



CAERPHILLY HOMES TASK GROUP (WHQS) - 21ST FEBRUARY 2013

SUBJECT: EMPTY PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

REPORT BY: DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 In response to a request from the Vice Chair of the Caerphilly Homes Task Group, this is an information report providing an update and clarification on the re-let standard, decoration allowances for tenants, tenant satisfaction rates, refusal rates and empty property void periods.

2. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 2.1 **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".
- 2.2 **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.
- 2.3 **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."

3. THE REPORT

- 3.1 Re-let Standard

Following the Wales Audit Office inspection into the Management of Empty Council Homes, an Action Plan for the Council was set and completed prior to submission to the Living Environment Committee on the 7th September 2010. See Appendix 1. This is included by way of background. Contained in this Action Plan was the action to 'Ensure all re-let homes meet the targets set in the re-let standard, measure compliance and regularly report performance to service users'. See Appendix 2. The Lettings Standard is supplied to all new tenants when signing for their tenancy. See Appendix 3. This Lettings Standard was agreed in consultation with Tenant Representatives and reported to the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee in March 2010. Work to empty property is identified through an end of tenancy inspection. Any work outstanding prior to the tenancy start date is notified to the tenant in writing on a standard pro-forma.

3.2 Decoration Allowance

The decoration allowance value is fixed annually. Each room is assessed prior to re-let and the allowance is granted depending on its decorative conditions. The amount per room is currently £45. Where an allowance has been approved, the tenant can choose which method of payment they would prefer:

- Credit to the rent account
- Cheque
- Decoration vouchers
- Decorators pack

In exceptional cases, a decision can be taken to re-decorate all or part of a property. This is called the Fairstart Scheme.

3.1 Tenant Satisfaction

Tenant satisfaction is measured using survey cards. All new tenants are sent a survey card monthly in retrospect following their tenancy start date. Data analysis of the returned survey cards are recorded on a quarterly basis. The average response rate is between 20/30%.

Cumulative Quarters 1, 2, & 3 – 2012/13

| Count of 4b. How would you describe the general condition of this property? | |
|---|----------------|
| 4b. How would you describe the general condition of this property? | Total |
| AVERAGE | 20.24% |
| GOOD | 44.05% |
| POOR | 4.76% |
| VERY GOOD | 26.79% |
| VERY POOR | 4.17% |
| Grand Total | 100.00% |

70.83%

Specific satisfaction levels are also reported on as required through the Corporate Ffynnon system.

3.2 Refusal Rates

The number of refusals and reasons for refusals between 01.05.2012 and 31.12.2012 are reported as follows:

| Refusal Reason | Count of Property reference |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| REF-APP CANCELLED | |
| OWN REQUEST | 28 |
| REF-HOUSED BY HA | 8 |
| REF-MEDICAL REASONS | 17 |
| REF-OTHR-SEE NOTEPAD | 269 |
| REF-PERSONAL REASONS | 60 |
| REF-PROP CONDITION | 23 |
| REF-PROP LOCATION | 154 |
| REF-PROPERTY SIZE | 34 |
| Grand Total | 593 |

There were 1582 offers made during this same period:

| Office Areas | Count of Property reference |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| BLACKWOOD | 325 |
| CAERPHILLY | 284 |
| GILFACH | 45 |
| GRAIG Y RHACCA | 53 |
| LANSBURY PARK | 64 |
| PONTLOTTYN | 322 |
| RISCA | 301 |
| YSTRAD MYNACH | 188 |
| Grand Total | 1582 |

This equates to a 37% rate of refusals to offers.

3.3 Void Property Performance Management

The total council housing stock at the beginning of 2013 was 10,917. For the calendar year 2012/13 there were on average 93 voids at any given time, which is less than 1% of the stock. The average void period, between end of tenancy and start of a new tenancy was 37 days. For comparison, the same data for 2011/12 was 124 voids with an average void period of 45 days. Up to the beginning of January 2013 we had received 636 new voids, compared with 701 in the previous year, for the same period.

4. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no legal implications. This report is for information purposes only.

5. **EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 This report is for information purposes, so the Council's Eqia process does not need to be applied.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no financial implications. This report is for information purposes only.

7. **PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no personnel implications. This report is for information purposes only.

8. **CONSULTATIONS**

8.1 The views of consultees listed below are incorporated within the report.

9. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 The contents of the report be noted.

10. STATUTORY POWER

10.1 Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002.

Author: Graham North, Public Sector Housing Manager
(Tel: 01495 235296 – E.mail: northg@caerphilly.gov.uk)

Consultees: Shaun Couzens Chief Housing Officer
Phil Davy, Head of Programmes
Kenyon Williams, Private Sector Housing Manager
Area/Neighbourhood Housing Managers
Lesley Allen, Principal Accountant
Sandra Isaacs, Rents Manager
Mandy Betts, Community Participation Officer
Rhys Lewis, Systems & Performance Manager
Trudi Widdison, Systems & Performance Analyst
Cllr. Gerald Jones, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing

Background Papers: Empty Property Management Procedures – available on the Caerphilly County Borough Council Intranet

Appendices:

Appendix 1 of 3 Report to Living Environment Scrutiny Committee – 7th September 2010
Appendix 2 of 3 Wales Audit Office (WAO) – Recommendations & Action Plan
Appendix 3 of 3 Lettings Standard