

**POLICY AND RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
3RD MARCH 2009**

SUBJECT: VOID PROPERTY INFORMATION REPORT - UPDATE

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF THE ENVIRONMENT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information to Members in response to requests for further details regarding void property repair costs, void property repair teams and property inspections at end of tenancy.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The report provides a breakdown of void property repair costs for 2007/2008 in cost bandings of £2.5k, the utilisation of void repair teams within Building Maintenance and outlines the procedure for undertaking inspections prior to a property becoming vacant.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 By bring properties up to an acceptable standard at which they can be re-let, the void property repair service links to the following strategies:
- 3.2 **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*".
- 3.3 **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.
- 3.4 **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 Properties become 'void' when a tenancy is ended and this can be for a number of reasons including; transfer, death of tenant, admission into care home, termination of tenancy, abandonment and eviction. During 2007/2008, void property repairs were undertaken to 985 properties and as requested, the costs below are shown in £2.5k bandings, whereas the previous report provided the breakdown in £5k bandings:

COST BANDING	NUMBER OF PROPERTIES
- £2.5k	613
£2.5k - £5k	237
£5k - £7.5k	90
£7.5k - £10k	28
£10k - £12.5k	9
£12.5k - £15k	3
£15k - £17.5k	2
£17.5k - £20k	0
£20k - £22.5k	0
£22.5k - £25k	1
+£25k	1
TOTAL	985

N.B. Due to the length of time since the original report was presented to 'Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee' on 30 September 2008, the total void property figure has varied slightly.

- 4.2 The majority of repair works carried out to void properties are undertaken by the in-house workforce, within Building Maintenance Services. In order to meet demand, three 'void work teams' have been established which are based on the housing areas covering the Upper Rhymney Valley area, Lower Rhymney Valley area and Eastern Valleys area. These teams consist of various trades and the priority and co-ordination of the work is organised jointly between the relevant Assistant Area Housing Manager and Foreman.

There are also on-site building maintenance teams based at the three Neighbourhood Housing Offices: Gilfach Bargoed, Lansbury Park and Graig Y Rhacca. However, whilst priority is given to void repair works, these smaller teams are also responsible for undertaking response repairs within the Neighbourhood.

When the in-house teams are unable to undertake the void repair work, the services of external contractors are utilised. This work has traditionally been tendered for on an individual basis, but in order to avoid unnecessary delays from this process, alternative contract arrangements are currently being considered. This may then enable the use of a number of external contractors to be utilised at short notice.

- 4.3 In cases where an outgoing tenant provides notice of their intention to terminate their tenancy a joint property inspection is carried by the Estate Management Officer/Housing Officer and Repairs Inspector/Maintenance Officer. The purpose of this inspection is to check conditions, which will include standard of decoration, unauthorised alterations and tenant damage/abuse/neglect. The outgoing tenant is advised of their responsibility to make good/re-instate any unauthorised alterations that they have undertaken, improve the standard of decoration where appropriate and carryout any repairs that are not due to 'fair, wear and tear' or, face the possibility of being recharged for the cost of this work. Advice is also provided regarding the need to remove all items, including floor coverings, from the property and outbuildings before returning the keys to the council on the date of termination. When an outgoing tenant does not provide notice of termination of tenancy or, does not allow access for a property inspection to be undertaken prior to the termination of tenancy, this may result in a recharge for repair works and clearance costs that could have been avoided.

A similar process is followed for those tenants wishing to transfer, however, offers of transfer will not be made unless property conditions including decoration, are deemed to be of an acceptable standard.

Any void property clearance costs and repair work that is not due to 'fair, wear and tear', is recharged to the outgoing tenant as per the current 'Recharge Procedure'.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None, this is an information report.

6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None, this is an information report.

7. CONSULTATION

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.

8.2 That the report is referred to the 'Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee' for information purposes.

9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 This report was provided in response to requests for further, more detailed information.

Author: Julie Reynolds, Neighbourhood Housing Manager – Gilfach Bargoed
Consultees: Cllr Lyn Ackerman - Cabinet Member Environment & Housing Services
Cllr Malcolm Parker - Chairman of the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Keith Lloyd - Vice Chairman of the Living Environment Scrutiny Committee
Anthony O'Sullivan - Director of the Environment
Shaun Couzens - Head of Building Maintenance
Graham North - Public Sector Housing Manager
Christopher Francis - Housing Strategy & Performance Manager
Mark Jennings - Housing Strategy Officer
Lesley Allen - Principal Accountant (Housing)
All Area/Neighbourhood Housing Managers

Background Papers: Empty Property Management User Guide (see intranet)
Termination Of Tenancy Procedure (see intranet)
Recharge Procedure (see intranet).
Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee Report: "Void Properties Information Report Detailing Work Undertaken on High Value Re-instatements" (30.09.08.)