

Housing Services Standards; Repairs and Lettings

Overview and Scrutiny Panel	24 November 2022
Report Author	Sally O'Sullivan, TLS Manager
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Jill Bayford, Cabinet Member for Housing
Status	For Information
Classification:	Unrestricted
Key Decision	No
Ward:	All

Executive Summary:

This report invites members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to review 2 documents relating to the level of service provided for responsive repairs and property letting, ahead of seeking approval at Cabinet.

The draft documents are as follows:

- Repairs Standard
- Lettings Standard

Recommendation(s):

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel are asked to:

1. Note and scrutinise the following documents
 - Repairs Standard
 - Lettings Standard

Corporate Implications

Financial and Value for Money

The adoption of the following:

- Repairs Standard
- Lettings Standard

Will have a financial implication, these are:

Responsive repairs has an annual budget of £1,992,880. This is a revenue budget.

The budget will be affected by the amount of repairs requested and approved by resident and council officers and by annual CPI increases.

Our partnering contractors also provide a call centre service that receives calls/requests from our residents. This service must diagnose the repair, book an appropriate appointment and keep in contract with our residents until the repair has been completed. The level of service we ask for needs to be balanced with our budgetary allowances.

We have an annual budget of £600,000 to bring our void properties up to the required standard for reletting. We need to ensure the standard of our void properties meets our aspirations and remains within our budgetary allowances. Funding for works to ensure void properties are ready for reletting comes from our revenue and capital budgets, depending on the types of works required.

We need to be able to let properties efficiently to reduce the amount of time they are void. For every week a property is void, TDC is missing out on a rental payment. This loss of income is described as a 'void loss.'

Legal

As a social housing landlord, the council has a regulatory responsibility to ensure the following:

- Our homes meet the decent homes standard
- Our homes are compliant with landlord health and safety requirements
- Tenants have the opportunity to scrutinise and have their say on the services we provide.

Corporate

The council's agreed Corporate Statement includes a priority to improve the standards and safety in homes across all tenures.

Risk Management

The Regulator for Social Housings' Consumer Standards tell us we must have appropriate frameworks in place to maintain the standards of our homes.

We must ensure our properties are compliant with Landlord Health and Safety regulation and legislation.

The Repairs and Lettings Standards tell our officers and residents how we will achieve this and safeguard the HRA budget.

Equality Act 2010 & Public Sector Equality Duty

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to the aims of the Duty at the time the

decision is taken. The aims of the Duty are: (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) advance equality of opportunity people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and (iii) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

Protected characteristics: age, sex, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy & maternity. Only aim (i) of the Duty applies to Marriage & civil partnership.

This report relates to the following aim of the equality duty:

- *To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.*

The council's tenants and leaseholders include residents that have protected characteristics as set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty. Each of the new standards are subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA), attached to this report.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- *Communities*

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1. The council's Tenant and Leaseholder Service (TLS) provides tenancy management and maintenance services to tenants and leaseholders of Thanet District Council.
- 1.2. We wanted to develop and publish these documents, to show commitment and give direction, as to how we will deliver our responsive repair and lettings service.
- 1.3. We pledged to create a Repairs and Lettings Standard as part of our Service Improvement Plan that we announced in March 2021
- 1.4. The publishing of these documents will ensure we are compliant with regulatory standards and legal requirements.

2. Service Standards

- 2.1. Service Standards describe the level of service we aim to achieve in key areas of our work.
- 2.2. Service Standards guide our officers about the level of service they should be providing and also let residents know the level of service they should expect.
- 2.3. Service standards help us be compliant with regulatory standards as prescribed by the Regulator for Social Housing (RSH).

- 2.4. The Homes Standard is one of four Consumer Standards that RP's must comply with. This is the standard that gives us the direction by which to manage the quality of our homes. .
- 2.5. The standard specifies two areas to be addressed:
 - Quality of accommodation
 - Repairs and maintenance
- 2.6. The Our Repairs and Lettings Standard addresses points made by the standard and thus facilitates compliance with the regulations.

3. Resident involvement

- 3.1. We had to find different ways to consult with residents in the development of these documents, as much of the standards are either prescribed in regulation (decent homes standard and health and safety legislation) or by contract (the service level delivered by Mears and Gas Call is contractually agreed).
- 3.2. The Thanet Tenants and Leaseholders Group (TTLG) were consulted on the Mears Customer Pledge. The pledge sets out standards of behaviour for the operatives and call centre staff. As a result of the feedback from the TTLG, further training was put in place for the call centre staff. Expectation on personnel conduct is also part of the Repairs Standard.
- 3.3. To obtain feedback in regards to a tenant's experience of moving into their new home, we surveyed all residents who had moved in within the last six months. The feedback told us that the lettings experience is generally a positive one for our new tenants, but we could improve the quality of information that we hand out.
- 3.4. The Letting Standard mentions the documents that new tenants can expect to receive. Following this feedback we reviewed all documents and are developing a new tenant handbook
- 3.5. The TTLG were consulted on the draft Standards at their meeting on 29 June 2022. The group welcomed the standards and made no recommendations on further revisions.
- 3.6. TLS officers have had the opportunity to review and feed into this strategy, and the final draft standards are attached at annexes 1 and 2.
- 3.7. These standards were also presented to the council's Housing Cabinet Advisory Group on 14 October 2022

4. Next Steps

- 4.1. Following scrutiny by OSP, we will take these documents to Cabinet to ask that they are approved for adoption.

Contact Officer: Sally O'Sullivan, (Tenant and Leaseholder Services Manager)
Reporting to: Bob Porter (Acting Corporate Director of Place)

Annex List

Annex 1 Repairs Standard
Annex 2 Lettings Standard

Background Papers

None

Corporate Consultation

Finance: Chris Blundell (Director of Finance)

Legal: Sameera Khan (Interim Head of Legal & Monitoring Officer)