26 attended. A briefing paper was provided for their consideration in advance of the meeting.
- 4.2 The TRF were asked to comment on the matters raised in Recommendation 3 of the WAO report as detailed below:

*R3 Introduce other options to improve performance including:*

- *enforcing the notice period for properties where a tenancy is terminated without the statutory four weeks' notice being given;*
- *undertaking preliminary voids work whilst the property is either still occupied or to charge the first four weeks void period to the late tenant account if the tenancy is vacated without notice or where a tenant has died;*
- *pre letting empty homes during the notice period;*
- *carrying out non-essential repairs after the new tenant has moved into the dwelling;*
- *introducing incentive schemes to encourage tenants to vacate properties in a timely manner and leave their home in a good condition to support quick re-letting; and*
- *regularly run advertising campaigns in local press, use advertising boards in a property and consider implementing choice based lettings.*

- 4.3 The TRF were asked to specifically consider and offer their views on the following:

**a) Undertaking preliminary repairs during the 4 week notice period whilst tenant is in occupation**

TRF feedback: The option was not supported. An initial inspection would be acceptable in preparation for the end of tenancy repairs but not to undertake works.

**b) Charging the first four weeks void period to the late tenant account where a tenant has died**

TRF feedback: The option was not supported. The TRF requested that a 2 week free rent period for deceased tenants families and representatives be considered in the future.

**c) Pre-letting the property during notice period whilst tenant in occupation**

TRF feedback: The option was not supported.

**d) Carrying out non-essential repairs after the new tenant has moved into the dwelling**

TRF feedback: The option was supported in part. TRF requested further consideration to be given to providing ingoing tenants the choice of accepting a list of proposed works to be completed after they take up occupation but this would be subject to the tenant's agreement, optional but not enforced.

**e) Providing incentives to reward tenants who leave their home in a good condition**

TRF feedback: The option was not supported. TRF believed that decisions on 'good condition' could be subjective.

**f) Running advertising campaigns and use of advertising boards**

TRF feedback: The option was supported in part. 'Readily Available Properties' are already widely circulated. Reclassification and/or changes to property eligibility criteria to be considered as a possible option for the future.

**g) Reopening the debate on Choice Based Lettings**

TRF feedback: The option was not supported.

**h) Undertaking minimum repairs prior to letting**

TRF feedback: As point (d) above.

- 4.4 An action plan has been developed to follow up on the WAO recommendations. Task and finish working groups have been identified to take forward the actions required. The EPMG meet regularly to monitor overall progress.
- 4.5 An updated action plan is provided in Appendix 1 of this report for information to Members on the current position.
- 4.6 For information, the current voids performance is summarised as follows:

Description	Current Year (Aug 2010)	Previous Year (Aug 2009)
Current voids	93	165
Total new voids to date	341	380
Average relet time	39 days	55 days

**5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Empty property management affects the level of income and expenditure of the Housing Revenue Account.

**6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 None, this is an information report.

**7. CONSULTATIONS**

- 7.1 The views of the consultees have been included within this report.

**8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 That the contents of the report be noted.

**9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 This report was provided for information to Members.

## 10. STATUTORY POWER

### 10.1 Housing Act 1985.

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Consultees: Cllr. Lyn Ackerman, Cabinet Member  
 Cllr. Michael Prew, Chair of The Living Environment Scrutiny Committee  
 Cllr. Keith Lloyd, Vice Chair of The Living Environment Scrutiny Committee  
 Anthony O'Sullivan, Director of the Environment  
 Shaun Couzens, Head of Building Maintenance  
 Colin Jones, Head of Performance & Policy  
 Christopher Francis, Housing Strategy & Resources Manager  
 Kenyon Williams, Private Sector Housing Manager  
 Lesley Allen, Principal Accountant  
 Mark Williams, Building Consultancy Manager  
 Paul Smythe, Building Maintenance Manager  
 Kate Elmer, Housing Strategy & Review Manager  
 Ros Roberts, Performance Manager  
 Ian Raymond, Performance Management Officer  
 Rhys Lewis, Housing IT & Performance Monitoring Manager  
 Trudi Widdison, Performance Review Officer  
 Tony Williams, Performance Manager  
 Sue Cousins, Housing Portfolio Manager  
 Area/Neighbourhood Housing Managers  
 Angela Hiscox, Service Development Officer  
 Sandra Isaacs, Senior Rents Officer  
 Empty Property Management Group  
 Philip Jones, Senior Housing Officer  
 Colin Roden, Contracts/Senior QS Manager  
 Sandra Jones, Tenants & Residents Forum  
 Olga Skym, Tenants & Residents Forum  
 Stan Mark, Tenants & Residents Forum

Background Papers: WAO Report December 2009: Inspection of the management of empty Council homes; Caerphilly County Borough Council

Appendices:  
 Appendix 1 WAO Recommendations & CCBC Action Plan