

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Housing**Housing Scrutiny Group Report - Voids Process****1. Purpose of Report**

To provide the outcome of a scrutiny exercise undertaken by the Housing Scrutiny Group on the repairs element of the void property process. This is in accordance with the Council's Corporate Policy of Housing – a good quality home for everyone.

2. Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to RESOLVE that the recommendations in Appendix 1 and the proposed Lettable Standard in Appendix 2 be approved.

3. Detail

As part of the Regulator of Social Housing's Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, there is an expectation that Registered Providers of social housing provide meaningful opportunities for tenants to scrutinise their landlord's strategies, policies and services.

A decision was made by the Housing Influence Panel (HIP) to create a Housing Scrutiny Group to conduct scrutiny exercises, and report back their findings and recommendations to the HIP for them to monitor. In April 2024, scrutiny training was delivered to members of the HIP to ensure that they knew how to effectively review Housing services, improve standards and to hold the Council to account through structured analysis, understanding co-regulation and developing effective recommendations.

The HIP scrutinised performance data and engaged in dialogue with Housing Senior Managers to identify a key area for scrutiny, and the Panel commissioned a relet process project. The original intention was to review the entire relet process, however, due to staffing limitations within the Lettings team, it was not feasible for that service to dedicate time away from operational delivery. As a result, the scope of the review was refined to focus specifically on the repairs element of the void property process.

The Scrutiny Group aimed to explore how effectively the repairs process supports the delivery of homes that are ready to be let meet agreed standards and provide a consistent experience for incoming tenants. A key area of concern identified early in the review was that the Lettable Standard had not been reviewed in over seven years. Additionally, it was noted that independent quality assurance checks are not routinely conducted on void properties once they have been processed.

The group also examined the availability and clarity of information provided to tenants about the voids process, with a view to improving transparency, trust, and tenant confidence in the service.

The HIP will receive regular updates on progress on the approved recommendations, and progress will be reported to tenants via various communication channels such as the Housing Newsletter (which is sent out to all tenants) and on the Council's website.

The report in **Appendix 1** outlines the group's approach, findings, and recommendations to enhance the quality and consistency within the Void Repairs Service. **Appendix 2** contains the proposed Lettable Standards that will be shared with new tenants to provide them with assurance that their new property meets the minimum standard of overall state of repair, condition and cleanliness.

4. Key Decision

This report is a key decision as defined under Regulation 8 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 as it affects residents in more than two wards.

5. Updates from Scrutiny

This applies where a policy has been through pre-scrutiny or Policy Overview Working Group.

6. Financial Implications

The comments from the Interim Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer were as follows:

There are no additional financial implications for the Council at this stage with the costs associated with the recommendations being contained within existing budgets. Any significant budget implications in the future, over and above virement limits, would require approval by Cabinet.

7. Legal Implications

The comments from the Head of Legal Services were as follows:

There are various pieces of legislation and standards the Council must comply with in the context of inspecting and undertaking works to void properties and management of these properties.

The consumer Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard set by the Regulator of Social Housing forms a further part of the regulatory framework for

social housing and is relevant to the standards the Council sets and publishes for re-letting its properties and what incoming tenants can expect.

The recommendations and the proposed standards as detailed in the report will provide the assurance that the above legal and regulatory obligations are being met by the Council.

8. Human Resources Implications

Not applicable.

9. Union Comments

Not applicable.

10. Climate Change Implications

The climate change implications are contained within the report.

11. Data Protection Compliance Implications

This report does not contain any OFFICIAL(SENSITIVE) information and there are no Data Protection issues in relation to this report.

12. Equality Impact Assessment

Not applicable.

13. Background Papers

Nil.