

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Tenant Services Management Board – 15th July 2013

Tenants' Forum: Recommendations, proposals and discussion points arising from the inspection of void properties by tenant inspectors

Report of Tenants' Forum presented by Malcolm Andrews – Tenants' Forum Chairperson and Stephen Boland Housing Services

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Jean Adkins)

1. Executive Summary

This joint report sets out a number of recommendations, proposals and discussion points raised by members of the Tenants' Forum whose members (Tenant Inspectors) have been inspecting the quality of void properties since March 2012. Housing Services officers have considered all that has been put forward and the comments of officers are included with this report.

The views of Tenant Services Management Board members are sought.

2. Introduction

Tenant inspectors are Tenants' Forum volunteers who help with monitoring the quality of Housing Services' void properties. The inspectors collect data when visiting void properties and provide a written report to Housing Services, report on how well the service is doing and make recommendations on how to improve the service.

Tenants' Forum volunteers began their work in March 2012.

There are currently 5 teams of inspectors and approximately 4 properties are selected for inspection each month.

To date many properties have been inspected. It is the reports from these inspections that have been considered together to form the basis on which all recommendations, proposals, and discussion points in this report are proposed.

3. Key Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on reoccurring issues arising from inspections undertaken by Tenants' Forum tenant inspectors.

A. Tenant inspector recommendation:

All void properties should be completed to 'official lettable standard' (see Appendix A)
– This does not appear to be the case at present.

Officer comment:

Officers affirm that all TDBC housing properties are let to, at least, maintain our lettable standard.

Further work will be undertaken by officers, by reviewing tenant inspector reports, to look into this matter.

B. Tenant inspector recommendation:

All gas and electrical meters to be fitted at 'correct specified heights'.

Officer comment:

The housing service acknowledges the problem of some tenants not being able to easily access their gas or electric meters. The gas and electrical meters are not the property of Housing Services and it would be costly to move meters when it is not currently a priority for investment.

Easy access to meters will be a feature in any new build or major refurbishment works to a property. Property services officers will also investigate new technology that may be available to enable readings to be made remotely.

C. Tenant inspector recommendation:

All electric sockets to be supplied and fitted at a height approximately three feet up from the floor.

Officer comment:

Achieving this would be more practical on any new build or major refurbishment works to a property but not in relation to void properties because of the extent and cost of the works involved. In doing so an assessment would need to be undertaken to ensure investment is targeted to where the greatest need is.

Furthermore, Housing Services is going to undertake a physical refresh of its sheltered housing stock and will consider this recommendation as part of that work.

D. Tenant inspector recommendation:

Minimum of 3 double electric sockets fitted per room; Minimum of 8 electric sockets per kitchen.

Officer comment:

The costs of such works would need to be further considered and could be supplied and fitted as a matter of routine on any void property schedule or as part of any future electrical refurbishment contract or new build.

Consideration needs to be given to the size of any bedroom, for example, a bedroom would need to be large enough to accommodate 3 accessible double sockets.

Single sockets could be enhanced to doubles as a matter of routine, subject to available budget.

Note: The whole issue of a TDBC Housing Services home standard needs to be given more thought.

E. Tenant inspector recommendation:

A full set of window security locks and keys to be provided.

Officer comment:

Officers are in agreement with above.

F. Tenant inspector recommendation:

None of the main entrance door keys to the property should be left lying around in property/in kitchen drawers. All such keys need to be kept securely by officers until they are all handed over to new a tenant.

Officer comment:

Officers are in agreement with above.

G. Tenant inspector recommendation:

If a future tenant moves into a property prior to all remedial works being completed they shall be provided with a written statement from the Estates Officer detailing the works still to be completed along with timescale.

Officer comment:

Officers are in agreement with above.

H. Tenant inspector recommendation:

The boiler and central heating instruction booklets must be available and accessible at the property.

Officer comment:

Instructions and information in respect of boilers and central heating is currently made available to all new tenants and contained within the 'Welcome Pack for New Tenants' documentation.

4. Key Proposals

The following proposals are suggested by the Tenants' Forum as financial considerations.

A. Tenant Inspector proposal:

Throughout a property all floor coverings left by previous tenant/s to be removed and floors made good. However, if a TDBC Surveyor states that carpets are to be left, then no decorating is to be carried out and decorating pack(s) to be supplied.

Note: Tenants' Forum state that Housing Services should be making more frequent use of decorating packs. The issuing of decoration packs should be the norm, except in circumstances where property is to be let to, for example to elderly person/s or disabled person/s.

Officer comment:

Officers recognise the budget savings that could be achieved by issuing more decorating packs.

B. Tenant Inspector proposal:

Ensure all flats have a storage area to provide for the recycling of household waste. Too many stairwells and walkways are obstructed.

Officer comment:

Taunton Deane Borough Council's secure tenancy agreement states the following:

"Your use of council property and communal areas."

5.2 You will undertake to keep the communal hall, staircases, landings, lifts, passageways and surrounding areas serving your dwelling in a clean and tidy condition and free from obstruction. These areas must not be used in such a manner as to cause nuisance or annoyance to other residents".

Housing Estates Officers will continue to work with tenants to ensure they follow the tenancy conditions they agreed to by signing a tenancy agreement to become a Taunton Deane Borough Council tenant.

Our Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2012 – 2042 makes provision for £4.5m over 30 years for environmental improvements to fund works outside the home including improved recycling provision for our blocks of flats where possible.

C. Tenant inspector proposal:

Where required, gardens to be given one grass cut and tidy up and the 'incoming tenant' to be made aware of their responsibility for future upkeep. Ideally any works to gardens need to be undertaken a maximum of a 1 week before occupancy occurs.

Officer comment:

Taunton Deane Borough Council's secure tenancy agreement states the following:

"Your use of council property and communal area

5.1 You must ensure that your garden is kept tidy, by regularly cutting the grass, hedges and shrubs. You will not allow litter or rubbish to accumulate, or domestic animals to create a nuisance through noise or fouling".

Officers understand that what is being proposed is for an initial cut and tidy up where an out going tenant/s has not maintained their garden. Officers also recognise that undertaking such works as part of a void works schedule would ensure any 'incoming tenant' would see what the basic standard of garden maintenance looked like.

5. Key discussion points for an improved tenant inspection process

The following discussion points are representative of the views of all the tenant inspectors and highlight what have observed to be re-occurring issues and matters.

A. Tenant inspector discussion point:

Tenant inspectors need a minimum of one hour for each inspection.

Officer comment:

Officers are in agreement with above.

B. Tenant inspector discussion point:

Tenant inspectors require a copy of the surveyors report for each void property that is to be inspected.

Officer comment:

Officers are in agreement with the above.

C. Tenant inspector discussion point:

Tenant inspectors to have control in carrying out their individual void property inspection.

Officer comment:

Officers are in agreement with the above.

D. Tenant inspector discussion point:

All sheltered housing properties that become void are to be decorated throughout where, following a surveyor's inspection, it is deemed necessary.

Officer comment:

Officers are in agreement with the above.

6. Recommendations

It is recommended the Tenant Services Management Board:

- Receive and note this report; and comment on the Tenants' Forum recommendations, proposals and discussion points.

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If you believe the property being offered fails to meet the standards listed or you wish to make a suggestion, please let your Estate Officer know during the "Post Tenancy visit" or contact 01823 356334



If you require further information please contact:

Rent, Recovery & Void Department

Taunton Deane Borough Council,
The Deane House, Belvedere Road,
Taunton, TA1 1HE
Tel: 01823 356334

Email: rents@tauntondeane.gov.uk
www.tauntondeane.gov.uk

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Bengali

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Chinese

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Hindi

अगर आप इस दस्तावेज़ में प्रस्तुत किसी भी जानकारी का अनुवाद दूसरी भाषाओं या ब्रेल, बड़े अक्षरों वाली छपाई, ऑडियो टेप, या सीडी में चाहते हैं, तो कृपया हमें इस नंबर पर फोन कीजिये 01823 356334 या यहाँ ईमेल कीजिये rents@tauntondeane.gov.uk

Portuguese

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Polish

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Lettable Standard

Introduction

This Lettable Standard sets out Taunton Deane Borough Council's minimum standard which a property will meet before it is re-let. It will help ensure consistent quality of each property offered for re-let. We will ensure all new incoming or transferring tenants are made aware of this standard.





General

Before you move into the property we will:

- Ensure the property is safe and secure.
- Ensure the whole property is clear of rubbish, including cupboards, attics, outbuildings and gardens.
- Check the gas and electricity supplies to the property are safe and if necessary we will carry out repairs.
- Service heating systems and appliances and leave them in good working order subject to a live gas supply being available, or one supply established.
- Please note, during winter months we may drain down wet heating systems and water supplies to prevent any burst pipes occurring.
- Test and inspect smoke alarms. If you do not have one installed in your home we will fit a mains connected smoke detector.
- Repair any broken window/s, where necessary. We will ensure the windows are in good working order.
- Ensure that floors are in a reasonable condition.

- Repair obviously damaged plaster on walls and ceilings.
- De-infest properties of insects or vermin, if applicable.
- Repair or replace any dangerous gutters or down pipes
- Remove any dangerous structures (such as old garages, outbuildings, greenhouses, sheds or ponds)
- Cut back overgrown gardens and clear of any rubbish. If the weather is bad we may have to do this after you have moved in.
- Replace damaged bathroom fittings, including missing plugs or chains.

If we have to make minor repairs after you have moved in we will:

- Where possible tell you about the work when you view the property
- Make sure the repair work does not affect your safety.



The internal decorations are the responsibility of the tenant. We will however, check the condition of decoration and if we consider it very poor, we may issue decorating vouchers.

If the property is within a sheltered accommodation unit we may carry out partial or full decoration of the property.

As a minimum each property will have

- Gas or electric heating in the main living room.
- Electric or gas cooker points
- A stopcock in a serviceable condition.
- Safe handrails to all staircases.
- A bathroom with a bath or shower, basin and toilet (or separate toilet). There will be a hot and cold water supply.
- A kitchen sink with a hot and cold water supply. We will provide sufficient food storage and preparation areas.
- Sanitary ware and fittings that are sound and flush correctly.
- Seat and flap covers for each toilet in the property.
- Any external toilet (if applicable) will be serviceable.
- An Energy Performance Certificate which gives information on the energy efficiency rating for the property.
- Useful information regarding your new home.