

NOTTINGHAM CITY HOMES

HOUSING MANAGEMENT SERVICES
COMMITTEE
17 FEBRUARY 2010

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF HOUSING SERVICES

UPDATE ON VOIDS AND FORWARD PLAN

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report details the current progress that is being made in the re-letting of void properties, forward planning for the section and targets for the forthcoming year.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Housing Management Services Committee note and comment upon the report.

3 REPORT

- 3.1 The current lettable voids total as at week commencing 8 February 2010 stands at 319. This is the lowest amount of lettable voids since the inception of NCH in 2005.
- 3.2 There have been recent changes in the management team, with additional resources from within the Company being charged with improving performance of the section.
- 3.3 When the new management team were installed at Harvey Road in mid November 2009, the total voids stood at 438. This was a significantly high amount and considerably off the final (financial) year end target of 300 lettable properties.
- 3.4 At the end of Quarter 3 (December 09), the average re-let time was 38.5 days. This represents an improvement of 10 days compared to 08/09 year, and this now places NCH out of the lower quartile position, and into the median quartile. The current target at year end is 35 days average re-let time.
- 3.5 Weekly meetings have taken place with the Chief Executive, relevant Directors (Assist), and Head of Service to ensure performance improves as the reduction in voids is a Company priority.
- 3.6 There are also 522 non-lettable void properties which include properties that are no longer being re-let due to their condition, desirability etc., and

the status of each of these is currently being reviewed, for example those properties, which are subject to regeneration projects. Included in this category would be corporate properties (non traditional Council built properties), and a proposal is being put to the Council to sell a number of these each year to increase capital receipts so that void repairs and major works on other properties can proceed.

4 REASONS FOR THE CHANGE IN PERFORMANCE

4.1 There have been several factors which have contributed to the improved performance of the section, these include the following:-

- New working practices
- Closer working relations
- New management input
- New performance management mechanisms
- Fast tracking of minor works

5 HOW WILL PERFORMANCE BE MAINTAINED

5.1 There are regular weekly meeting held with relevant team managers, Heads of Service and Assistant Directors.

5.2 These meetings seek to plan for external factors (e.g. letting of corporate properties, increased numbers of evictions, etc) and ensure that systems are in place to cope with increased void property numbers and respond accordingly.

5.3 Targeted advertising by the HomeLink Team that seeks to generate interest in properties that have presently a low demand.

5.4 Devising an “Action Plan” specifically for increasing the letting of sheltered properties. There are currently 99 sheltered properties that are ready to let, 83 are properties that are available immediately with little or no interest from applicants on the housing register. The intended action plan will seek to reduce this figure by considering initiatives such as:

- Devising targeted marketing campaigns to promote lettings
- Working with Partner agencies
- Incentivising tenant movement
- Modernisation of stock
- Housing Register criteria changes

The implementation of any actions suggested in the plan would, however, be subject to approval by both NCH Board and NCC.

5.5 Most of the housing stock that is designated as being “general purpose” will be let to applicants on the register. Currently there are approximately 11,000 applicants on the housing register wanting General Purpose type accommodation. However, to ensure that demand remains high, the

following process will need to be maintained:

- Regular reviews of the Housing Register

6 WILL PERFORMANCE BE IMPROVED/FORWARD PLANNING

- 6.1 By setting realistic yet rigorous targets, and monitoring performance as well as developing new strategies, it is felt that performance can be maintained and improved further.
- 6.2 Contact has been made with other ALMO's in the country, as well as other organisations in the region – most of who have expressed that they are experiencing difficulty with letting sheltered scheme voids. The organisations that are not experiencing such problems are those that have previously undergone a programme of re-classification of such schemes.
- 6.3 In 2008/09 the Average Re-let Time (ART) for all void properties was 49 days. This is currently (Dec 09) running at 38.5 days.
- 6.4 Performance improves significantly to 31 days when sheltered and long term properties are excluded. In Quarter 3 (ending Dec 2009), 2038 voids were re-let, 206 of which were long term and sheltered voids. The average turn around time for sheltered and long term voids was 105 days. The remaining 1832 voids (approximately 90%) were re-let at an average of 31 days each. The set target for ART is 35 days by year end.

It must be stated also, that NCH must not neglect either its customer care or quality in the standard of properties we let whilst ensuring that performance is being improved. Tenant Inspectors will help NCH to monitor, maintain and improve the standard of properties we let to our customers. Recent data obtained through the Vision Management System informs us that:

- There has been an improvement in the level of 'New tenants satisfied with the overall service', when compared to 12 months previous.

There has been a slight deterioration in the number of 'New tenants satisfied with the condition of their new home', when compared to 12 months previous.

- 6.5 Although difficult to predict, having regard to historical trends, (see Appendix 1), it is felt that a reasonable target for total ready to let voids for end of 2010/11 would be 230. This would represent a significant improvement of this year's total, however, a word of caution is that some significant decisions would need to be undertaken as detailed in the "Sheltered Action Plan", or the realistic target amount may be closer to 250.
- 6.6 New processes have been developed that will also help in comparing the performance of NCH by addressing some of the issues to reduce the

number of refusals.

Some of the initiatives that NCH have implemented or are in the process of implementing include:

- Interviewing applicants who have made 2 or more refusals of properties
- Increased Housing Advisor support at application stage to clarify applicant choices.
- Improved information to applicants – Website improved with greater information on property profiles and local area profiles.
- Greater information of area amenities to promote and better inform applicants on their chosen areas.
- Obtaining multiple “expressions of interest” on a vacant property.
- Revision of draft Allocations Policy – refusals made after 2 could result in an application being placed “on hold” until the application has undergone an in-depth interview to fully assess their requirements.

6.7 This would place NCH in a very good position to become a top quartile performer by 2012.

7 IMPLICATIONS FOR NOTTINGHAM CITY HOMES OBJECTIVES

7.1 The re-letting of void properties is a key priority of the Company.

8 VALUE FOR MONEY AND EFFICIENCY ISSUES

8.1 The rent loss from properties being vacant, does impact on Company finances.

9 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no direct implications associated with the content of this report.

10 BACKGROUND MATERIAL AND PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

10.1 None.

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Date: 9 February 2010