

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the University of Toronto crest. The crest includes a crown at the top with four floral motifs, a shield with a cross, a ship on the left, and an eagle on the right, and a banner at the bottom with the motto 'ANNE FOR A'.

AGENDA ITEM

5

**REVIEW OF STANDARD FOR RE-
LETTING PROPERTIES**

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: REVIEW OF STANDARD FOR RE-LETTING PROPERTIES
Meeting: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date: 16 JUNE 2016
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information in relation to the implementation of the new Standard for Re-letting Properties.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Following consultation with tenants and other service users, a revised Standard for Re-letting Council Housing was agreed by Executive in January 2015 and became operational from April 2015. A copy of the revised Standard is attached in Appendix 1.

2.2 The main changes to the Standard are as follows:

- Essential checks and repairs are carried out to the property prior to occupation (marked as * in Appendix 1), any non-essential repairs can thereafter be carried out once the new tenant is in the house.
- Where the previous tenant left floor coverings, blinds and white goods in a good condition, these are now offered to the incoming tenant
- Alterations made by the previous tenant which meet safety and quality standards and improve the property, are left for the incoming tenant
- A-rated, low energy light bulbs are fitted in all rooms
- Consultation is undertaken with incoming tenants on the layout and style of kitchen units, where a property has been assessed as needing a new kitchen.
- All wallpapered and painted walls will be intact and clean or internal wall surfaces will be in a good condition for decoration
- Additional decoration, above the decorative standard, will be carried out to properties in low demand
- Renewal and repair of plasterwork
- Properties cleaned to a “sparkle clean” standard, free of debris prior to occupancy
- Sheds; garden furniture and ornaments left by previous tenants will be offered to new tenants.
- All rechargeable void repairs are promptly charged to the outgoing tenant and appropriate action taken to recover sums due.

2.3 In addition to the above changes the new Standard also commits, assuming access is available to the following:

- All gas systems are functioning within 24 hours of tenants confirming their gas and electricity supplier
- Where the water supply has been drained down, water supply will be turned on within 24 hours.

3. PERFORMANCE

3.1 In order to effectively measure the impact of the new Standard, comparative performance data has been collated, including information on customer satisfaction; number of void properties; time taken to re-let; cost and rent lost.

3.2 During 2015/16, a total of 1,630 properties were allocated. This represents c10% of our housing stock and places the Council in the top quartile for the number of allocations it progresses each year.

3.3 The following table outlines comparative performance data pre and post the implementation of the new Standard.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE	PRE NEW STANDARD (2014/15)	POST NEW STANDARD (2015/16)
Satisfaction with the condition of their home	84.09%	91%
Number of void properties	327	214
Average time taken to re-let a property	44.60 days	50.17 days
Average cost per void property	£2,702	£3,347
% of rent lost due to voids	1.73%	0.98%

3.4 Overall, the changes to the Voids Standard have impacted positively on tenant satisfaction, with over 90% of tenants now satisfied with the condition of their home, an increase of 7% on the previous year. The assessment of tenant satisfaction is undertaken at the tenancy settling in visit, which is around 1 month after tenancy commencement. This timeframe allows a period of time for any repairs or other issues to be identified. Not with-standing the improvement in tenant satisfaction, one of the areas of dis-satisfaction relates to some instances where repairs were required post-occupancy e.g.: radiator leaks. In addition, some tenants were dis-satisfied as a result of matters that were outwith the Standard e.g.: investment/improvement works. Tenant satisfaction and the reasons for dis-satisfaction will continue to be reviewed on an on-going basis, to ensure we are responsive to the views of tenants.

3.5 The new standard means that additional work is undertaken prior to occupancy. As such, the expenditure on Void properties has increased over the last year from £4m to £5.3m, with a corresponding increase in the average cost per void property.

However, there has been a compensatory reduction in the expenditure within the general maintenance budget i.e.: repairs historically undertaken post occupancy, are now undertaken pre-occupancy.

3.6 There has also been a focus over the last year in improving the condition of low-demand/hard-to-let properties. This work has resulted in a reduction in the number of void properties. The additional work has however, increased the average time taken to re-let a property. However, as the number of low-demand properties has reduced over the year, the average re-let has correspondingly reduced e.g.: the average time in March 2016 was 31 days, compared to 75 days in April 2015.

3.7 As a consequence of reducing the number of void and low-demand properties, the percentage of rent lost has correspondingly reduced. The Council's performance is now below the peer group average i.e.: 0.98% compared to a peer group average of 1.3%.

4. OTHER CHANGES

4.1 A comprehensive review of all procedures relating to the void process has been undertaken. Each process is now clearly set out in procedural documents which provide clear guidance to staff on the procedure to be followed with realistic target times to be achieved.

4.2 Pre-void information is also now being used to advertise properties during the pre-void stage where possible.

4.3 Along with undertaking additional works to low-demand properties, targeted advertising for all applicant groups in the weekly Homespot publication has proven effective in raising community awareness that these low-demand properties are available. The use of 'For Let' signs has also increased the volume of enquiries about available properties. The impact of these initiatives is that over the last year, 127 properties that had been previously classified as low demand were allocated, with only a residual number now being advertised each week in Homespot.

4.4 Going forward, the service is currently undertaking two significant reviews within BMD and Housing Services, which include the following aspects of the void process:

- Reviewing the technical inspection process to achieve a more streamlined process
- Further work on proactive verification visits
- Review the offer process for applicants in the 'Home Seeker' banding
- Further work on lettings procedures with associated targets for action
- Improve identification and recharging procedures to ensure where ever possible recovery of expenditure on void properties.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The introduction of the void standard has increased tenant satisfaction and means that void properties are now allocated to a consistent standard that is understood by both tenants and staff.
- 5.2 A key focus over the last year has also been to improve the standard of low-demand properties and this has proven successful in both reducing the number of low-demand properties and also the total number of void properties.
- 5.3 Recent performance information indicates that these positive trends are continuing and we are now also seeing a reduction in the time taken to re-let a property.

6. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Members:

- 6.1 **Note the position regarding the implementation of the new Standard for Re-letting Properties.**

DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES

Date: 6 June 2016

Ref: AAC160616 – Review of Standard for re-letting properties

Contact: David McGhee ext 0788

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1. Report to Executive dated 13 January 2015 “Review of Standard for Re-Letting Properties”

Falkirk Council: Standard for Letting Council Housing

The following details the work to be carried out to void properties.
Work marked with an asterisk will be done before the property is re-let.

Previous Tenancy: Alterations/Adaptations/Items left

1. Alterations made by the previous tenant will be left in place if they meet current safety standards, the Council's quality standards, and they improve the standard of the property, for example but not limited to: lighting, doors, showers
2. Adaptations provided for a previous tenant may be left for the incoming tenant if reasonable to do so, eg a level access shower
3. Items in a good condition left by the previous tenant with the Council's agreement, such as floor coverings, window blinds, and white goods will be left in the property and offered to the incoming tenant
4. Any abeyances in terms of the Scottish Housing Quality Standard will be addressed as part of the void process, where possible.

Gas and Electrical Supplies and Systems

1. * Gas and electrical supplies and systems will be checked for safety and will be in good working order. These include:
 - Heating systems
 - Mains wired smoke detectors (to replace battery detectors)
 - Xpelair fans
 - Any white goods left for incoming tenant
 - Any shower left for incoming tenant
2. * Carbon monoxide detector will be installed/checked where there is a gas supply to the property
3. * Where required, A-rated low energy light bulbs will be fitted in all rooms – the equivalent of 100w in the kitchen and 60w in all other rooms
4. Kitchen will have a minimum of 6 electrical sockets, where possible
5. * Electrical fixtures and fittings will be free of excessive paint on coverings/cover plates
6. * Gas and electricity meters will be read and recorded when property void
7. * Gas safety certificate will be given to incoming tenant

Solid Fuel Central Heating Systems, Coal, Gas and Electric Fires

1. * Solid fuel central heating systems and coal fire arrangements will be taken out and replaced with either gas or electric wet central heating systems.
2. * Electric storage heating system will be replaced by gas central heating system (if gas supply in area) or if no gas supply, with electric wet central heating system.
3. * Gas and electric fires, hearths and electric fireplace suites will be removed
4. * Cast iron/ceramic tiled fireplaces in bedrooms and kitchens will be removed

Plumbing

1. * All water and waste systems will be checked and free from leaks
2. * Sanitary ware will be replaced to match existing where broken or cracked
3. * Plumbing will be installed for automatic washing machine
4. * Insulation cover 80mm minimum thickness will be fitted to hot water tank, if not in place/if not to required thickness
5. * Toilet seat and lid will be renewed
6. * Lead-lined cold water tank will be replaced

Security

1. * External locks will be changed and the new tenant given a minimum two sets of keys
2. Where fitted, the communal door entry system will be working (unless ownership within close prevents repairs being carried out) and the new tenant will be given a minimum of two fobs
3. * Any external door with a yale lock only will have a mortice lock fitted
4. * All windows will close securely
5. Windows with locks will have keys provided

External Elements

1. * The following will be checked and repaired as necessary to ensure property is wind and watertight:
 - Roof
 - Chimney heads
 - Rhones and downpipes
 - External walls
 - External doors
 - Windows
 - Window panes – broken or cracked, will be replaced

Internal Elements - Throughout

1. * Property checked for rising damp, wet and dry rot, and remedial work instructed where necessary
2. * An asbestos check will be carried out to the property and the certificate issued to the incoming tenant
3. * The property will be assessed for its energy efficiency rating and the energy performance certificate will be issued to the new tenant
4. * Defective flooring, skirting, and stair treads will be repaired/replaced as necessary
5. Doors, door handles and locks will be in a good condition and in good working order
6. Door standards and facings will be replaced where damaged
7. * Banisters and handrails will be checked and secured as necessary
8. * Doors with glass panelling which does not meet current safety standards will be replaced with standard doors
9. Pipe work and electric meters will be boxed in, with meter boxes having door for access.

Internal Elements – Kitchen

1. Kitchen worktops will be repaired/replaced where damaged, to match existing
2. * Kitchen units, doors, and drawers will be checked and secured as necessary
3. If kitchen is assessed as needing replaced, the number of units and their capacity will meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard where possible (see below re tenant consultation)

Internal Decoration

1. * All wallpapered and painted walls will be intact and clean, with an allowance made for wear
2. * Where there is no decoration, internal wall surfaces will be in a suitable condition for redecoration by the new tenant, that is, walls will be free from major defects – with visible plasterwork in a good condition with cracks no wider than 5mm
3. * Ceilings will be free of polystyrene tiles.
4. Existing artex in a sound condition will remain in place.
5. If a property is in low demand or where a number of applicants have declined to take the property, we will carry out internal decoration to make it more attractive to rent by raising the decorative standard.

Standard of Cleanliness

1. * The property will be cleaned to a sparkle clean standard and free of debris.
2. * The above includes kitchen units, cupboards, work surfaces, sanitary ware and central heating radiators, storage and panel heaters.
3. * In the bath/shower area, tiles, seals and grouting will be clean and watertight
4. * Shower cubicle/shower curtain will be clean and in a good condition
5. * External lock-ups and attic spaces will be cleared out

Garden and Common Areas

1. Garden areas will be cleared of garden furniture and ornaments unless incoming tenants formally accept responsibility for such items
2. Sheds and decking in a satisfactory condition will remain in place
3. * Paths, steps, handrails, and ramps will be checked and repaired/re-secured as necessary
4. Gates, fencing, and clothes poles will be repaired/re-secured as necessary
5. * Garden will be cleared of any rubbish/abandoned household items
6. Fencing will be installed to box in the front garden
7. Overgrown trees/hedges/shrubs will be cut back or taken out as appropriate
8. Where the property is a long-term void, the garden area will receive basic garden maintenance to keep it in a reasonable condition

Consultation with Incoming Tenants

1. Where a kitchen replacement is required and a new tenant has been identified, we will consult with the incoming tenant to agree layout and style of units
2. Where we have agreed that outgoing tenants can leave floor coverings, cooker, and/or other goods in the property, we will offer them to the incoming tenants on the basis that they take ownership and repair/replacement/removal responsibility for them.
3. As above, incoming tenants will be offered any garden furniture and ornaments left in a good condition.

Once Property is Let

1. All gas systems will be up and running within 24 hours of the tenant confirming their electricity and gas suppliers, assuming access is available
2. Instructions for operating the heating system will be given to the tenant at the start of their tenancy
3. Where water supply has been drained down, water supply will be turned on within 24 hours, assuming access is available
4. Existing gas and electricity supplier information will be passed on to new tenant as soon as we have the information
5. For older properties, new tenants will be made aware that when stripping wallpaper they may come across plasterwork which needs renewed and that they should contact us to attend to the repair
6. If grass is overgrown, a one-off cut will be carried out for the incoming tenant