
Clyde Valley Housing Association

Customer Panel

Void Scrutiny Report

17th March 2016

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Clyde Valley Housing Association (CVHA) Customer Panel (the Panel) is pleased to submit our Void Tenant Led Inspection Report to Clyde Valley Housing Association's Senior Management Team and Board Members for their information and consideration.
- 1.2 The Panel would like to thank the CVHA who assisted in this inspection by providing information to the Panel and arranging inspection visits to the void properties.

2. THE INSPECTION PROCESS

- 2.1 The Panel followed an agreed work plan which included:
 - a. Review of information and relevant fact finding
 - Clyde Valley Housing Association's Repairs and Maintenance Policy and Lettable Standard
 - Scottish Social Housing Charter Context
 - Scottish Housing Regulator Context
 - Clyde Valley Performance Information and Tenant Satisfaction Reports
 - b. Planning and Preparation, including:
 - Participation in training, information and support provided to by TIS
 - Planning and agreeing questions to be asked in meetings and via e-mail to Clyde Valley staff
 - c. Reality Checking
 - Meetings with Clyde Valley staff
 - Visits to void properties with the inspectors at initial and post inspections
 - Review of the lettable standard document dated September 2013

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 What the Panel liked:

- a. The Panel understands that as per the Scottish Social Housing Charter, (SSHC) that CVHA is required to manage its business so that:

“Tenants’ homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by April 2015 and continue to meet it thereafter, and when they are allocated, are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair.”
- b. The Panel considers that as a minimum standard the CVHA Lettable Standard is acceptable and achievable, however agree that some improvements in decoration could be made in some properties. Further comments and recommendations are detailed later in this report.

- c. The Panel agrees with CVHA's aim to minimise void rent loss by ensuring that void properties meet the Lettable Standard as quickly as possible to ensure that they are re-let within the target timescales.
- d. The Panel understands that the level of work required to each property may vary due to the condition properties are left in by the previous tenant and whether or not improvements have been carried out whilst properties are tenanted.
- e. The Panel understands that CVHA is working towards achieving value for money and efficiencies where possible and understands the average cost per void in 2013 – 2014 was around £1,450, which was a reduction from £1,700 in the previous year. The Panel agrees that these figures demonstrate this.
- f. The Panel considers it is good practice that the CVHA inspectors carry out all inspections with the Contractor to agree the work required and to check this has been satisfactorily completed prior to the property being released for re-let. The Panel considers this should ensure that CVHA is in control of works carried out and associated budgets.
- g. The Panel was pleased to learn that all void works were carried out and properties returned for re-let within the agreed target timescales in the last year.
- h. The Panel considers that the properties visited were improved at the time of our post inspection visits however the standard of cleanliness and decoration could have been improved upon in one case. (see section x below)
- i. Information gathered in the large scale tenant satisfaction survey carried out in 2015 indicates that 97% of new tenants who responded to the survey were satisfied with the condition of their home when they moved in. The Panel agrees this is very positive. However during the inspection process the Panel also learned that tenant satisfaction levels sought within one month of moving in, is lower at around 75%.

3.2 Panel Findings and Recommendations:

The Group identified the following items for consideration and improvement:

3.3 The CVHA Lettable Standard

The Panel considers that the lettable standard is a relatively good standard that meets the SSHC outcome. Based on our review of the document and visits to the void properties the Panel recommends the following:

Removal of items:	
a.	CVHA continues to ensure that loft spaces, cellars and sheds in particular are cleared of all debris.
b.	Where items such as carpets, curtain poles, light fittings or furniture is left in a good condition, that CVHA offers such items to the new tenant, with a disclaimer agreeing future responsibility or donates items for recycling or homeless projects or through working closely with the local housing officers offers items to tenants who may benefit from them.
c.	CVHA ensures a consistent approach to regarding items left in order that such items are not wasted where possible.
Cleanliness:	
d.	CVHA ensures that the standard of cleanliness is high, particularly with reference to window sills, facings, doors bathrooms and kitchen fittings, tiles and work surfaces.
e.	The Panel considers the sparkle clean standard is good and recommends that CVHA continues to check this is being achieved, particularly with reference to air fresheners and cleanliness of windows as this was not evidenced in all properties visited.
Decoration & plasterwork:	
f.	Standard is improved to include new facings when new doors and windows are installed.
g.	Where the standard of painting is of a poor quality or in "gaudy" colours that walls are painted in a neutral colour.
h.	Where plasterwork is damaged either by the tenant or during works, that wall paper on associated walls is removed to allow the new tenant to decorate more easily.
j.	CVHA continues with the new procedure of providing decoration packs where required rather than a decoration allowance as we consider this is better Value for Money for CVHA and enables new tenants to decorate more quickly.
k.	CVHA considers the removal or encasing of artex in properties where this is heavy or would be difficult for new tenants to decorate.

I.	CVHA considers improving the standard of internal decoration to encourage properties to be re - let and to take account of the financial constraints of applicants and / or their ability to redecorate properties.
Electrical:	
m.	CVHA continues to fit new light bulbs in properties to assist new tenants when they move in.
Solid Fuel:	
n.	CVHA provides tenants with information regarding the age of carbon monoxide detectors to ensure lifespan is okay. CVHA considers installing additional detectors in larger properties.
Asbestos:	
o.	CVHA provides information to tenants on how to deal with artex removal and asbestos issues if not carried out by CVHA pre let.
Joinery:	
p.	CVHA replaces facings when doors and windows are renewed.
Windows:	
q.	CVHA improves this section to include “window locks will be in a good working order and keys supplied where appropriate”
Plumbing:	
r.	CVHA considers how properties will be cleaned to a high standard, when the water supply is drained down.
Sanitary ware & bathing facilities:	
s.	New toilet seats will be fitted to “match the toilet and bathroom suite” as part of the standard and thereafter will be the responsibility of the tenant.
Gardens and drying areas:	
t.	CVHA works to ensure that grass cutting and garden tidying is carried out pre viewing where possible and at least have work done before the new tenant moves in.

Minor outstanding repairs:

u.	CVHA works to ensure all repairs are carried out at the void stage where possible and where not sets a target of less than 4 weeks after new tenant moves in, unless agreed as longer with the tenant.
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3.4 Tenant Satisfaction

The Panel considers that the anomalies in tenant satisfaction indicated in 3.1 above, may be as a result of tenants recollection of any issues or concerns by the time the large scale survey is carried out versus the more immediate views expressed within a month of moving in. The Panel therefore recommends that:

a.	CVHA continues to seek views within the one month period and address concerns expressed.
b.	CVHA provides details of concerns or complaints about the standard or condition of properties to the Panel for our consideration and to allow us to monitor the standard and provide suggestions and recommendations.

3.5 Void Costs

The Panel understands that costs vary in each property and that some can be very high due to damage caused by the previous tenant, no access to carry out maintenance or improvement works, asbestos removal, wood worm and dampness among others. However we consider that the cost of improving the garden in one property we visited by laying slabs and stone chips seemed rather high.

The Panel recommends that:

a.	CVHA continues to ensure Value for Money and efficiencies in relation to the average void costs as evidenced in the reduction from £1,700 to £1,450.
b.	CVHA carries out less extensive work in gardens to allow this money to be used for a higher standard in other properties.
c.	CVHA carries out an assessment of the cost and level of work carried out as new tenant repairs and considers carrying out all repair work at the void stage to provide a home that “meets the Scottish Housing Quality Standard and is clean, tidy and in a good state of repair when let” as per the Charter outcomes. The Panel intention within this

	proposal is to ensure that all costs associated with void properties are clearly recorded and demonstrated within this budget heading.
d.	CVHA continues to ensure outgoing tenants are recharged for the cost of any rechargeable repairs, damage or high levels of cleaning required.

3.6 Void Turnaround Time

The Panel understands that CVHA is aiming to keep void rent loss to a minimum and will therefore prioritise properties with high demand and in such cases will do the majority of the work after the new tenant moves in.

The Panel recommendations with regard to turnaround times are:

a.	All properties with a high demand should be given priority, even those that cannot be let with gas and electrical checks only. In such cases the target timescale for the contractor should be set as 5 days, unless the level of work required is extensive.
b.	Consideration is given to the marketing of low demand properties, along with consideration of how to make them more attractive to applicants such as increasing the standard to include painting in neutral colours, additional time to move in or higher specification of decoration packs where it is considered that the increased costs will improve uptake of properties.
c.	CVHA continues to assess the long term voids to identify options for them such as demolition, sale, change of apartment size etc.

3.7 Void Aesthetics

The Panel considers that void properties can cause a visual blight on the communities where they are situated, especially when there are a number of them in close proximity. The Panel therefore recommends that:

a.	CVHA retains or installs curtains on the windows of void properties, particularly in long term voids.

b.	CVHA ensures that gardens, closes and open spaces in and around void properties are well maintained.

3.8 Information to tenants

The Panel is unclear on how the Lettable Standard is communicated to tenants and therefore recommends that:

a.	A user friendly leaflet is produced for tenants in partnership with the Panel, that will allow tenants to be clear on the condition and cleanliness that can be expected in CVHA property.

4. Vote of Thanks

The Panel would like to thank all staff who assisted in the Void Inspection work and responded to our survey.

*Clyde Valley Customer Panel
17th March 2016*