

Agenda

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Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Date: **Monday 13 November 2017**

Time: **5.00 pm**

Place: **Plowman Room - Town Hall**

For any further information please contact:

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Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Membership

Chair Councillor David Henwood

Vice Chair

Councillor Angie Goff

Councillor Jennifer Pegg

Councillor Gill Sanders

Councillor David Thomas

Councillor Elizabeth Wade

Geno Humphrey (Housing Panel co-optee)

Councillor Mike Rowley

Housing

The quorum for this Committee is four, substitutes are permitted.

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AGENDA

Pages

APOLOGIES

Substitutes are not allowed.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

VOID PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

7 - 60

Why is it on the agenda?
The Panel has asked for an update on the management of void residential properties.
Who has been invited to comment?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cllr Mike Rowley, Board Member for Housing;• Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

TENANT INVOLVEMENT

61 - 66

Background Information
At its meeting of 11 April 2016 the Housing Panel were briefed on the Tenant Involvement function within Housing & Property. The Panel the Panel agreed to make fourteen recommendations to the City Executive.
Why is it on the agenda?
To provide members with an update on tenant involvement following the recommendations mentioned above.
Who has been invited to comment?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cllr Mike Rowley, Board Member for Housing;• Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

5 RENT PERFORMANCE

67 - 76

Background Information
Following the Housing Scrutiny Panel's meeting on the 9 th November 2016, this report provides an update on current and former tenant arrears as at the end of September 2017
Why is it on the agenda?
For the Panel to note the report
Who has been invited to comment?
Tanya Bandekar, Service Manager Revenue & Benefits Katie Ball, Income Manager

NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

77 - 78

Background Information
The Panel has asked for data about the number of households and families with dependent children or expected babies in temporary accommodation
Why is it on the agenda?
For the Panel to note the data

HOUSING PANEL WORK PLAN

79 - 82

For the Panel to note and agree its work plan, which can be adjusted to reflect the wishes of the Panel.

NOTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Meetings are scheduled as follows:

- 11 December *at 4.00pm*
- 16 January 2018
- 8 March 2018
- 9 April 2018

All meetings begin at 5.00pm unless otherwise stated

DECLARING INTERESTS

General duty

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed "Declarations of Interest" or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your* employment; sponsorship (ie payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licences for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Declaring an interest

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest.

If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member "must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself" and that "you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned". What this means is that the matter of interests must be viewed within the context of the Code as a whole and regard should continue to be paid to the perception of the public.

*Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those of the member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

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To: Housing Panel
Date: 13th November 2017
Report of: Head of Housing
Title of Report: Void Property Management

Summary and recommendations

Purpose of report:	To provide members with an update on the management of void residential properties.
Key Decision	No
Executive Lead Member	Councillor Mike Rowley, Board Member for Housing
Corporate Priority	An Effective and Efficient Council
Report Author	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

Recommendation:

1. **The Housing Panel is asked to note the contents of this report**

Appendices

Appendix 1	Voids Service Agreement
Appendix 2	Tenancy Management Restructure Briefing
Appendix 3	Empty and Void Property Management Audit
Appendix 4	Void Property Performance
Appendix 5	Knights House Show Flat

Introduction and background

1. The management of the Council's void residential properties is carried out by three service teams, Tenancy Management and Allocations in Housing & Property Services and Void Works in Direct Services.
2. The roles and responsibilities of the respective teams are set out in Appendix 1 – Voids Service Agreement.
3. Prior to December 2015, the work currently done by Tenancy Management sat in the Void Property team in Direct Services. The Void Property team functions were subsumed into the Tenancy Management team at that time although this was not operational on void properties until April/May 2016. The rationale behind this restructure was sent to members of the Audit Committee in summer 2016 and is shown as Appendix 2 – Tenancy Management Restructure Briefing.
4. The Council's Internal Auditors, BDO, carried out an audit of Empty and Void Property Management in June 2016. This identified the same view of managers in that many of the previous procedures and processes needed to be re-engineered to work within a generic working environment rather than a specialised one
5. Throughout 2016, officers revised process and procedures and adopted the Voids Service Agreement, setting out the responsibilities of the teams.
6. Operational Managers from each of the service areas meet on a weekly basis to discuss current voids, capacity, forthcoming voids that are on notice, prioritising where required, and voids that have recently been re-let to learn any lessons.
7. Measures required to deal with hard to let properties are also agreed. An example is the show flat approach in Knights House, where a flat that had been empty for seven months with no demand was let within two weeks of being advertised with carpets and furniture. See Appendix 5 – Knights House Show Flat

Performance Improvement

8. The re-let time performance for 2016-17 and 2017-18 is shown in Appendix 4 – Void Property Performance.
9. The overall performance for the year 2015/16 was in the bottom quartile at 34.3 days with performance in March 2106 slipping to 40.1days.
10. The improvements to process took a considerable time to bed in and results only started to significantly improve in early 2017. This was a combination of working through the processes and staff having to learn a new job role.

11. The targets set for performance are 21 days for a standard general needs void and 31 days for standard and major works general needs voids combined.
12. The performance improvement has been significant with standard voids now being re-let in less than 15 days on average and standard and major works voids combined less than 18 days. Figures are accurate up to and including 24 October 2017.
13. Sheltered properties are shown separately as some are extremely hard to let and if they are finally let, while it is in one sense a success, the impact on performance statistics can be significant.

Additional Benefits of Performance Improvement

14. The improvement in re-let times has an impact by maximising rental income but there are also impacts in other areas. As Tenancy Management Officers are now involved in the whole process, they are able to deal with outgoing tenants in a much more managed process and in turn, it provides opportunities for properties to be advertised and prospective tenants to view properties before void property work is complete and in some cases before the former tenant has left. This means that in most cases, properties are able to be let the day that void works are finished, reducing the time that applicants are in less satisfactory accommodation.

Conclusion

15. The changes made to the operational processes in place to manage void properties have seen significant improvements in performance.
16. Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

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Void Service Agreement

Housing and Property & Direct Services

2017

Void Service Agreement

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Version Control:

Version	Date	Description of Changes
V 1.0	May 2017	
V 1.1	September 2017	Minor clarifications and typos

1. Introduction

This document sets out the roles and responsibilities of the teams involved in the management of Council housing stock becoming void and arrangements to ensure that the properties are re-let in the minimum amount of time. The teams involved are:

- Tenancy Management (Housing & Property)
- Allocations (Housing & Property)
- Building, Design & Facilities (Housing & Property)
- Responsive Building Operations (Direct Services)

2. Job Titles & Acronyms

STMO	Senior Tenancy Management Officer
TMM	Tenancy Management Manager
TMO	Tenancy Management Officer
VTL	Void Team Leader

3. Termination of Tenancies

There are several reasons for tenancies to be terminated, including:

- Death
- Moving to Residential Care
- Transfer to another Council property
- Nomination to a Housing Association
- Moving out of social housing sector
- Eviction
- Abandonment

There are several methods to end a tenancy in law:

- A tenant's 28 day Notice to Quit
- A landlord's 28 day Notice to Quit (and possibly a Possession Order)
- The execution of a Warrant for Possession by the Court Bailiff (Eviction)
- A surrender of the tenancy, agreed by both parties, ideally by way of a Deed

The TMO will ensure that the correct method of ending the tenancy is used, depending on the circumstance of the case. The 28 days' notice cannot lawfully be shortened however the decision whether to waive any rental charges during this period, such as if the keys are returned early, is at the discretion of the TMM or STMO.

4. Transfer Applicants

Tenants on the transfer list who are likely to be successful in bidding for a transfer will be visited by a TMO in advance. The Allocations Team will run regular reports to identify the tenants to be visited.

The purpose of the visit is to assess the condition of the property including the decorative condition as well as to prepare the tenant and speed up void turnaround times if possible. Where decoration is required, the tenant will be advised of the decoration work required. Any day to day repairs that are noted will be reported to Direct Services.

If the condition of the property is particularly poor, Notice of Seeking Possession may be served and the tenant will not be considered for any offers until the property condition has improved to a satisfactory standard.

5. Pre-termination Inspection

When a notice is received, every effort should be made to arrange a pre-termination inspection although sensitivities with bereaved relatives regarding the death of a tenant may make this difficult. The inspection will be carried out by a VTL.

Topics to be covered at the inspection visit include:

- Identification of any outstanding repair or decoration
- Identification of a tenant's potential recharge liability
- Early assessment of potential void work volumes

A Pre-Termination sheet will be completed at each visit and the record kept on the property file. If a VTL identifies that the condition of the property may not be suitable to be advertised or visited by prospective tenants before becoming void, they will inform the TMO.

For all properties becoming void, a record will be kept of whether a Pre-termination Inspection was carried out or not, and if not, what the reason was. This information will be part of the required management information and the percentage of inspections carried out as a proportion of properties becoming void will be recorded monthly on the Council's performance management system,.

If it is not possible to organise a visit, the TMO will make every effort to confirm with the outgoing tenant/relative, how many rooms there are, whether there are any disabled adaptations and whether there are any known major problems with the property. The TMO will also discuss with the tenant whether the property will be advertised and if they should expect potential visits to be made by prospective tenants.

6. Advertising Properties

Wherever possible, properties should be advertised as soon as notification of the forthcoming void is received. If photographs of a property are available, they should accompany the advert. Stock photos (e.g. sheltered blocks, property type) can be used if necessary.

7. Choice Based Lettings System

Oxford City Council works in partnership with other Registered Providers that own social housing stock in Oxford. This partnership is known as ORAH (Oxford Register for Affordable Housing). As the lead partner, the Council operates the city wide Choice Based Lettings Scheme for all partners, advertising properties and approving allocations and nominations to successful bidders. The Choice Based Lettings cycle is weekly.

Under the terms of the ORAH partnership, the City Council has a series of agreed targets for turning around offers, with properties that are immediately ready to let or expected to be ready within seven days having a turnaround target two working days for family accommodation and three working days for single person accommodation.

As the City Council is now advertising and allocating properties often before a tenancy ends, offers are being prioritised based on the expected void ready date.

8. Offer Approvals

When a bidding cycle closes, Allocations staff check those who are top of the bidding list for a property to ensure that:

- Properties are allocated to applicants in the most housing need
- An applicant is offered a property if they are considered suitable to sustain a tenancy
- The property offered is suitable for the applicant and their household's housing need

9. Accompanied viewing/letter of introduction

Accompanied viewings or viewings with a letter of introduction should be used to give potential tenants the opportunity to look round the property and make an early decision. These will have been discussed with the outgoing tenant or family of deceased where possible.

10. Return of Keys

Where keys are to be returned by outgoing tenants/relatives, they should be received by 12 midday on a Monday. If keys are received after this time, the full week's rent will be payable by the outgoing tenant and the property will not become void until the following Monday.

Each week, a report is generated showing properties where the keys are expected. Keys are returned by outgoing tenants to the Contact Centre. Customer Services Officers are required to immediately e-mail the Tenancy Management team (generic e-mail address) and the Voids Team when a set of keys is returned. A key receipt is provided to the tenant/family and a record of who accepted the keys is noted. If keys are returned when they are not expected, i.e. if there is not a current valid notice, the Contact Centre staff will immediately contact the TMO.

11. Key Safes

Keys are required to be collected by a member of the voids team no later than 24 hours after they have been received. A record of which member of staff collected the keys is kept. Each new void property is then visited and a key safe fitted. The key safe code is notified to all staff and contractors who need access to the property whilst void. Once a new tenant has been signed up, the key safe is removed.

12. Void Works

The VTL will inspect the property as soon as possible after the keys are returned. The VTL will notify the TMO about any adaptations if not already identified. The VTL will identify and order all works to bring the property up to the Void Standard.

These will include:

- Clearance of property and garden
- Clearance and lock changes of any sheds, garages or out-houses
- Rough cut of gardens and remove all temporary sheds, greenhouses and ponds (unless gifted to the incoming tenant)
- Insulation to loft space
- Gas and electric safety checks, ensuring there are usable utility supplies
- Essential repairs that must be completed while the property is empty
- Capital/major works only if the property could not be let otherwise
- Add capital/major works to the planned program where needed
- Complete or program all works that will be recharged to the previous tenant
- Plan/appoint all external planned works to be completed post void
- Plan/appoint all non-essential or minor repairs that could be completed once the new tenant has moved into the property or prior to the outgoing tenant moving out.
- Provide two complete sets of keys for the property including fobs, shed keys, balcony keys, bin store keys, all documented on the key form

13. Quality of Work

On completion of works the VTL will post-inspect the property and complete the post inspection form. The Void Team will advise the Tenancy Management team when a property is safe to view and will also provide a copy of the original specification and post inspection paperwork so that a copy can be given to the incoming tenant along with details of future appointment dates and job numbers.

14. Health & Safety

The VTL will supervise operational staff throughout the voids work and control Health and Safety on site. No unauthorised personnel or prospective tenants should visit site during the voids work without prior clearance from the VTL. Once attending site, access may still be refused if the operational staff on site consider the site not to be safe.

Throughout the void period, the VTL, in conjunction with Property Services, will ensure full compliance with L8 Water Management, including testing, chlorination and flushing as necessary, retaining comprehensive documentation. Some elements of the process may be carried out by the Council's specialist contractor.

The VTL will ensure compliance with regards to The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 e.g. fire doors, warning systems.

15. Additional Work in Hard to Let Properties

There are very few hard to let properties, and those are generally restricted to low demand sheltered properties. All properties that are hard to let are looked at in more detail and additional work around the presentation can be agreed. This may involve agreeing works such as decorating, carpeting or part-furnishing the property as a show home to make it more appealing.

In sheltered hard to let properties, show flats may be created that include furniture and other household items such as soft furnishings.

16. Viewings

Once a property has been allocated to a successful bidder, the TMO arranges for the prospective tenant to jointly view the property with them as soon as is practical, either when the outgoing tenant is still in situ or when a void property is considered to be in a safe condition to allow it. Where possible, the TMO will talk the prospective tenant through any void work still to be carried out and any programmed work that will take place at a future time. The TMO will obtain a firm indication of the intention of the prospective tenant as to whether they are likely to accept the property. See also section 9 – Accompanied Viewings.

17. Sign Ups

The TMO will arrange for the sign up to take place as soon as a property is considered ready to let by the VTL. A sign up may take place at the viewing.

18. Weekly Voids Meeting

A weekly Voids Meeting is held that would normally be attended by the Tenancy Management Manager, the Responsive Repairs and Voids Manager, the Voids and Transport Manager, the Allocations Manager and the Maintenance and Surveying Manager. Substitutes should attend if necessary.

The meeting discusses current and future void properties individually, identifying target work completion dates and challenging each part of the process from advertising through to sign up.

The work of the Voids Team will also be prioritised around properties where the applicant is ready to be signed up wherever possible.

19. Performance Management

The voids performance will be monitored through the weekly Voids Meeting and Key Performance Indicators will be reported on through the corporate performance management system.

All teams will update the relevant Void Pathway events on the housing management information system throughout the process to enable performance to be effectively monitored.

The Key Performance Indicators to be reported on are defined in the Housemark Priority Performance Benchmarking Guidance Manual 2015.

General Needs Properties

- Average re-let time in days (standard re-lets)
- Average re-let time in days (major works units, including time spent in works)
- Average re-let time in days (all re-lets, including time spent in works)

Sheltered Properties

- Average re-let time in days (all re-lets, including time spent in works)

All properties

- Average re-let time in days (all re-lets, including time spent in works)
- Void works repair time (standard re-lets)
- Void works repair time (major works)

Targets against these indicators will be agreed annually.

Tenancy Management Restructure

In autumn 2015, consultations were held with relevant staff about merging the Council's Garage Team and Void Property Officer Team into the Tenancy Management Team. Both the Garage and Void teams sat within Direct Services at that time.

The key driver is a more efficient customer focussed and joined up service with specific objectives as follows

- Greater integration between tenancy management, allocations and voids through the entire voids process, with an improved customer journey with a single point of contact from the point of viewing a void property, through the lettings process and for the duration of the tenancy.
- Improved integration of garage management with tenancy services, general estate management and corporate asset management
- Realisation of a post saving to the general fund

Prior to the restructure, a Tenancy Management Officer would manage a property while a tenant was in occupation, and when the time came, deal with any issues around tenancy termination (death/transfer etc) with the outgoing tenant. When the property keys were returned, the Void Property Officers took over responsibility for the property, showing prospective tenants around the property, making the offer and signing the new tenant up, after which responsibility for the property passed back to the Tenancy Management Officer. This didn't provide effective continuity of customer service and was inefficient in terms of staff time spent exchanging information.

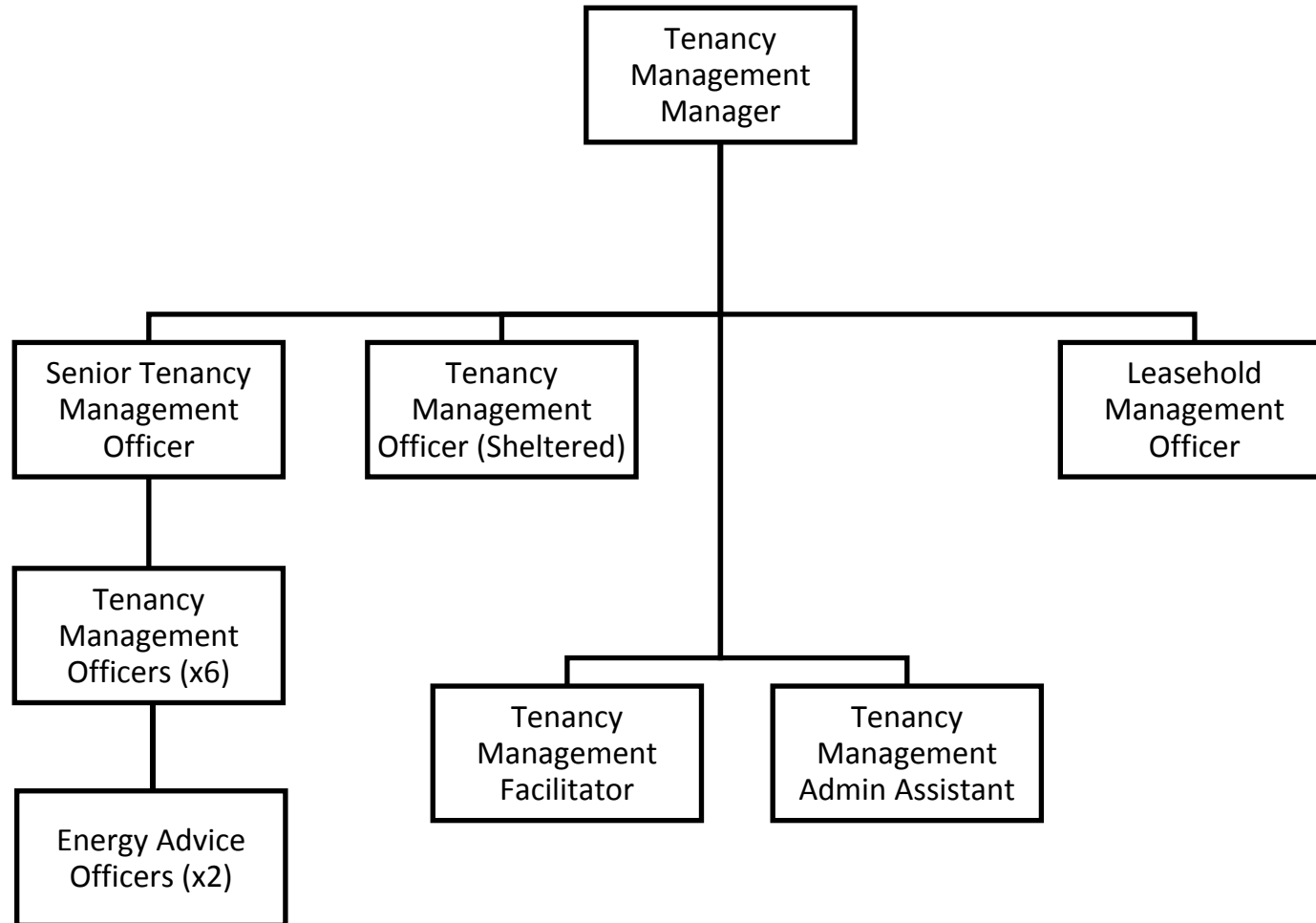
The Garage team was a small team which managed the allocation of 4,000 Council owned garages across the city. As well as integrating the only area of the Council's property asset base that was managed outside Housing & Property, the restructure provided resilience in terms of staff cover, which was not possible while it remained such a small team in Direct Services.

The structures pre and post the restructure are shown at the end of this briefing.

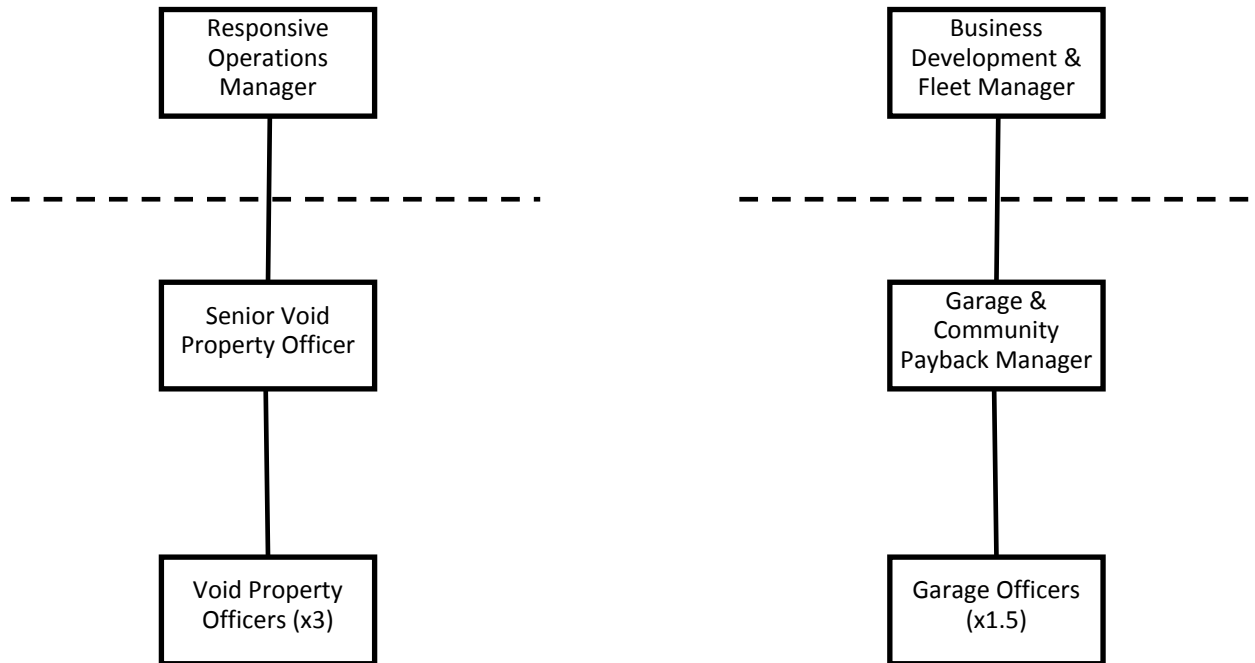
Although the restructure became effective in November 2015, all but two of the staff who were in the Direct Services teams left before the restructure took place. This led to a significant recruitment exercise and then training the existing as well as new staff. The new arrangements for Tenancy Management Officers being responsible for void properties on their patch only became operational in April/May 2016. Many of the previous procedures and processes are being re-engineered to work within a generic working environment rather than a specialised one, including a focus on minimising end to end times on key events within the void process to reduce overall void times.

Any queries on this matter should be directed to Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager bgraves@oxford.gov.uk

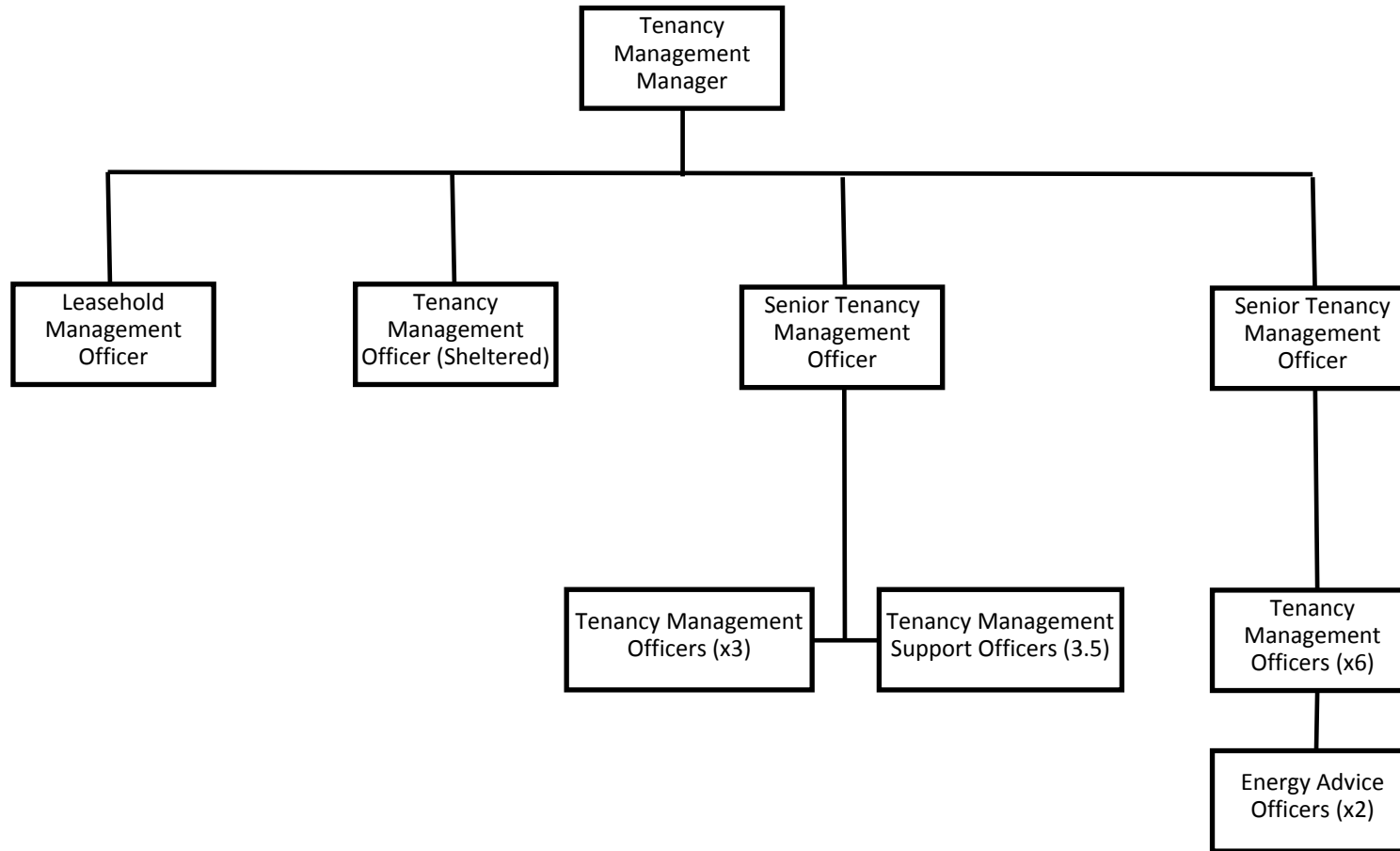
Structure – Tenancy Management Team (July 2015)



Structures (Direct Services) July 2015 – Only posts below dashed line are affected



New Structure – Tenancy Management Team



Oxford City Council

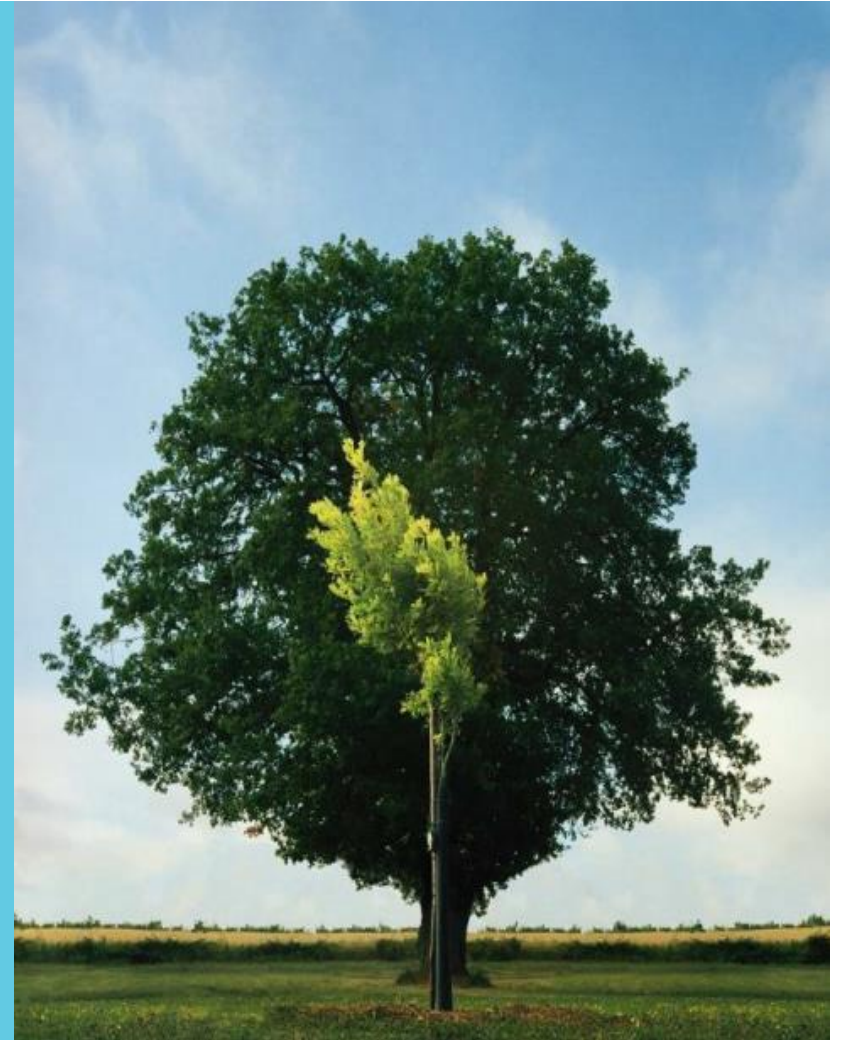
INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

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Audit 2. Empty and Void Property
Management

June 2016

LEVEL OF ASSURANCE

Design	Operational Effectiveness
Moderate	Limited



FINAL

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REPORT STATUS

Auditors:	Tanya John - Internal Auditor, Gurpreet Dulay- Manager
Dates work performed:	23 - 27 May, 2016
Closing Meeting:	26 May 2016 - attended by Tanya John and Bill Graves
Draft report issued:	1 June 2016
Final report issued:	21 June 2016

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Restrictions of use

The matters raised in this report are only those which came to our attention during the course of our audit and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist or all improvements that might be made. The report has been prepared solely for the management of the organisation and should not be quoted in whole or in part without our prior written consent. BDO LLP neither owes nor accepts any duty to any third party whether in contract or in tort and shall not be liable, in respect of any loss, damage or expense which is caused by their reliance on this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL CORPROATE OBJECTIVE

Meeting Housing Need - Improving Oxford residents' access to affordable high-quality homes in good environments that are close to jobs/facilities

LEVEL OF ASSURANCE (SEE APPENDIX VI FOR DEFINITIONS)

Design	Moderate	Generally a sound system of internal control designed to achieve system objectives with some exceptions.
Effectiveness	Limited	Non-compliance with key procedures and controls places the system objectives at risk.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS (SEE APPENDIX VI FOR DEFINITIONS)

High	 1
Medium	 5
Low	 3

Total number of recommendations: 9

OVERVIEW: EMPTY AND VOID PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Oxford City Council (the Council) seeks to reduce the time that properties remain empty. Whilst properties remain empty, no rental income is received and this impacts on the overall Housing Revenue Account. The Council have c.300-350 empty properties a year out of 7778 properties (as at 22 April 2016). The Council achieve a re-let time of 30 to 35 days however, aim to achieve a target of 18 to 23 days, which is in line with or better than the national average (See Appendix III). The key operations to re-let a property are managed as follows:

- Tenancy Management Team - Pre-termination visits should be carried out jointly with officers from both the Tenancy Management team and the Voids team. The Tenancy Management team are responsible for ensuring a correct notice is received or served and the tenancy is ended. The team is also responsible for the viewings with applicants, signing of the new tenancy agreement and creation of the new tenancy on the housing system.
- Voids Team - This team ensure the property is refurbished to the correct standard and promptly
- Housing Allocations Team - This team promotes vacancies and vets prospective candidates to ensure they are allocated to a suitable property.

From our review, we noted the following areas of good practice:

- Prioritisation and assessment of potential tenants by the Allocations Team helps to reduce the voids period
- The Choice Based Letting (CBL) website allows the Council to effectively offer the properties to potential tenants
- Staff do have the training and/or experience to perform the roles in the void process.

However, we also noted the following areas of improvement:

- Pre-termination inspection checks should be done during the notice period and forms should be completed for each property (Finding 1 - Medium)
- The Council Tax Team should notify the Tenancy Management Team of deaths more promptly (Finding 2 - Medium)
- A Voids Satisfaction Survey should be created and implemented with the results analysed and acted upon (Finding 4 - Medium)
- The Tenancy Management Team should agree a protocol with the Voids Team on how keys are given to/collected by each other (Finding 5 - Medium)
- Procedures documents and protocol should be agreed between Tenancy Management, Voids and Housing Allocations Teams (Finding 6 - High)
- As part of the tender specification for the housing software, the Council should request a solution to the Access database (Finding 9 - Medium).

Conclusion

We have issued one high, five medium and three low recommendations. The most significant finding identifies that there is not a Void Management Policy or similar document which may be contributing to the effectiveness of the voids management process. Furthermore, through the review we identified weaknesses in communication around notification of deaths and transfer of keys between teams. We also found that whilst the team structures are designed and in place, these are still embedding following changes to structures in November 2015 and therefore the effectiveness in managing the void process is currently limited as evidenced by current performance.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RISK: Pre-termination inspections are not conducted regularly resulting in delays to the turnaround time on a property

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Ref.	Finding	Sig.	Recommendation
1	<p>When a tenant wants to leave the property, they are required to give a four week notice. During the notice period, the Council should conduct a pre-termination inspection; this is conducted at the property with the tenant, the Tenancy Management Officer (TMO) and a Voids Team officer who is also a Surveyor.</p> <p>The purpose of the inspection is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify any alterations made by the outgoing tenant Identify any rechargeable repairs Identify and notify Direct Services of expected volumes of work to assist with forecasting and capacity planning Identify any factors which will be considered as part of offering the property for re-let, such as special adaptations. <p>After the inspection, pre-termination paperwork is filled out with details of the property including: tenants reason for leaving, meter readings, whether the property needs cleaning and repairs required to bring the property's condition to the standards expected. These details are then used for the property advertisement on the Choice Based Lettings (CBL) website to promote it to those on the Council's Housing Register. Furthermore, if any repairs are done on behalf of the tenant after the notice period, the Voids Team fills out a Voids Recharge Form and recharges the tenant for the repairs.</p> <p>A sample of 12 void properties for the period 1 January 2016 to 20 May 2016 were selected for testing (See Appendix I for a table summarising the results of our testing on pre-inspection terminations). The testing concluded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For two of the 12, a pre-inspection form was not retained and therefore we conclude this had not been undertaken during the notice period For five of the 12, the pre-inspection termination visit took place after the notice period ceased. 	Med	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Pre-termination inspections should take place during the notice period. If this is not possible, there must be record of the reason why the inspection was not done. b) Pre-termination inspection forms should be filled out and retained for every inspection undertaken. c) Performance against these targets should be measured and reported to senior management

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RISK: Pre-termination inspections are not conducted regularly resulting in delays to the turnaround time on a property

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Ref.	Finding	Sig.	Recommendation
1 cont.	<p>This finding should be taken in the context of an internal review conducted assessing the reasons for voids in the period 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2012. This internal review found that the reason for voids were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Void due to deceased tenant - 43% • Void due to transfers - 41% • Voids due to eviction - 5% • Voids due to abandoned properties - 6% • Other - 5%. <p>Whilst the statistics are four year old they represent the current split of reasons. It can be derived that only in 41% of cases can a pre-termination inspection be conducted.</p> <p>The risk here is that where pre-inspections are not conducted the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot estimate the level of repairs required • Are unable to request the tenant to repair the property prior to leaving the property. However, do note that in most cases the tenant may not have the skill-set or capability to undertake the work beyond minor decorations • Have incomplete/inaccurate information loaded to the advertisement on the CBL website which could impact the levels of rejections for properties or delay the property being advertised. <p>All of these risks increase the likeliness the property will remain void for a longer period of time which increases the financial cost to the Council.</p>	Med	
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE		RESPONSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE	
Agreed.		<p><i>Responsible Officer: Bill Graves</i></p> <p><i>Implementation Date: November 2016</i></p>	

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RISK: Processes to obtain notification of empty property are inadequate leading to a delayed turn around time on a property

28

Ref.	Finding	Sig.	Recommendation
2	<p>When a tenant leaves a property, the Council issue a four week notice; however if a tenant dies, the Council issues a four week notice once they are notified of the death. The Council is typically notified of the death by the tenant's family, neighbours or via the Council's 'tell us once' system. The Council is also notified of deaths by the Council Tax Team who are emailed a list of the deceased by the Registrar Office.</p> <p>We would expect that the Council Tax Team inform the Tenancy Management Team of the deaths as soon as they are notified. However, we found that the notification system was irregular and inconsistent, resulting in the Tenancy Management Team being notified of deaths up to a month after the Council Tax Team received notification.</p> <p>For the sample tested, three of the 12 properties related to deceased tenants and from our testing we found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The notices for these properties were not given by the Council as soon as they were notified of the death. In one case, the Council took 15 days to give notice for a property after they were notified of the deceased tenant Whilst saying this please note that in many cases there may be a good reason not to issue a notice in such circumstances i.e. There may be another occupier living in the property (not a joint tenant) who might be eligible to succeed the property and also delays could be due to applying sensitivity given the reason that it relates to a death. <p>One of the primary reasons for properties becoming void is due to tenant deaths. The risk here is that the property of the deceased tenant remains empty for longer due to late notification to the Tenancy Management Team which results in financial loss due to the property remaining empty and houses not being allocated to those on the Council's Housing Register. However, it should be noted that any liabilities for the property is sought to be recovered from the individuals estate.</p>	Med	<p>a) The Council Tax Team should notify the Tenancy Management Team of deaths no later than the following working day. This could be achieved via improved communication and expectations between the two teams and the Tenancy Management Team being added to the email distribution the Council Tax Team receive their notifications on.</p> <p>b) Performance against these targets should be measured and reported to senior management</p>
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE
<p>A) Agreed - an immediate improvement would be for the Corporate scanning team to include the tenancy management team in the circulation list as part of the Tell Us Once project. B) Agreed.</p>			<p><i>Responsible Officers: a) Tanya Bandekar b) Ann Phillips</i></p> <p><i>Implementation Date: September 2016</i></p>

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RISK: Refurbishment of the property is not performed promptly and/or adequately leading to a delayed turn around time on a property

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Ref.	Finding	Sig.	Recommendation
3	<p>The Council undertakes repairs and refurbishments (known as planned maintenance) in all their properties at certain time intervals. The planned maintenance includes replacing kitchens, bathrooms, windows, etc. and these occur while the tenant is still residing at the property. The purpose of the planned maintenance is to ensure that properties remain in a good state of repair at all times otherwise, the properties may deteriorate to a level which requires more significant repair as it was not updated at a later date.</p> <p>We found that in some instances, when the Council approached the tenant to organise planned maintenance, the tenant refused to let the Council carry out the work.</p> <p>The risk here is that there is increased likelihood that void periods of properties will be longer due to more significant repairs being required on those properties where planned maintenance was not performed. This leads to increased void periods and the repair costs are typically more significant outside a planned programme resulting in financial loss to the Council.</p>	Low	<p>a) Planned maintenance should be undertaken on properties. Where they are not performed, the Council need to record why planned maintenance was not carried out</p> <p>b) If a tenant refuses to allow planned maintenance work to be carried out, this should be escalated to the Tenancy Management Team.</p>
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE
Agreed.			<p><i>Responsible Officers: Martin Shaw</i></p> <p><i>Implementation Date: September 2016</i></p>

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RISK: Ineffective key performance indicator information is captured, reported and/or acted upon resulting in financial loss

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Ref.	Finding	Sig.	Recommendation
4	<p>Before a property is offered to a bidder, the property must be viewed by the tenant. After the viewing, the bidder can choose to accept or reject the offer. After the viewing, the bidder is asked to fill out a form which confirms whether they accept or refuse the property including the reasons for their decision. The reasons for refusal given are often very high level with narrative such as 'inappropriate location' or 'not near amenities' and therefore limited information can be extracted from this to support the approach to future property repairs and allocation of properties.</p> <p>We understand that previously a more detailed Voids Satisfaction Survey was completed however this ceased to operate and has not been re-implemented. If such a document was established it would contain vital information regarding the repairs undertaken and if feedback is given to confirm properties are rejected due to the state of repair/adaptations, then the Voids Team could take appropriate action.</p> <p>The risk here is that the Voids Team do not receive any feedback on the work done and without feedback, they are unaware if whether there is a correlation between rejected properties and the state of repair. If this correlation is not understood with appropriate action taken this could lead to increased financial cost to the Council.</p>	Med	<p>a) The Voids Satisfaction Survey should be created and implemented</p> <p>b) The Voids Team should analyse the surveys and set an action plan (if necessary) to act upon the feedback.</p>
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE
<p>Agreed. The satisfaction survey will be reintroduced and the responses shared with the Voids Team.</p>			<p><i>Responsible Officers:</i></p> <p>(a) Ann Phillips</p> <p>(b) Ian Henwood</p> <p><i>Implementation Date:</i></p> <p>(a) September 2016</p> <p>(b) November 2016</p>

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RISK: Inadequate procedures to transfer keys to tenants results in extended empty and void property times

31

Ref.	Finding	Sig.	Recommendation
5	<p>At the end of the tenants four week notice period, the tenant must hand the keys back to the Tenancy Management Team. It is then the duty of the Tenancy Management Team to hand the keys to the Voids Team so that they can begin performing any repairs and maintenance to the property at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>From our sample tested, we found that the Tenancy Management Team took between 1-5 working days (See Appendix II) to hand the keys to the Voids Team. Please note that this time period does not only include the handing of the keys between different Council teams. This time period also includes undertaking any termination inspections which could not be conducted prior to the tenant leaving the property, the transfer of the electricity to a direct services contract and obtaining up to date information to support the property advertisement for the Choice Based Lettings website. Whilst saying this, it is accepted that the transfer of keys could be improved and consideration of how to manage the logistical challenges of key transfer could be more effective.</p> <p>The risk is that the Voids Team are unable to begin the voids process without the keys hence lengthening the time period and the cost of the total voids period to the Council.</p>	Med	a) The Tenancy Management Team should agree a protocol with the Voids Team which sets out how keys will be given to/collected by the Voids Team no later than the following working day after receipt of the keys. The protocol should then be followed and its effectiveness monitored.
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE
Agreed.			<p><i>Responsible Officers: Ann Phillips</i></p> <p><i>Implementation Date: November 2016</i></p>

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RISK: Inadequate management oversight and discussion results in appropriate decisions and actions not being taken to support the effective operation to resolve empty and void properties

32

Ref.	Finding	Sig.	Recommendation
6	<p>The Tenancy Management Team, Voids Team and the Housing Allocations Team work together to reduce the voids period and ensure that properties are not empty for periods in excess of target void time periods set. The three teams are interdependent and therefore it is important that the teams work well together to achieve the objective limiting the time properties are void. It is typically expected a Void Management Policy or similar document is in place to bind the relationships and expectations of the three teams.</p> <p>However, we found that communication between the three teams was ineffective . Whilst testing, we spoke to the three different teams and it was evident that there is limited communication and understanding of the respective duties between the teams. When we discussed cases selected for testing with the three teams it was apparent that this disconnect between the teams led to views being taken that the other teams in the process were the reason why void periods were extended. It should be noted that as the three teams are not located in the same place this could be a contributor to the limited communication.</p> <p>The Council do not have a Voids Management Policy or similar document and the absence of such a document is considered a contributor to the effectiveness of void property management.</p> <p>The risk here is that the teams are not be able to work as effectively to reduce the Voids period due to limited and ineffective communication resulting in extended void periods and financial loss to the Council.</p>	High	<p>a) An over-arching service agreement should be agreed between the Tenancy Management Team, Void Team and Housing Allocations Team setting out responsibilities, expectations, performance to be recorded/reported etc.</p> <p>b) The procedure documents should then be ratified by the Housing Landlord Group.</p> <p>N.B we do not recommend a formal policy be produced at this stage however, any procedure documents created should cover those in the Medway Council Void Management Policy which can be found via the below link, as this is considered a good practice Policy.</p> <p>http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/Void%20Management%20Policy%20and%20Procedures.pdf</p>
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE		RESPONSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE	
A) Agreed. B) Agreed.		<p><i>Responsible Officers: Bill Graves</i></p> <p><i>Implementation Date: November 2016</i></p>	

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RISK: Inadequate management oversight and discussion results in appropriate decisions and actions not being taken to support the effective operation to resolve empty and void properties

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Ref.	Finding	Sig.	Recommendation
7	<p>A practice undertaken by some authorities is to offer an incentive scheme to tenants with the aim of improving the void turnaround time.</p> <p><u>Incentive Scheme example</u> To qualify for any of these payments applicants must have been a council tenant at the property they are leaving for 12 months or more and a valid notice must have been completed to notify the council that the property will be coming vacant. Payments will be offset against any rent arrears owing on the rent account once the tenancy is terminated and all Housing Benefit Payments have been adjusted. Payments could be given as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £40.00 4 weeks notice • £60.00 Property left empty, clean and in good decorative order (Gardens have been left manageable were appropriate) • £20.00 All keys returned • £20.00 No debts on electricity and gas meter • £20.00 Pre-termination visit by Housing Officer. <p>The Council currently do not operate an incentive scheme. In March 2016 the average void cost to the Council stood at £4,538.00. An incentive scheme might secure a shorter void period and reduce the average void cost to the Council. If the average void cost to the Council is reduced by a greater value than the incentive given, it could be considered to be a financially beneficial arrangement. This has the additional benefit of getting properties into use at an earlier date which more quickly allocates those on the Council's Housing Register.</p>	Low	<p>a) An analysis of the cost/benefits of an incentive scheme should be performed and assessed as to whether it could be implemented at the Council; this assessment could be performed via a pilot.</p> <p>b) A decision should be made by the Housing Landlord Group (and other approvals required, if necessary) to whether an incentive scheme should be pursued based on the analysis performed.</p>
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE
Agreed.			<p><i>Responsible Officers: Bill Graves</i></p> <p><i>Implementation Date: November 2016</i></p>

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RISK: Inadequate management oversight and discussion results in appropriate decisions and actions not being taken to support the effective operation to resolve empty and void properties

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Ref.	Finding	Sig.	Recommendation
8	<p>Key Performance Indicator (KPI) information is reported to the monthly Housing Management Group meeting. In Appendix IV we set out those KPIs which the Council currently report alongside suggestion for further KPIs which could be captured and reported.</p> <p>From our review it is felt that the KPIs currently not captured in this monthly reporting which should be are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of working days taken to transfer keys from Housing Tenancy Management to Voids Teams (this could be broken down and monitored for the various steps in the process from receiving the keys, conducting termination inspections, transferring electricity and obtaining information for the Choice Based Lettings website) • Average number of working days to undertake repairs • If implemented as per Detailed Finding 5 - The total number of Voids Satisfaction Surveys received out of those eligible to complete one. • The areas suggested in Detailed Finding 1 and 2. <p>Please note that via the Council's central performance monitoring system, CORVU, there is a measure in place to monitor the time the void repair is with the Voids Team; which has a target of 20 days.</p> <p>If the Council do not capture all relevant KPIs there is a risk that under performance may not be identified to then allow appropriate action to be taken.</p>	Low	The Housing Management Group should consider the additional KPIs and then ensure these are captured and reported on a monthly basis to the meeting.
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE		RESPONSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE	
Agreed.		<p><i>Responsible Officers: Bill Graves</i></p> <p><i>Implementation Date: August 2016</i></p>	

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RISK: Inadequate management oversight and discussion results in appropriate decisions and actions not being taken to support the effective operation to resolve empty and void properties

Ref.	Finding	Sig.	Recommendation
9	<p>The voids process is managed through a Microsoft Access database. Whilst information is held on the Council’s housing system, Northgate, the module within the software has not been purchased and used by the Voids Team. Therefore the Voids Team capture critical elements of the voids process on the Access database.</p> <p>The Access database was created in-house and therefore lacks the support a software would have in terms of managing corrupt elements of data and recovery of data when it crashes. The reliance on the Access database therefore could be considered a risk and it is a single point of failure.</p> <p>We are aware the Council are putting out for tender their housing software in 2016.</p>	Med	As part of the tender specification for the housing software, the Council should request that a solution is found for the Access database single point of failure.
MANAGEMENT RESPONSE			RESPONSIBILITY AND IMPLEMENTATION DATE
Agreed.			<p><i>Responsible Officers: Paul Fleming</i></p> <p><i>Implementation Date: November 2016</i></p>

OBSERVATIONS

Here we list any observations we have noted which are not sufficiently significant to warrant being identified as a Detailed Finding.

1. Rents Team 'Cradle to Grave' review

The Rents Team has facilitated a working party from cross departmental representatives within Finance, Customer Services and Housing. The aim has been to look at ways to improve working practices across all the service areas, remove any duplication, and see where joined- up working can improve the customer journey and increase income to the Council. This work is still on-going with a further review of the action plan due to take place on the 14 July 2016. Some of the actions have been pending awaiting the finalisation of the Housing restructure.

It is considered unlikely that the impact of this review will impact the Voids and Empty Property process however, has been placed here for your information.

APPENDIX I - PRE-TERMINATION INSPECTIONS

SAMPLE DATA

A sample of 12 void properties for the period 1 January 2016 to 20 May 2016 were selected for testing. The table below gives details on the notice period in addition to data on the pre-termination inspections undertaken for each property. See Detailed Finding and Recommendation 1 which summarises our findings for the sample tested.

Full Address	Notice Received	End of Notice Period	Date of pre -term inspection	Was inspection during notice period?
Abingdon Road, Oxford, OX1 4XG	Not known	Not known	13.1.2016	Not known
Aldrich Road, Oxford, OX2 7SU	11.1.2016	8.2.2016	14.2.2016	No
Brome Place, Oxford, OX3 9LR	16.12.2016	13.1.2016	18.1.2016	No
Brook View, Oxford, OX4 7UR	3.12.2015	31.12.2015	11.1.2016	No
Buckler Road, Oxford, OX2 7TE	5.1.2016	2.2.2016	25.1.2016	Yes
Butterwyke Place, Oxford, OX1 1TT	26.11.2015	24.12.2015	25.1.2016	No
Butterwyke Place, Oxford, OX1 1TT	24.2.2016	23.3.2016	Not known	Not known
Cranley Road, Oxford, OX3 8BP	11.12.2015	8.1.2016	12.1.2016	No
Faulkner Street, Oxford, OX1 1UA	5.1.2016	2.2.2016	14.1.2016	Yes
Hockmore Tower, Pound Way, Oxford, OX4 3YG	N/A	N/A	Not known	Not known
Pegasus Road, Oxford, OX4 6SZ	Not known	Not known	24.2.2016	Not known
Tilehouse Close, Oxford, OX3 8AU	Not known	Not known	Not known	Not known

APPENDIX II - KEY HANDOVER SAMPLE DATA

A sample of 12 void properties for the period 1 January 2016 to 20 May 2016 were selected for testing. The table below shows when the keys for the property were handed to the Tenancy Management Officer (TMO) and how long they took to hand over the key to the Voids Team. See Detailed Finding and Recommendation 1 which summarises our findings for the sample tested.

Keys with TMO	Date Voids Received Keys	Days taken for voids to receive keys from TMO	Days taken for voids to receive keys from TMO including weekends
11.1.2016	14.1.2016	3	3
15.2.2016	17.2.2016	2	2
18.1.2016	18.1.2016	0	
7.1.2016	12.1.2016	5	3
25.1.2016	25.1.2016	0	0
21.1.2016	25.1.2016	4	2
29.3.2016	5.4.2016	7	5
11.1.2016	12.1.2016	1	1
11.1.2016	14.1.2016	3	3
20.1.2016	25.1.2016	5	3
22.2.2016	24.2.2016	2	2
31.12.2015	6.1.2016	6	2

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APPENDIX III - HOUSE MARK AVERAGE RE-LET DATA

The table below summarises the findings from House Mark in their 'Voids and lettings analysis 2015' report analysis re-let times for the period 2012/13 to 2014/15. The Council have between 5-10,000 properties and as at March 2016 the re-let time was 40.1 days with the average for 2015/16 at 34.3 days. The table below demonstrates that the Council are performing below the average.

Financial year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	
Measure	Average re-let time in days (standard re-lets)	Average re-let time in days (standard re-lets)	Average re-let time in days (standard re-lets)	Number of landlords
Housing Association	25.59	27.14	24.60	132
LA/ALMO	26.00	30.38	28.75	46
<5,000 properties	24.61	24.07	23.05	64
5-10,000 properties	25.90	28.00	25.25	57
10,000+ properties	27.49	32.24	29.00	57
Central	24.00	24.39	24.74	51
London	26.27	30.65	27.13	27
North	26.91	32.28	29.00	63
South	23.48	22.84	22.28	33
ALL	25.70	27.92	25.70	178

APPENDIX IV - KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR ANALYSIS

The below table (left) summarise those Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that the Council report to the Housing Management Group on a monthly basis. The below table (right) sets out further KPIs which should be considered as part of the monthly reporting as it may identify trends in areas where performance standards are not being met.

Oxford City Council KPIs currently in use	Other KPIs for consideration
Total re-let time (HouseMark definition)	Number of refusals and reasons for refusal
Percentage appointments kept	Number of working days taken to transfer keys from Housing Tenancy Management to Voids Teams
Percentage post-inspections	Average number of working days to undertake repairs
Percentage of post inspections passing inspection	The total number of Voids Satisfaction Surveys received out of those eligible to complete one
Percentage of Right to Repair completed on time 40 % Emergency Responsive Repairs completed on time (Category E)	
% Urgent Responsive Repairs completed on time (Category A)	
% Routine Responsive Repairs completed on time	
Number of repairs jobs completed	
Percentage of gas services in date	
Percentage of emergency gas repairs completed on time (Category E)	
Percentage of urgent gas repairs completed on time (Category A)	
Percentage of routine gas repairs completed on time	
Average cost per void	
Satisfaction with repairs	

APPENDIX V - STAFF INTERVIEWED

BDO LLP appreciates the time provided by all the individuals involved in this review and would like to thank them for their assistance and cooperation.

NAME	JOB TITLE
Ann Phillips	Tenancy Management Manager
Tom Porter	Allocations Manager
Ian Henwood	Responsive Repairs and Voids Manager
Bill Graves	Landlord Services Manager

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APPENDIX VI - DEFINITIONS

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LEVEL OF ASSURANCE	DESIGN of internal control framework		OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS of internal controls	
	Findings from review	Design Opinion	Findings from review	Effectiveness Opinion
Substantial	Appropriate procedures and controls in place to mitigate the key risks.	There is a sound system of internal control designed to achieve system objectives.	No, or only minor, exceptions found in testing of the procedures and controls.	The controls that are in place are being consistently applied.
Moderate	In the main there are appropriate procedures and controls in place to mitigate the key risks reviewed albeit with some that are not fully effective.	Generally a sound system of internal control designed to achieve system objectives with some exceptions.	A small number of exceptions found in testing of the procedures and controls.	Evidence of non compliance with some controls, that may put some of the system objectives at risk.
Limited	A number of significant gaps identified in the procedures and controls in key areas. Where practical, efforts should be made to address in-year.	System of internal controls is weakened with system objectives at risk of not being achieved.	A number of reoccurring exceptions found in testing of the procedures and controls. Where practical, efforts should be made to address in-year.	Non-compliance with key procedures and controls places the system objectives at risk.
No	For all risk areas there are significant gaps in the procedures and controls. Failure to address in-year affects the quality of the organisation's overall internal control framework.	Poor system of internal control.	Due to absence of effective controls and procedures, no reliance can be placed on their operation. Failure to address in-year affects the quality of the organisation's overall internal control framework.	Non compliance and/or compliance with inadequate controls.

Recommendation Significance	
High	A weakness where there is substantial risk of loss, fraud, impropriety, poor value for money, or failure to achieve organisational objectives. Such risk could lead to an adverse impact on the business. Remedial action must be taken urgently.
Medium	A weakness in control which, although not fundamental, relates to shortcomings which expose individual business systems to a less immediate level of threatening risk or poor value for money. Such a risk could impact on operational objectives and should be of concern to senior management and requires prompt specific action.
Low	Areas that individually have no significant impact, but where management would benefit from improved controls and/or have the opportunity to achieve greater effectiveness and/or efficiency.

APPENDIX VII - TERMS OF REFERENCE

BACKGROUND

Empty Homes is the term used to describe properties that have become void or vacant. There are a number of ways that properties can become void:

- Council tenants transferring to other void properties with a housing priority
- Council tenants moving to other tenures such as Housing Associations, Home Ownership schemes or elderly/vulnerable residential accommodation such as nursing homes
- Council tenants that have breached their tenancy conditions by non-payment of the rent, anti-social/unacceptable behaviour and being evicted with a court order for possession of the tenancy
- Council tenants that have died without leaving a successor that has a legal right to occupy the property
- Council tenants that have abandoned their tenancy without informing the Council that they intend to move out.

The main objective is to reduce the time that Council properties remain empty. Whilst properties remain empty, no rental income is received and this impacts on the overall Housing Revenue Account that is used to provide essential housing services.

Oxford City Council have c.300-350 empty properties a year out of 7778 properties (as at 22 April 2016). The Council achieve a re-let time of 30 to 35 days however, aim to achieve a target around 18 to 23 days. The key operations to re-let a property are managed as follows:

- Tenancy Management Team - This team become aware of notifications and then ensure pre-termination inspections are performed and any aspects impacting the outgoing or incoming tenant are managed
- Responsive and Void Property Team - This team ensure the property is refurbished to the correct standard and promptly
- Housing Allocations Team - This team promotes vacancies and vets prospective candidates to ensure they are allocated to a suitable property.

These activities are reported at the Housing Management Team meetings and overseen by the Head of Housing and Property Services.

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The scope will cover the Key Risks set out overleaf.

PURPOSE OF REVIEW

Review the arrangements to manage empty and void properties to ensure they are promptly and effectively brought into use. This will include ensuring the reporting of data is accurate and sufficiently scrutinised.

APPENDIX VII - TERMS OF REFERENCE

EXCLUSIONS

This review will not consider the Sheltered Housing Scheme at Bradlands.

APPROACH

Our approach will be to conduct interviews to establish the controls in operation for each of our areas of audit work. We will then seek documentary evidence that these controls are designed as described. We will evaluate these controls to identify whether they adequately address the risks. Any opportunities identified to improve arrangements will be offered for consideration alongside recommendations to resolve any weakness in controls.

KEY RISKS

Based upon the risk assessment undertaken during the development of the internal audit operational plan, through discussions with management, and our collective audit knowledge and understanding, the key risks associated with the area under review are:

- Processes to obtain notification of empty property are inadequate leading to a delayed turn around time on a property
- Refurbishment of the property is not performed promptly and/or adequately leading to a delayed turn around time on a property
- Procedures to promote empty properties are insufficient and unduly increase the turn around time on a property
- Pre-termination inspections are not conducted regularly resulting in delays to the turnaround time on a property
- Inadequate prioritisation and assessment of the potential tenant results in the property remaining empty resulting in financial loss
- Staff do not possess the training and/or experience to ensure empty and void properties are let effectively and efficiently
- Inadequate procedures to transfer keys to tenants results in extended empty and void property times
- Ineffective key performance indicator information is captured, reported and/or acted upon resulting in financial loss
- Inadequate management oversight and discussion results in appropriate decisions and actions not being taken to support the effective operation to resolve empty and void properties.

DOCUMENTATION REQUEST

Please provide the following documents in advance of our review (where possible):

- Minutes from monthly Housing Management Team meeting from 1 April 2016 to date
- Minutes from monthly Housing Landlord Group meeting from 1 April 2016 to date
- Listing of voids for the period 1 January 2016 to date (received).

Any documents provided will assist the timely completion of our fieldwork, however we may need to request further documentation and evidence as we progress through the review process.

APPENDIX VII - TERMS OF REFERENCE


TIMETABLE

Audit Stage	Date
Commence fieldwork	23 May 2016
Number of audit days planned	12
Planned date for closing meeting	30 May 2016
Planned date for issue of the draft report	1 June 2016
Planned date for receipt of management responses	8 June 2016
Planned date for issue of proposed final report	10 June 2016
Planned Audit Committee date for presentation of report	29 June 2016

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Tom Porter	Housing Allocation Manager	tporter@oxford.gov.uk
Ian Henwood	Responsive Repairs and Voids Manager	ihenwood@oxford.gov.uk

SIGN OFF

On behalf of BDO LLP:		On behalf of Oxford City Council:	
Signature:		Signature:	Stephen Clarke
Title:	HEAD OF INTERNAL AUDIT	Title:	Head of Housing and Property Services
Date:	16 May 2016	Date:	16 May 2017

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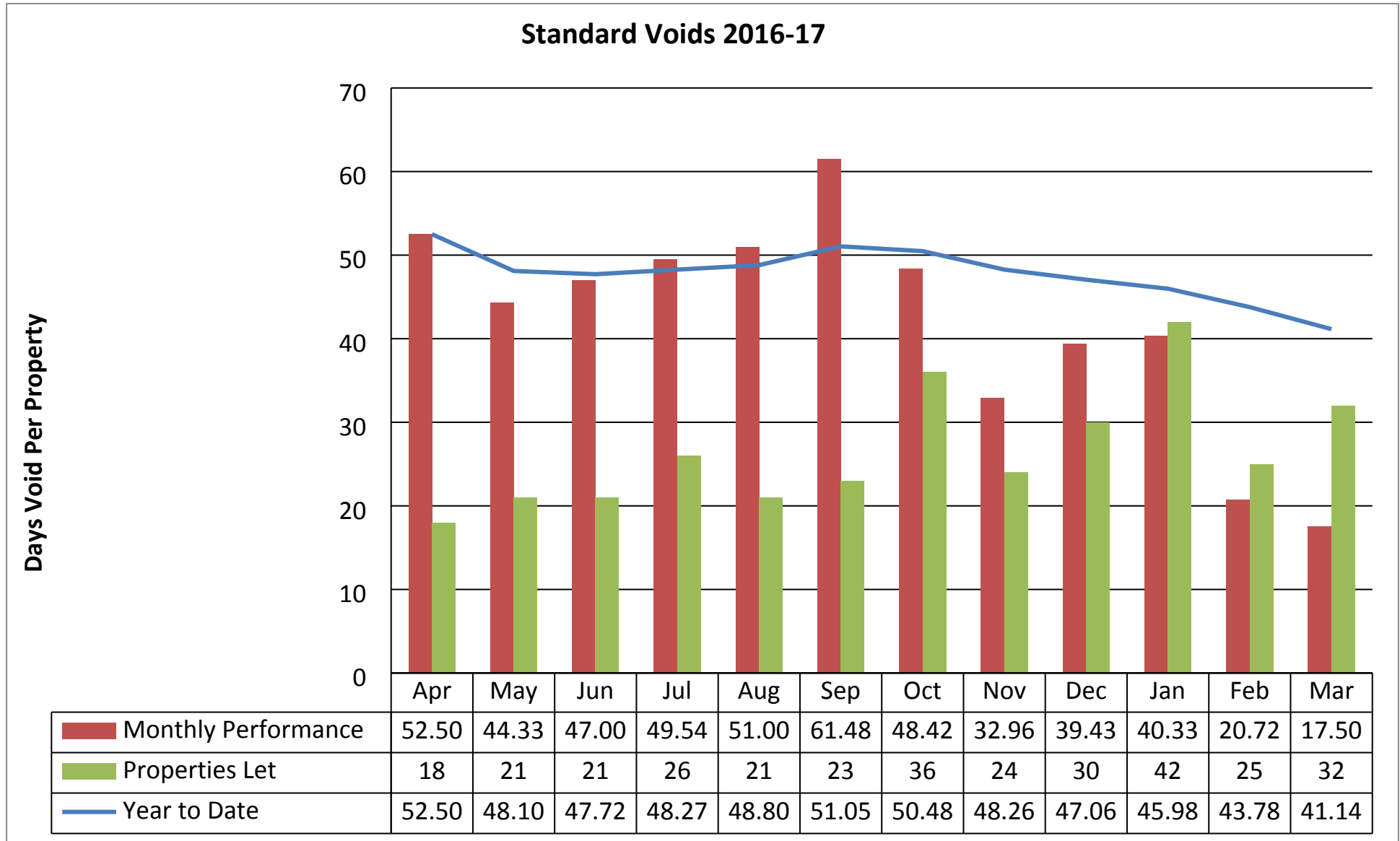
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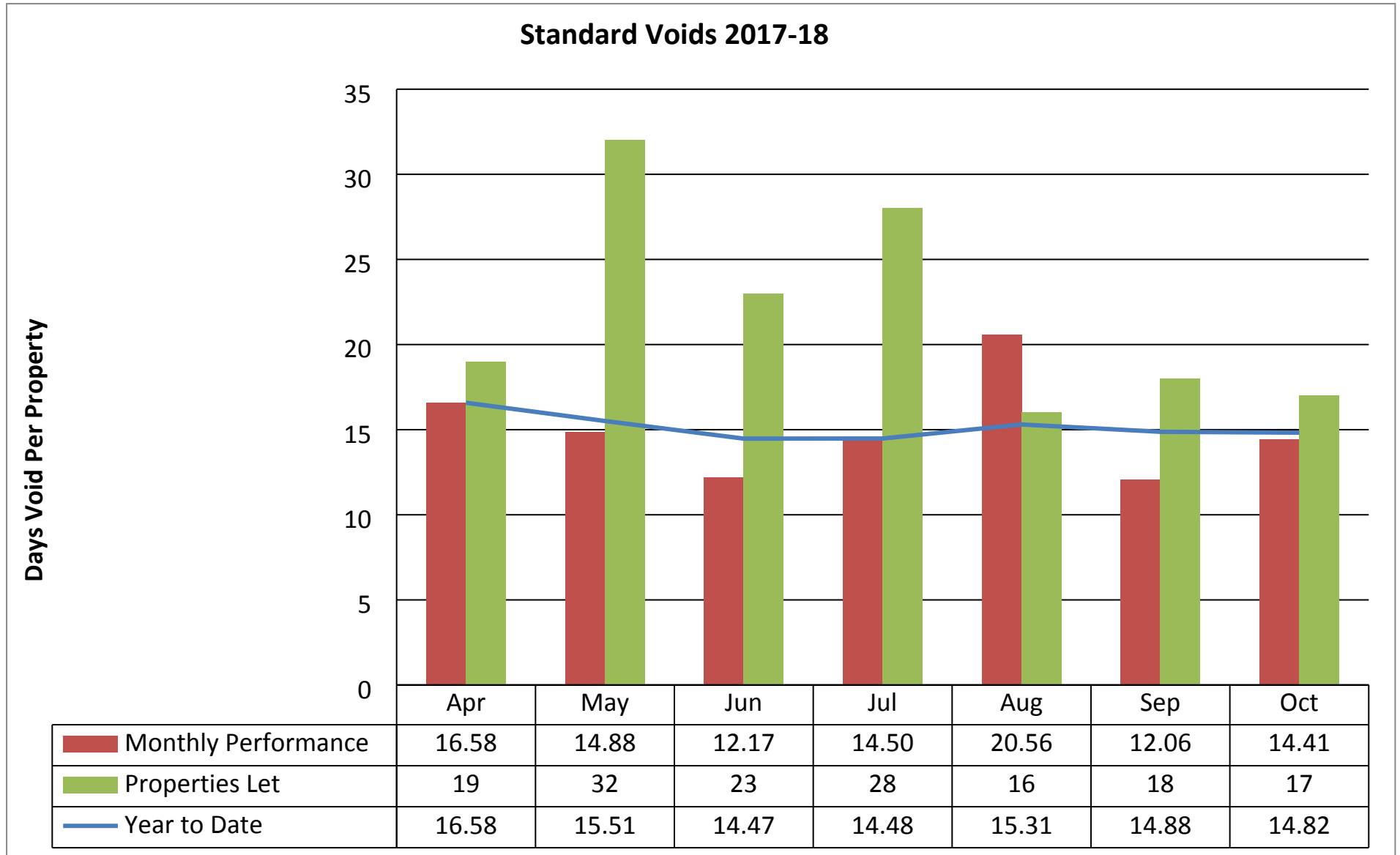
Appendix 4 – Void Property Performance Management

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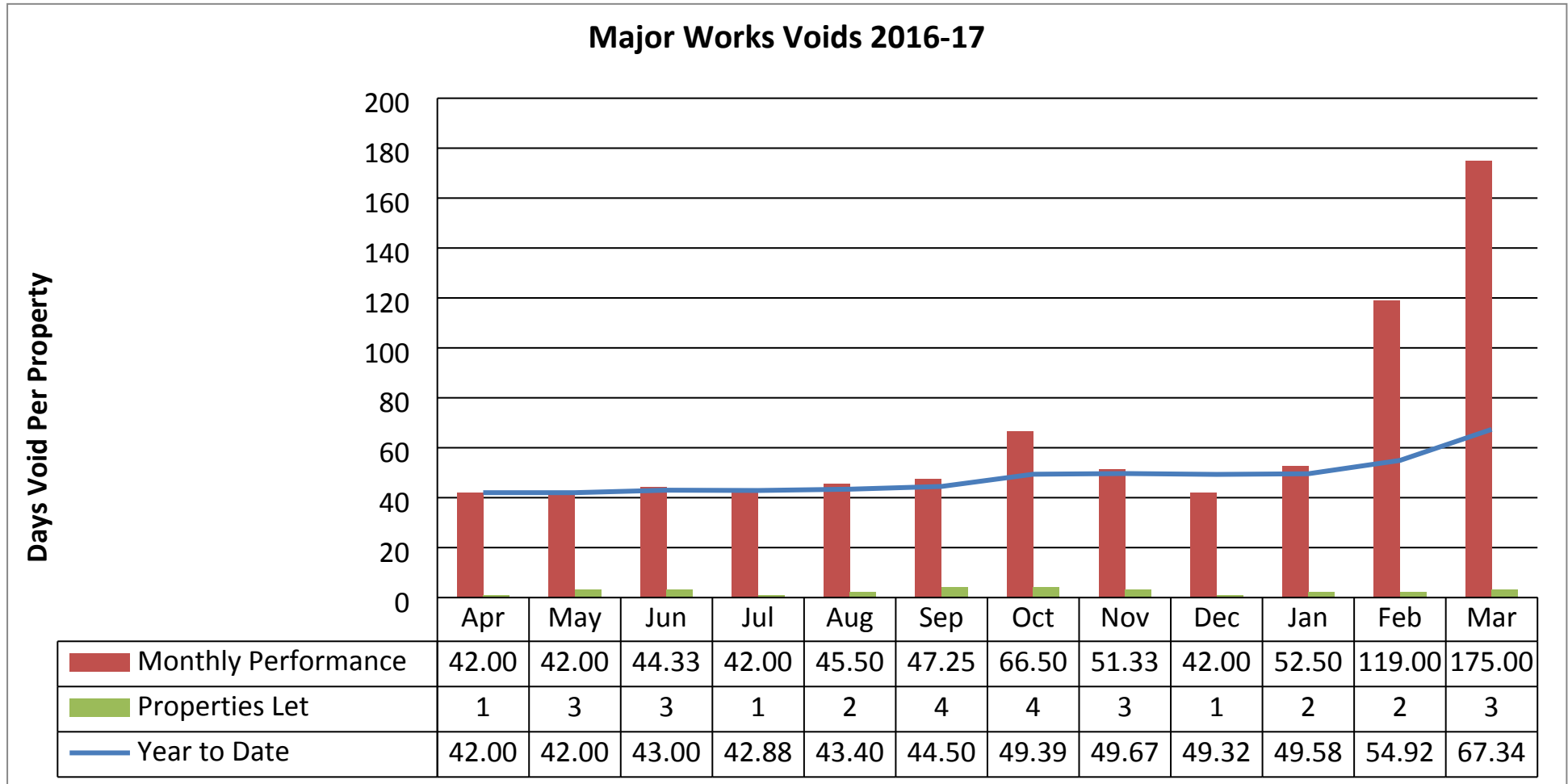
Appendix 4 – Void Property Performance Management

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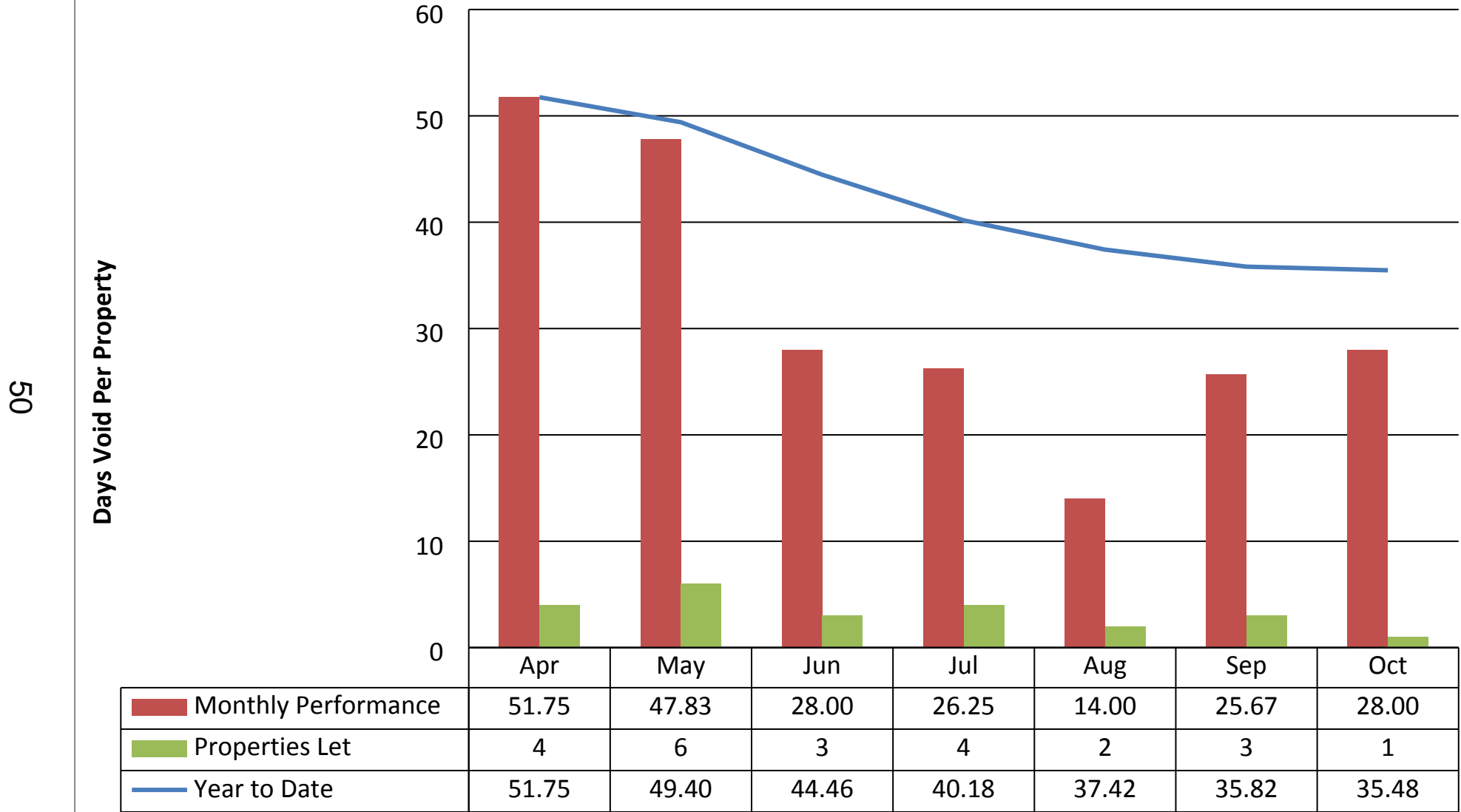
Appendix 4 – Void Property Performance Management

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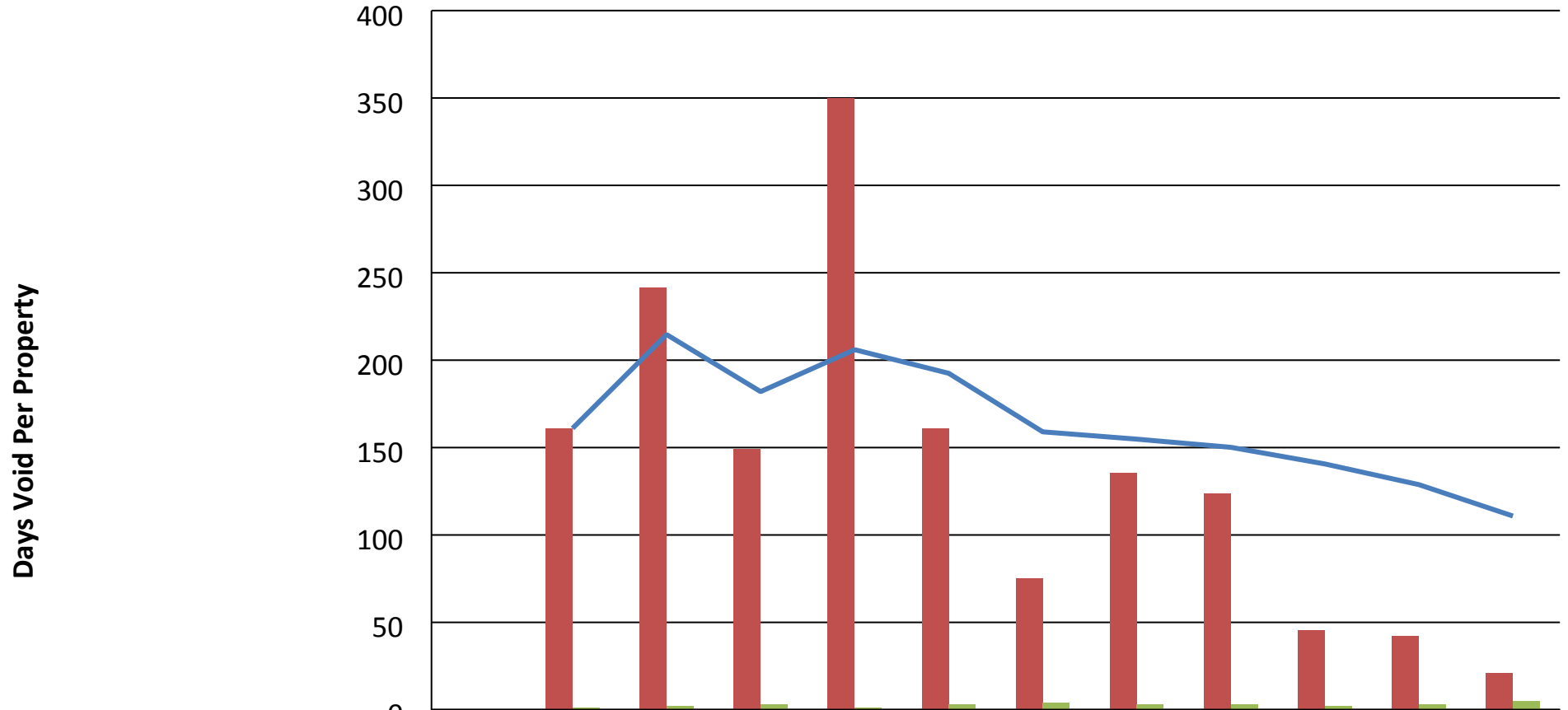
Appendix 4 – Void Property Performance Management

Major Works Voids 2017-18



Appendix 4 – Void Property Performance Management

Sheltered Voids 2016-17

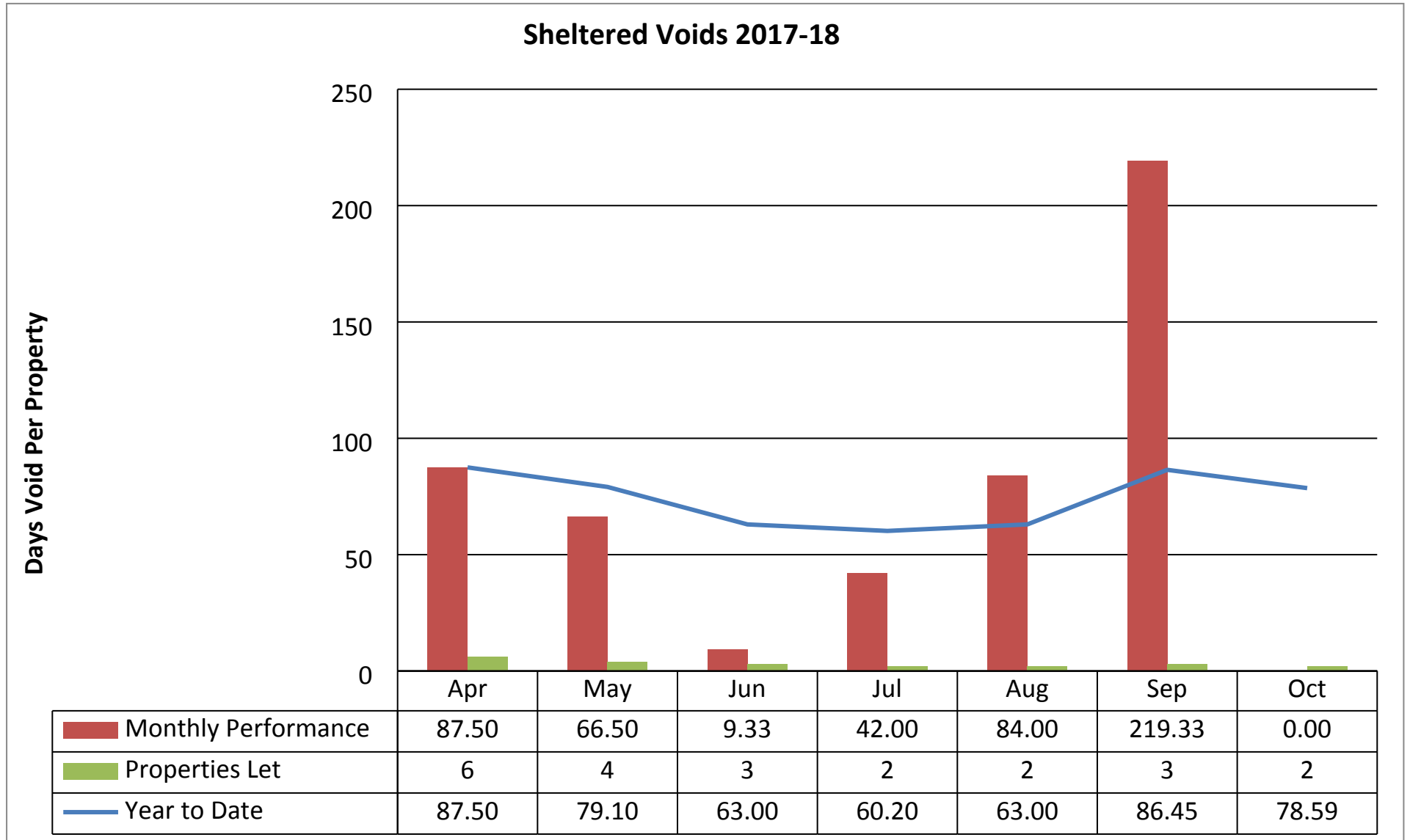


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Monthly Performance		161.00	241.50	149.33	350.00	161.00	75.25	135.33	123.67	45.50	42.00	21.00
Properties Let		1	2	3	1	3	4	3	3	2	3	5
Year to Date		161.00	214.67	182.00	206.00	192.50	159.00	154.82	150.15	140.64	128.80	110.83

Appendix 4 – Void Property Performance Management

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To: Housing Panel
Date: 13th November 2017
Report of: Head of Housing & Property
Title of Report: Tenant Involvement Progress Update

Summary and recommendations

Purpose of report:	To provide members with an update on tenant involvement.
Key Decision	No
Executive Lead Member	Councillor Mike Rowley, Board Member for Housing
Corporate Priority	An Effective and Efficient Council Meeting Housing Need Strong and Active Communities
Report Author	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

Recommendation:

1. The Housing Panel is asked to note the contents of this report

Appendices

Appendix 1	Tenant Involvement Progress Update
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Introduction and background

1. At its meeting of 11 April 2016 the Housing Panel were briefed on the Tenant Involvement function within Housing & Property and the various initiatives introduced since the adoption of the Tenant and Resident Involvement Strategy 2012.
2. The Panel the Panel agreed to make fourteen recommendations to the City Executive.
3. The Tenant Involvement Progress Update at Appendix 1 sets out progress against those recommendations.

National Recognition

4. In February 2017, the Tenant Involvement Team were the winners of the TPAS South Region Team of the Year (the largest of the three TPAS Regions), were shortlisted for Excellence in Tenant Engagement for the Tenants in Touch magazine and Excellence in Employment Skills and Training for the Tenant Training Programme. Two tenants were also shortlisted for Tenant of the Year.
5. In July 2017, the Tenant Involvement Team was one of only three National Finalists for Team of the Year and were invited to deliver workshops at the National TPAS Conference.

Conclusion

6. Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

Report author	Bill Graves
Job title	Landlord Services Manager
Service area or department	Housing & Property Services
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Appendix 1 – Tenant Involvement Progress Update

13th November 2017

Recommendation	Agree?	Housing Panel Comment April 2016	Progress update Autumn 2017
1. That elected members are asked to approach or suggest tenants who may wish to contribute to tenant involvement.	Y	Agreed	Are there any tools/literature that could be issued to members to support this process?
2. That the Tenants in Touch newsletter continues to include some content (e.g. one page) specifically aimed at leaseholders.	Y	This has been in place for the last two editions and apart from the forthcoming issue where it was not possible, will continue in future editions. Members are encouraged to read the newsletter.	Updates/articles are sourced from all Tenancy Management Officers, (including the Leasehold Management Offer) for every edition.
3. That consideration is given to exploring opportunities to offset some of the costs of producing Tenants in Touch through paid sponsorship or advertising, as well as promoting local charities and support groups.	Y	We will give consideration to this, with the agreement of the tenants involved in editing the newsletter.	We do promote local charities and support groups for example; Emmaus & CAB. Although the sponsorship is a good suggestion and could bring in some income; we would however lose income with the additional time it would take to manage this. The ads could also detract from the excellent and useful article already in the magazine.
4. That Tenants in Touch is fully accessible using the Council's mobile app.	In part	We support in principle and will look to incorporate into the IT work programme if feasible.	Having looked into the app, it is felt that Tenants in Touch would be better placed on a Tenants Portal. Being that we are currently mid tender for the new housing system and mobile app; it is recommend that this be included in the system's development stages (the Tenant Portal).

5. That tenants using the repairs portal are signposted to reporting other things, such as incidents of anti-social behaviour.	In part	As above	As above, there is scope for a new Tenant Portal being part of the new housing/mobile system. Enhancements to the portal would be considered during the development stages. We are also able to confirm that ASBIT have been heavily involved in the systems tender process.
6. That the Tenant Involvement Team continues to support and link with local IT training (such as the Blackbird Leys Information Technology Zone) and facilitate trials of new online services.	Y	This builds on the excellent work already done in this area	We continue to be active in sign posting tenants to such training. As part of the Tenant Involvement Structure, we will be setting up personal development plans for all new/existing volunteers. This will pick up individuals' training needs.
7. That tenants are involved in future procurement processes from the early stages through to selection, perhaps on a rotating basis from within a pool of tenants who have expressed an interest.	Y	As above	This was carried out at the early stages of a potential Repairs Satisfaction Survey outsourced contract. The sessions with the volunteers helped populate the tender brief, with the feedback and suggestions being very useful.
8. That tenant involvement in recruiting to housing posts is mainstreamed with involved tenants having a full and equal say in the process of recruitment.	Y	As above – for key housing posts.	We will also train volunteers to interview existing staff. This will not only cover recruitment and will provide them with the skills to ask officers/managers detailed questions about the services they deliver so that this can be used in service reviews.

9. That joint partnership working opportunities continue to be provided, enabling the sharing of best practice and ideas with other local authorities and housing associations.	Y	As above	This year we have joined an Engagement Partnership in Berkshire and will head the meeting. We were also very active at the National TPAs conference 2017 and made new Involvement contacts from Luton, Leeds and Oldham (for example).
10. That elected members are invited to the annual Tenant and Leaseholder Conference in future years.	Y	All members are welcome. Notification of events are provided through Tenants in Touch	<p>We spoke with are most active volunteers regarding a conference this year. They agreed that there would be greater value investigating money into inviting more tenants to the National TPAS Conference.</p> <p>This year we took 14 tenants and it was the most rewarding/productive conference to date. In 2018 we will again seek the views of our most active volunteers, on whether they would prefer investment in either a Annual Conference, the TPAS National, or a different alternative.</p>
11. That a training matrix is created to assist in keeping track of which tenants have attended the basic and non-compulsory training courses.	Y	This should allow us to suggest things involved tenants could do to contribute more fully	A training matrix has been set up. This will also links into the Personal Development plans.
12. That consideration is given to inviting non-residents to organised activities within sheltered blocks, where it is appropriate and safe to do so.	Y	The Council has been considering how to publicise our sheltered accommodation better, and this is a valuable suggestion	This year we carried out a review of the Housekeeping Service. As a result we are publishing a Local Offer for each sheltered scheme. When presenting the draft offer later this year, we will include the consultation on the communal space. Their feedback can then be included in the final version of their Local Offer.

<p>13. That consideration is given to the involvement of tenants in regeneration projects at Blackbird Leys and Barton, possibly as part of the Tenant Involvement Team's improvement focus for 2016-17.</p>	<p>Y</p>	<p>We are determined to ensure maximum participation in the regeneration programmes in BBL and Barton, and it would be very helpful for the Tenant Involvement Team to make this a focus for the coming Council year.</p>	<p>Tenant Involvement is heavily involved in the consultation of Great Estates projects. This included the improvements to the flats at Stowford, Bayswater and Barton Road.</p>
<p>14. That consideration is given to opportunities to involve and seek the views of potential future tenants who are currently on the Housing Register.</p>	<p>Y</p>	<p>Although this is more difficult than involving existing tenants for obvious reasons, the input would be valuable and we will look at ways of doing this, in conjunction with the Tenant Involvement Team.</p>	<p>In November Tenant Involvement are starting joint work with their Homelessness Prevention colleagues, on the Trailblazer project. Some of this work will include involving people living in temporary accommodation.</p>

To: Housing Panel
Date: 13th November 2017
Report of: Service Manager, Revenues and Benefits
Title of Report Rents Performance

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To provide an update on rent arrears as requested by the Panel
Key decision:	No
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Susan Brown
Corporate Priority:	None
Policy Framework:	None
Recommendation: That the Housing Panel resolves to:	
Note the report	

Introduction and background

- Following the Housing Scrutiny Panel's meeting on the 9th November 2016, this report provides an update on current and former tenant arrears as at the end of September 2017. In particular:
 - The profile of debt by age and value
 - The number of tenants in arrears who are affected by any of the benefit changes and/or direct payment rollout.

Overall Rent Collection Performance

- As at 30th September 2017 the collection rate was 94.41% against a target of 95.33%. This is down on the September 2016 position (95.73%). The target collection rate at the end of 31st March 2018 is 98.25%. The target collection rate at 31st March 2017 was also 98.25%.
- The overall Rent roll for this year has increased by approximately £360,000 compared to the same time last year. Despite a reduction in Rent of 1% for some tenancies, we had fewer Right To Buy's than budgeted, (budget assumed 40 but we had 25), we had approximately 200 properties move to formula rent when they

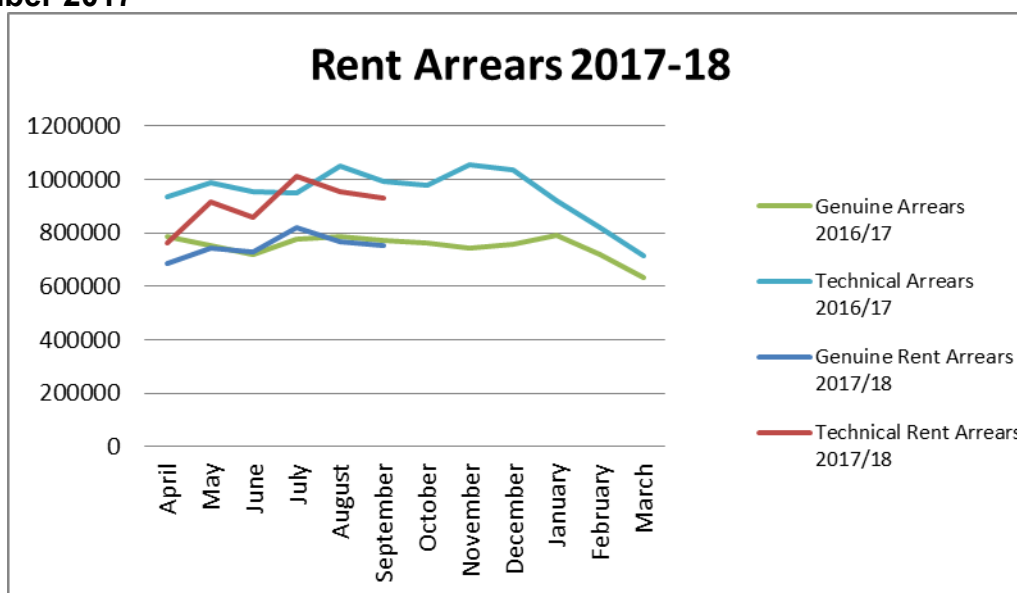
became void, The tenants service charge discount has been removed, 5 properties transferred to the Housing Company, and Cumberledge house was demolished

4. From April until September this year the team has experienced a higher than normal level of sickness absence and staff changes, which resulted in a higher level of arrears from April until August. The team is now almost fully staffed and we anticipate that the arrears across all areas of collection will continue to improve going forwards.

Technical arrears versus genuine arrears

5. As the rent debit is raised weekly, the arrears figures are skewed by the following variables:
 - Direct Debit payment dates of the 5th, 15th and end of month
 - The timing of monthly instalments. Most tenants paying their Rent by Direct Debit will pay for their annual rent in 12 equal monthly instalments.
 - In 2016/17 there are 52 weekly rent debits, which equates to 4.34 weeks rent being paid each month, therefore at certain points in the year the monthly debit is not cleared by the monthly payment. However, the instalment plan will ensure that each rent account will be cleared by the end of the financial year.
 - Direct payments of Housing Benefit are paid 4 weekly in arrears
6. This report adjusts the technical arrears figures to provide a 'genuine arrears' figure on a monthly basis. ('genuine arrears' take into account the timing issues related to direct debits and direct payments of housing benefit).
7. Table 1 below shows technical and genuine arrears from the end of March 2017 to the end of September 2017, compared to the 2016 figures. Technical arrears were £713,307.40 at 31st March 2017. They had risen to £929,593.53 (an increase of £216,181.96) at the end of September 2017.
8. Genuine arrears were £629,999.13 at 31st March 2017 (the lowest figure for 6 years) and have increased to £752,029.49 at the end of September 2017, an increase of £122,030.36. (At the same point last year they were £771,520.00) The trend levels in changes to arrears patterns are similar to corresponding years, which will lead to reducing levels at end of year.

Table 1: Rent arrears comparison between 2016 and 2017 to the end of September 2017



9. Table 2 below shows the profile of debt by the number of weeks in arrears. It shows there is an increase of 91 arrears cases since March 2016 predominantly in the 0-13 week bracket. However, the number of arrears cases between 13 and 52+ weeks has increased both by value (£14,531.13) and volume (92).

10. There are 53 cases since April 2017 that:

- Have been to Court for possession but an arrangement made
- Are continually monitored by the Income Management Team so that any failure to keep to the arrangement is actioned immediately.

Last year there were 131 in the whole year.

Table 2: Arrears Analysis for Rent

Mar-17

Weeks	Number	Value
0-4 weeks	2027	£289,232.60
5 - 13 weeks	280	£251,407.95
14 - 26 weeks	61	£116,094.07
27 - 39 weeks	14	£43,730.79
40 - 52 weeks	0	£0.00
53 + weeks	2	£12,075.15
Total		£712,540.56

Aug-17

Weeks	Number	Value
0-4 weeks	3399	454,223.01
5-13 weeks	358	327,461.31
14-26 weeks	72	144,743.62
27-39 weeks	15	45,346.68
40-52 weeks	2	8743.91
52+ weeks	1	6477.42
Total		986,995.95

Sept-17

Weeks	Number	Value
0-4 weeks	2118	415,316.72
5-13 weeks	394	366,099.83
14-26 weeks	69	143,289.09
27-39 weeks	10	28,936.19
40-52 weeks	2	7268.56
52+ weeks	1	6937.30
	Total	967,847.69

11. At the end of March 2017 there were only two accounts with the equivalent of between 39 and 52 weeks Rent arrears.

High Level Arrears (13-52+ weeks)

12. All cases that have more than 13 weeks of rent arrears have either been taken or are in the process of going to court to seek a legal agreement to pay the rent arrears. The Income Team are members of the court user group and judges have requested that we work with tenants early in the arrears process so any orders or judgements made are realistic for the tenant to adhere to payments.
13. We have implemented rent escalation policies for all eligible tenancies from the start of October this year. This has automated reminder letters for the lower level debts and will free up staff to tackle the higher value debt.

Arrears Engagement Activity

14. Table 3 below shows the last three years of agreement and court activity highlighting a potential increase in legal activity in the current year. This outlines the team's endeavours to contact tenants early in the arrears process and resolve debt problems before they escalate. It also shows that tenants are adhering to long term agreements or payment plans.

Table 3: Arrears Actions for all Tenants

Arrangement Type	2015/2016	2016/2017	April 16- Sep-16
Agreements	734	1353	374
Court Orders	114	131	53

15. Tenants in arrears are contacted by the Incomes Team in the first instance to make an agreement. If this agreement is not adhered to, or we are unable to make contact with the customer, then the case is escalated to a court hearing. At the court hearing the judge will make a determination based on the individual case presented, and will either grant possession, or suspend possession based on an agreement being maintained via a court order, or adjourn the case subject to a payment arrangement being agreed and maintained. The team can make their own judgement on whether or not to vary this arrangement and refer back to the Court in these cases.

16. The team has evicted 5 tenants in the current year to date; this is significantly lower than previous years but comparable to other organisations in our benchmarking group where the average is approximately 20 per year. The number of evictions has decreased because of staff shortages, however now that the staffing compliment is back to normal effective action will be taken to tackle the problems earlier, which in some cases means eviction is the right option.

Engagement with tenants

17. In July 2016 the whole Council achieved full compliance for the Customer Service Excellence (CSE) assessment, and the Rents Team who undertook the assessment the previous year achieved three compliance pluses for;

- Developing customer insight about our customer groups to better understand their needs and preferences.
- Empowering and encouraging all employees to actively promote and participate in the customer-focused culture of the organisation.
- Demonstrating how insight and experience from customer-facing staff is incorporated into internal processes, policy development and service planning
- The CSE work is continuing and further work is being undertaken in the following areas to ensure compliance going forward:
 - ❖ Customer Insight programme being developed for implementation in 2017/18
 - ❖ Customer Welcome Pack being produced for tenancy sign-ups to improve the process. Customer consultation will be carried out once a draft has been approved by Landlord Services
 - ❖ Meetings with Tenancy Management have been arranged to revise the cross working sign-up Process and to discuss support requirements for vulnerable tenants.

Former Tenant Arrears (FTA's)

18. Current Former Tenant Arrears figures for the current year are detailed below:

Starting Balance April 2017	£372,227.67
Balance at September 2017	£411,780.21

19. This financial year the focus has been on targeting new tenants when they sign their tenancy agreement with a view to stopping arrears building up in the early stages of the tenancy. The team have also been tackling medium level arrears and the increase in high level debts to stop the escalation of arrears.

20. Former tenants' arrears are currently dealt with on a case by case basis with accounts being pursued but fewer write offs being completed than last year. We are shortly to request a bulk write-off of uncollectable debts of £55,000.00 which will reduce the arrears to £356,780.21.

21. The Debt Collection Agency will be engaged to collect income where efforts by the team have been unsuccessful. We have selected two agencies that will provide competition and we can measure performance against each. The Enforcement

Agencies will only be used as a matter of last resort in an attempt to collect the debt, failing which the debt will be written off.

Debt Analysis by Value

22. Table 4 below shows the profile of debt by value. Since 1st April 2017 the number of arrears cases has increased by 1,010, and the arrears have increased by £122,030.36.

Table 4: Rent Debt Analysis by Value of Debt

Range	Genuine Arrears March 2017	Genuine Arrears Cases March 2017	Genuine Arrears August 2017	Genuine Arrears Cases August 2017	Genuine Arrears September 2017	Genuine Arrears Cases September 2017
£0 to £100	34,530.60	844	60,890.22	2386	33,930.34	1772
£100 to £250	90,489.43	610	80,826.05	531	79,442.51	530
£250 to £500	104,156.95	292	126,912.07	351	125,837.51	347
£500 to £750	82,222.86	136	99,896.16	162	107,138.76	177
£750 to £1000	66,009.95	76	83,607.71	96	93,749.91	108
£1000 +	252,589.34	156	313,928.75	210	311,930.46	190
	629,999.13	2114	766,060.96	3736	752,029.49	3124

Welfare Reform

Universal Credit

23. Out of a total of 7,706 tenants, there are 38 tenants now in receipt of Universal Credit (UC). 26 of these cases have had an arrears increase of an average of £745.53 since they have been in receipt of UC

24. We have applied for a total of 19 Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA), where the housing element of UC is paid directly to the Council, and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have agreed all 19 of these

25. There have been a number of issues in dealing with the DWP to ensure tenants receive timely assessments and communicate the information required

26. Of the 38 tenants that have received UC payments, 5 were part of the direct payment demonstration project

27. Oxford City Council went to Full Service on 18th October. We have done as much as we can to understand the implications for the service. Indications from others that

are already live with Full Service are that we should expect to see an increase in Rent arrears going forward. That said, we will be applying for Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA's) as we do now for those tenants that are vulnerable and unable to manage their rent.

28. UC claimants will also be able to apply for an Advanced Payment of their Universal Credit and we will be doing our best to ensure if this happens that their Rent is paid from that advance.

29. We can also apply for Managed Payments to help clear arrears

Direct Payments

30. We currently have 661 tenants who are receiving direct housing payments. These tenants are now monitored for non-payment using the standard Income Team procedure.

31. We have also amended our procedures to ensure we capture as many tenants as possible onto direct payments at tenancy sign-up.

Bedroom Tax

32. There are 399 (297 same time last year) tenants currently affected by the bedroom tax, this is a decrease of 261 cases from 660 tenants with bedroom tax deductions when the policy was introduced in April 2013. (However, there are a number of Direct Payment cases that were potentially not included in last year's report which may explain the increase)

33. Out of these tenants there are 30 that are being supported by Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP).

Benefit Cap

34. There are a further 137 council tenants who have been affected by the Benefit Cap (introduced in April 2013) and 39 that have had the cap removed. 65 tenants have received a DHP this financial year because of the benefit cap.

Benchmarking data

35. The Benchmarking data provided by HouseMark for the 12 months to 31st March 2017 which compares data for the City Council with similar local authorities that have retained their Housing stock is not available until mid-November, hence cannot be included in this report.

Service Improvement

36. Actions completed from the last report

- Promoting Direct Debit as our preferred payment method- we now offer this as the preferred payment option, and push this where possible at tenancy sign up, and current take up is 52.71% of total tenants (not including those on full Housing Benefit/ Universal Credit)

- We will be looking to offer any day Direct Debits when we implement the new Housing Management System to offer a range of additional Direct Debit dates for arrangements
- We continue to review processes and procedures on a regular basis and have reviewed all letters sent to customers from initial contact through to serving notice, improving efficiency and communication through tenant and staff consultation. We have recently reviewed our Rent statements to include a message about Universal Credit
- We have been using software for two years now which has allowed us to highlight specific areas of the city where there has been a growth in arrears. Using historical payment data for the tenants in that area we can divert resources to specific tenancies to tackle arrears.
- We have introduced an automated procedure of letter generation for our initial contact letters for secure tenancies, introductory tenancies, garage rents and temporary accommodation to better improve early notification to the tenant of non-payment but also allow staff resources to review notice of possession creation. This will assist with the collection of smaller rent arrears
- Former Tenant Arrears collection- we have started to focus attention on higher level arrears this year and management of those former tenant arrears by cleansing accounts and sending those viable for recovery to our Enforcement Agents.
- We continue to work with the Customer Contact Centre, giving additional training and advice, to ensure that these staff can resolve the customer enquiry at first point of contact.

New areas:

- We are currently assisting with the procurement of a new Housing Management System. Involvement has been with soft market testing, scoring the tender and initial clarification of points from the tender submission. Next steps are site visits and then the decision, before the project gets fully underway to implement the new software
- Arrears prevention at sign up of tenancy- we are reviewing our process currently and will also be including information about claiming Universal Credit and Council Tax Reduction. We continue to get tenants claiming Housing Benefit onto Direct Payments, this to help them treat their money like a salary, and to manage their money effectively. We constantly look at ways of improving the customer experience.
- We are drafting a procedure which will allow the contact centre and welfare reform team to make agreements on low level arrears to address this at first point of contact
- Universal Credit went to full service on 18th October 2017 in Oxford. This now encompasses all working age claimants. In sites that have gone to full service earlier there are reports of rent arrears rising significantly due to the delay in receiving Universal Credit payments. We will be monitoring these cases very carefully and addressing vulnerability at an early stage. We will apply for Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA's) in these cases, and managed payments for arrears.
- We are also busy preparing policies and procedures for the new Housing Company.

- Garage arrears continue to reduce as we have removed the second reminder letter from the recovery process. These currently stand at:

Current Tenants	£25,894
Former Tenants	£15,914
Total	£41,808

This means we seek possession of the garage earlier keeping arrears to a minimum.

- Rent arrears at the 31st March 2017 were the lowest they have been for 6 years

Report author	Tanya Bandekar
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Background Papers: None

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Number of households in temporary accommodation

	31-Dec-16	31-Mar-17	30-Jun-17	30-Sept-17
Families with dependent children or expected babies	97	80	80	89
Single households	15	11	13	11
Other	2	5	1	0
TOTAL	114	96	94	100
Number of children in temp accommodation	165	148	147	162

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HOUSING PANEL

13 NOVEMBER 2017- PROVISIONAL REPORTS

Agenda item	Decision	Description	CEB Portfolio	Report Contact
Housing performance - quarter 2	No	To consider mid-year Council performance against a set of housing service measures chosen by the Panel.	Housing	Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing Services
Tenant Involvement	No	Joint session with the Tenant Scrutiny Panel to consider how tenants are involved in decisions that affect them.	Housing	Simon Warde, Tenant Involvement Manager
Void property management	No	To consider tenancy management functions including the management of void properties and changes to the management of issues in sheltered housing schemes.	Housing	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager
Rent performance	No	To monitor the Council's rents performance including current and former tenant arrears.	Housing	Tanya Bandekar, Service Manager Revenue & Benefits

11 DECEMBER 2017 - PROVISIONAL MEETING

Agenda item	Decision	Description	CEB Portfolio	Report Contact
Oxford City Council's Tenancy Strategy & Policy Statement 2018	Yes	To request CEB approval to go out to public consultation on the draft Tenancy Strategy	Housing	Frances Evans, Strategy & Service Development Manager
Impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017	Yes	To set out the implications of the new Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and any changes required to current service delivery or any potential impact on the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.	Housing	Dave Scholes, Housing Strategy & Needs Manager
Review of Home Choice Pilot	Yes	To update CEB on the 1st year's operation of the Home Choice Pilot.	Housing	Paul Wilding, Programme Manager Revenue & Benefits

16 JANUARY 2018 - PROVISIONAL MEETING

Agenda item	Decision	Description	CEB Portfolio	Report Contact
Draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018 - 2021	Yes	To request CEB approval to go out to public consultation on the draft Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21, which incorporates the strategy for bringing empty properties back into use.	Housing	Frances Evans, Strategy & Service Development Manager

8 MARCH 2018 - PROVISIONAL REPORTS

Agenda item	Decision	Description	CEB Portfolio	Report Contact
Housing performance - quarter 3	No	To consider a report on Council performance against a set of housing service measures chosen by the Panel.	Housing	Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing Services
Empty garages and former garage sites	No	To receive an update on how the Council is dealing with empty garages and former garage sites.	Housing	Martin Shaw, Property Services Manager
Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funds in 2018/19	Yes	To agree the allocation of the homelessness prevention funds with the purpose of meeting the objectives of the homelessness strategy. Funding is recommended to services/projects working to prevent and/or tackle homelessness and rough sleeping.	Housing	Nerys Parry, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager

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HOUSING PANEL - TO BE SCHEDULED

Agenda item	Decision	Description	CEB Portfolio	Report Contact
Great Estates update	No	To receive an update on progress made in developing masterplans for estates and working up and delivering a rolling programme of priority improvement schemes.	Housing	Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing Services
Tenant satisfaction	No	To monitor tenant satisfaction survey results.	Housing	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

Leaseholder relationships	No	To consider Council relationships with leaseholders including the views of individual leaseholders.	Housing	Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing Services
Building the housing for the future	No	To consider the need to build homes fit for the future and the need to provide accommodation for the increasing older population with compound needs including dementia.	Housing	Frances Evans, Strategy & Service Development Manager
Impacts of absent owners on housing availability	No	To consider the impacts of foreign investors and other absent owners on housing availability in the city.	Housing	Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing Services
Flexible tenancies	Yes	To pre-scrutinise any decisions on the local implementation of government plans to prevent local authorities in England from offering secure tenancies for life to new council tenants in most circumstances.	Housing	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

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HOUSING PANEL (PANEL OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE)

Thursday 12 October 2017

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Henwood (Chair), Pegg, Sanders, Thomas, Wade and Humphrey.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillors Hollingsworth (Planning & Regulatory Services) and Rowley (Housing)

OFFICERS PRESENT: Andrew Brown (Scrutiny Officer), Stephen Clarke (Head of Housing Services), Ian Wright (Service Manager Environmental Health), Alan Wylde (Housing Development & Enabling Manager) and Becky Bell (Home Improvement Agency Team Manager)

121. APOLOGIES

Apologies were noted from Cllr Angie Goff.

122. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

123. REGULATING THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR

The Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services and the Environmental Health Service Manager introduced their report. They said that the intention was to improve standards in the non-HMO private rented sector. The proposal was to do so by using new powers to issue civil penalties to rogue landlords who failed to comply with an Improvement Notice. The penalties would be retained by the Council and used to fund two fixed term officer posts. Most landlords operating in the city were good and had nothing to fear from this approach, which was considered to be fair and effective. A selective licensing scheme had been considered but rejected on the basis that to be acceptable to government, a scheme would have only covered part of the city, and not necessarily those areas where enforcement actions were concentrated. This would have created unfairness and flaws in the system.

A representative of Oxford Community Forum addressed the Panel. He said that his organisation has opposed the introduction of selective licensing for HMOs and questioned why the Council was intent on intervening in the private rented sector, rather than the social or universities sectors. He said that landlords were not aware of what the Council was doing and would feel insecure about the implications of further interventions. He questioned what safeguards would be in place to govern the use of these new powers.

The Environmental Health Service Manager explained the background to HMO licensing and provided assurance that landlords would have opportunities to comply before being served with a penalty.

In discussion and in response to questions the Panel noted that:

- The approach was not expected to impact rent levels;
- Tenants were protected from retaliatory evictions;
- Officers would use a range of data sources, intelligence and experience to identify the properties most likely to be in disrepair;
- Once an offense had been identified, three senior officers and a lawyer needed to be satisfied at various stages before an intention to issue a civil notice was given to the landlord.
- The appeals process had not been tested and income would need to be carefully monitored;
- The Council would be the first in the country to take this approach although others were considering doing so;
- The names of landlords issued with a civil notice would not be made public, although they would be placed on a government database.
- For very serious offenses landlords may face banning orders, although that power had not been used yet.
- The Council would be targeting poor housing rather than specific geographies.

The Panel agreed to request an annual report in order to monitor spend and numbers of inspections and enforcement actions taken.

124. DRAFT HOUSING ASSISTANCE AND DISABLED ADAPTATIONS POLICY 2018

The Board Member for Housing introduced the report and said that a very rare thing was happening - the government was increasing a funding stream. This was giving the Council flexibility to top up Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG), taking the maximum DFG to £40k, introduce discretionary Adapted Home Grants of up to £10k and introduce discretionary Safe and Secure grants of up to £1k. These would help to ensure that people were able to return home from hospital sooner, reducing bed blocking, and to help prevent falls.

The Home Improvement Agency Team Manager added that the funding was channelled through the Better Care Fund and was increasing from £500k in 2012 to £1m in 2020. Government had signalled that the intention was to fund further increases into the future. The Council's Policy was being refreshed to better reflect the aims of the Better Care Fund.

In discussion and in answer to questions the Panel noted that:

- Many elderly people were frightened to spend their savings on adaptations; hence the introduction of non-means tested funding.
- The Council was actively promoting the grants to various groups and organisations across the city and had produced a number of leaflets to be placed in GP surgeries, pharmacies, community settings etc.
- Support is provided to applicants by a case worker.
- Flexible Home Improvement Loans are very popular and the full amount is always allocated.
- Direct Services provide can undertake works competitively but the trading company business plan assumes no growth in this area.

125. HOUSING PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 1

The Head of Housing Services introduced the report. He said that the rough sleeping figure for the end of June (HP003) should read 180. Progress was being made to improve the rents performance (BV066a).

The Panel expressed concern that there was insufficient resource in the team dealing with rent collection. The Head of Housing Services explained the nature of the resourcing issues in that area and the challenges created by the introduction of Universal Credit. He said that progress had been made since June.

The Panel noted that Universal Credit recipients could only elect for their rent to be paid directly to their landlord once they had got into arrears.

126. TOWER BLOCK FIRE SAFETY - VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Housing Services explained that the Council had placed a variation order with its contractor to remove and replace the aluminium composite material (ACM) rain screen installed on parts of the two tower blocks in Blackbird Leys. The contractor had initially proposed a non-combustible ACM product as a replacement but to provide maximum reassurance to residents the Council had requested a non-ACM aluminium rain screen. This would require the fittings installed on the blocks to be changed but the £150k cost of doing this could be absorbed within the existing budget. It would also extend the timescale for replacement by a couple of months to July 2018. The resident reference group had been advised and was supportive of this decision. The Council was confident that it was taking a sound decision that went over and above the Council's obligations.

A leaseholder addressed the Panel and expressed concern about the risk of arson or a terrorist attack on one or more of the Council's tower blocks. The Head of Housing Services responded that the blocks were secure and contained no unacceptable fire risks that would exacerbate damage or harm in the event of a major incident.

127. LUCY FAITHFULL HOUSE

The Head of Housing introduced the report and explained the reasons why authorisation was being sought to demolish Lucy Faithful House. He said that the building was old-fashioned, in poor condition and the internal layout was such that refurbishment would not be desirable. The plan was to redevelop the site as residential accommodation and to maximise the delivery of affordable housing.

In discussion and in response to questions the Panel noted that:

- Asbestos surveys were being undertaken ahead of demolition early in the New Year.
- Alternative uses for the building (e.g. as a severe weather shelter) had been considered but ruled out on the basis that there was adequate

capacity elsewhere and insufficient time (and no budget) to make the building safe and find a suitable management organisation.

- The building had recently been used by a guardianship organisation but there had been significant concerns and complaints about safety, resulting in Environmental Health action.

The Head of Housing Services offered to share information about severe weather accommodation with members.

128. HOUSING PANEL WORK PLAN

The Panel noted that two housing decisions are going forward to the City Executive Board in December and asked the Scrutiny Officer to set a provisional panel meeting.

The Panel also asked to bring the empty garages report forward to March.

129. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Noted.

130. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.45 pm