

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION

Date and Time :- Tuesday 19 March 2024 at 1.30 p.m.

Venue:- Town Hall, Moorgate Street, Rotherham.

Membership:- Councillors Wyatt (Chair), Tinsley (Vice-Chair), Andrews, Atkin, Aveyard, Barley, Bennett-Sylvester, C Carter, Castledine-Dack, T Collingham, Cowen, Ellis, Havard, Khan, McNeely, Reynolds, Taylor.

Co-opted Members:- Mrs. K. Bacon, Mrs. M. Jacques.

This meeting will be webcast live and will be available to view [via the Council's website](#). The items which will be discussed are described on the agenda below and there are reports attached which give more details.

Rotherham Council advocates openness and transparency as part of its democratic processes. Anyone wishing to record (film or audio) the public parts of the meeting should inform the Chair or Governance Advisor of their intentions prior to the meeting.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

To receive the apologies of any Member who is unable to attend the meeting.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 February 2024 (Pages 3 - 11)

To consider and approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 6 February 2024 as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive declarations of interest from Members in respect of items listed on the agenda.

4. Questions from members of the public and the press

To receive questions relating to items of business on the agenda from members of the public or press who are present at the meeting.

5. Exclusion of the Press and Public

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any part of the agenda.

6. Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review - Voids Lettable Standard (Pages 13 - 91)

To consider the report which provides Improving Places Select Commission with a summary of the findings of the review and the Council's response to each of the actions included in the Tenants Scrutiny Review Action Plan.

7. Update: Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review - Improving Communication with Tenants (Pages 93 - 126)

To consider the report and the accompanying presentation which provides an overall summary of progress made in response to the recommendations and the associated action plan.

8. Scrutiny Review Recommendations – Nature Recovery (Pages 127 - 144)

To note the report from the Head of Democratic Services outlining the findings and recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Nature Recovery undertaken by Members from Improving Places Select Commission which was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 13 March 2024.

9. Improving Places Select Commission - Work Programme 2023-2024 (Pages 145 - 146)

To consider and endorse the outline schedule of scrutiny work for the 2023/24 municipal year.

10. Urgent Business

To consider any item which the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.

11. Date and time of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on Tuesday 4 June 2024 commencing at 1:30pm in Rotherham Town Hall.



SHARON KEMP,
Chief Executive.

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 6 February 2024

Present:- Councillor Tinsley (in the Chair); Councillors Andrews, Aveyard, Castledine-Dack, Cowen, Ellis, Havard, Jones, McNeely and Mrs. M. Jacques (Co-optee).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors, Bennett-Sylvester, C Carter, and Wyatt along with Mrs. Kay Bacon (Co-optee).

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

48. COMMUNICATIONS

There were none.

49. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 12 DECEMBER 2023

Resolved: That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 December 2023 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest to report.

51. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

The Chair advised that three questions had been submitted to the meeting. These would be responded to in writing.

52. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that there were no items of business on the agenda that would require the exclusion of the press or public from the meeting.

53. IPSC ROTHERHAM MARKETS & LIBRARY REDEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Chair welcomed Councillor Sheppard, Simon Moss, Assistant Director, Planning, Regeneration and Transport, and Tim O'Connell, Service Manager to the meeting and invited Simon Moss to provide the update.

The Assistant Director, Planning, Regeneration and Transport noted that the Improving Places Select Commission had held a spotlight review of Rotherham Markets which was carried out in 2022 with further reports being submitted to Cabinet in December 2022 and February 2023. The

spotlight review was a really positive process and the service had taken on board the recommendations which had heavily influenced the approach the project had taken.

The report provided an update and detailed how the service had responded to each of the recommendations. He highlighted that they had prioritised face to face engagement with tenants and market traders. They had reinstated the voice meetings and had prioritised retaining market traders, prioritising their needs for the duration of the construction phase. The recommendations had influenced the design plans in terms of accessibility, usability and attractiveness, particularly to young people. He noted that some of the actions were still ongoing, in terms of working with the college to actively involve students in the new markets to continue to develop and modernise the markets offer.

Recommendation 1A was around face-to-face consultations and prioritising interactions with traders. In response to this the face-to-face one-on-one contact with market traders had taken place at least every two to three months. The voice meetings had been relaunched, which were in-person meetings and the market traders attended those. Those meetings had been really good to maintain that ongoing dialogue as the projects were being developed. There was a tailored markets consultation and engagement plan in place which was managed by the RiDO team.

A number of consultation workshop sessions were held in February 2023 to update traders on plans along with a series of individual meetings with market traders to provide an opportunity to discuss their requirements, particularly around the relocation aspect, during the temporary arrangements. A further round of trader engagements was planned, and these would be ongoing as the build process progressed.

Recommendation 1B was around consulting case studies and liaising with the market traders' associations such as National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) and National Market Traders Federation (NMTF), which was really useful. The Council did consult with those organisations which informed the proposals in a number of ways. The most striking of which was that NABMA raised previous case studies where there were issues arising from similar market projects where issues arose from keeping market traders in situ whilst works were carried out. During the consultation with traders, they had been really keen to stay on site however that consultation heavily informed the approach to phasing where a new temporary market had been created in the outdoor covered market, so striking a balance of retaining traders in situ whilst trying to minimise the disruption. He noted that a number of visits to other markets, Barnsley was a relevant one which gave close comparisons, explaining that the Council was working with Henry Boot Construction Ltd who had delivered the Barnsley project.

Recommendation 1C which was around re-evaluating the support offer for

new vendors. All new traders were now offered an initial meeting and follow up sessions with follow up sessions with RiDO Business Support Advisors which complemented a support package of 50% rent concessions across the Markets portfolio which extended the financial support offer to assist new traders to establish a viable business beyond the six-month introductory period.

Recommendation 1D was around retaining traders through the redevelopment phase which was considered a top priority as without the traders there wouldn't be a market. This had been a key consideration through the planning and design period. He reiterated that the approach was fundamentally altered to accommodate a temporary market option rather than works being undertaken directly in and around traders in the current positions. This change in approach was presented to market traders in the sessions referred to in recommendation 1A and were generally well received and supported by the traders. The report also referred to the rent concessions which was key to mitigating and recognising the impact on the trading position along with mitigating the impacts during construction.

He referenced the relocation of the outdoor covered market which had now moved out onto the street. There was an ongoing marketing campaign to address the indoor covered market and the footfall in the indoor covered market was being monitored since the relocation of the outdoor covered market to the street.

Recommendation 1E was around the redesign of the market space, in terms of optimising space for inclusivity and accessibility and making them attractive to students and young people. Accessibility was key and was a fundamental design aspect that was considered early in the process. He explained that the brief for the project had a focus on accessibility of entrances to the complex along with movement and usability throughout the complex itself. A lot of detail had been captured in the equality analysis which was presented to Cabinet in December. Rotherham College and young people are highlighted as key stakeholders within the market consultation strategy, which had influenced the design in terms of the proposed area of the market gardens and was designed to invited college student and pedestrians into that market area. The food hub was also key and was again designed to encourage more students and young people to use the complex.

He noted that although the report focused primarily on the markets, it was a markets and libraries redevelopment and the co-location with libraries was fundamental to that approach.

Recommendation 1F was around catering to the needs and interests of the younger generation and references discussions with the college around ideas such as a young trader's scheme. This had influenced the design of the project in terms of opening up the view and access from the college and a potential presence in the food court. These discussions

were ongoing.

Recommendation G was around recognising the markets as a unique and distinct community of buyers and sellers and there was a management resource required to sustain that successfully over the longer term.

He spoke about the success of the Tuesday street market and building on that success to build ideas of how the new spaces could be used for things like farmers markets etc. The design will enable some of that to happen with new equipment and improved electrical supply.

Recommendation H was around modernising the markets with such things as incorporating cashless approaches, linking it to the Council's digital programme. Cashless rental collections had been introduced for traders and an increasing number of indoor traders were paying by direct debit and improved IT network allowed the opportunity to take that further.

The Chair welcomed the update noting there had been a lot of consultation carried out with market traders along with offers of support to retain them.

The Commission noted the recommendations had been approved but the majority were listed as ongoing. It was asked when they would be completed. Clarification was also sought that both cash and cashless options would be available. It was explained that in terms of the way payments were taken from traders, this was a commercial transaction, and the Council was encouraging that to be done digitally however in terms of the customer offer, it was around enabling customers to be able to use multiple payment methods.

There was a batch of recommendations that fed into how the Council planned for the project, design aspect had been completed. How the markets would be used and when they opened were ongoing discussions. The project was due for completion at the back end of 2026. The focus of the project was on the build currently and there was time to develop aspects such as a young traders programme before the project closure.

Concerns were raised regarding the corporate communications plan as it was felt that changes needed to be updated and communicated across all platforms, in particular regarding the closure of access ways. There had been no social media update regarding the Drummond Steet access. It was believed that a number of traders were looking business as part of the redevelopment process. Some access ways had been closed earlier than scheduled. The challenge of managing this during this phase of the construction was noted and it was understood that signage needed to be clear. It was clarified that regular meetings were held with traders and the Council had used media as a communication tool around changes taking place. There was an element of disruption, and it was important that it was recognised, and plans undertaken to address any potential issues.

In response it was explained that bringing in new traders to the market during this time would be difficult and noted that if they joined now, they may not have the best experience. There was a need to retain as many traders as possible and look to bring new traders in over time.

Resolved: That the progress of the Rotherham Markets & Library redevelopment was noted and the update to the Scrutiny Review Recommendations – Markets: Engagement and Recovery provided in Appendix 1, was considered.

54. SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATION UPDATE

The Chair welcomed James Clark, Assistant Director of Housing to the meeting to present a report which summarised the changes to social housing and provided an update of the Housing Services preparedness activities.

The Assistant Director of Housing noted that the report summarised a number of changes that were happening to the way that social housing, including Rotherham's 20,000 council properties, were regulated. The changes largely stem from the Grenfell Tower fire and subsequent public inquiry but all other high-profile event including the death of Awaab Ishak a few years ago from damp and mould. Those changes amounted to a significant reform to the way that social housing was regulated in England.

He clarified the scope explaining it applied to the landlord services within the Council, so didn't apply to what's known as the Council's strategic housing function, so homelessness for example and private rented sector enforcement and licensing, and some of the Council's new build activity was not covered by the new regulatory framework. It was about how the Council managed the properties that it owned, so relating to the Council as a landlord.

To provide further context housing was already regulated but this was largely a passive regulator at this stage so rarely were landlords investigated and even more rarely was there a regulatory judgement issued due to the thresholds that had to be met in order to trigger it. All of that was being replaced with a proactive inspection regime which would feel similar to the way that schools or social services were regulated in other parts of the Council.

There would be a new set of twenty-two tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs). Roughly half of the measures would be performance statistics that the Council would generate as a landlord with the remainder being information gathered through surveying tenants. There was a defined list of questions that the regulator had published, and the Council had to collect that information by surveying its tenants and share the information with the regulator and published by June. That work was currently underway in the borough.

The Council had communicated with Members on the changes and communicated with tenants via Home Matters. Many tenants had received a call from the market research company being used and that would generate results that would enable the Council, tenants, and the regulator to compare its performance in the views of the tenants against other landlords across the country in a fair and transparent way.

A new consumer regulatory framework was another change. He explained that the regulator of social housing closed its consultation in October 2023 on the proposed new standards and it was expected that they would be finalised imminently and would be in force from 1 April 2024. The standards were broadly similar to the standards already in existence but there was more emphasis on tenant engagement and empowerment regarding the ability of tenants to hold their landlords to account. As mentioned, there were stronger levers for the regulators to intervene if they felt regulations were not being complied with.

There would be a new inspection regime, with the regulator indicating they intended to inspect large landlords, by which they meant more than 1,000 homes, roughly every four years but would be more often if there were issues. He expected the inspections would be similar to those other areas were given and the Council would be given a number of weeks' notice along with being asked to provide lots of evidence. The inspection team would then attend, talk with the Council, staff, members, tenants, and partners and would make an assessment and would give a grading. In terms of sanctions, the changes would mean that the Council or any landlord could be issued with an unlimited fine, if the regulator felt there had been serious detriment to tenants.

Also, in future if tenants are not satisfied with the way the Council had dealt with a complaint they could go straight to the ombudsman. The ombudsman would also be sharing information with the regulator, so the regulator would begin to build a much stronger picture based on the TSMs from inspections and on intelligence from complaints about how landlords were doing. The regulator would use all of that information to determine when and how they inspect and what their key lines of enquiry would be.

There would be a new requirement under the new framework for all housing managers to have a professional qualification. Work was being undertaken to understand the scope of that and how it could be met.

The recent publication and consultation on what was known as 'Awaab's Law' was not available in full at the time of the meeting so the report only references it. It was a really important change that would introduce statutory timescales for landlords to respond to repairs where they constituted health and safety hazards, so damp and mould was the obvious example but there was a list of twenty-eight or twenty-nine different hazards that would be in scope. The speed at which you had to respond would be determined by the type of hazard and the amount of risk and could range from twenty-four hours to a number of weeks.

The regulator had given some assurance that Councils would not be inspected during local election cycles as they realised that would be challenging. No intelligence was available at this time as to when Rotherham may be inspected. The main change was that the Council was going to have to report into a proactive regulator. A lot of the work being done was around evidence gathering and being ready to meet with the regulator. The new framework did have more emphasis on sharing information with tenants and giving tenants an opportunity to hold the Council to account. The Council was considering with tenants how it could strengthen some of those mechanisms, how it could strengthen its scrutiny and its involvement mechanisms. The Council was looking at what performance information could be shared with tenants and members and was strengthening some of its central services, such a compliance assurance, IT and digital business improvements.

The HRA business plan noted the Council had earmarked significant funding for 100% stock condition surveys, which would be the first time the Council had done that, and it would enhance the Councils understanding of the quality of its stock and its future investment priorities.

In response to a query, he acknowledged that the rate at which the Council was conducting surveys with tenants was not fast enough in Rotherham. The current expectation was to do a survey every five years and the Council was not achieving that. The planned investment would enable the Council to catch up so he anticipated that over the course of two to three years the Council would get round to all of its properties.

A query was raised regarding the regulatory fees, the report mentioned they were around £7-£8 per unit, was that on an annual basis? The Assistant Director of Housing explained the exact fee level was being consulted on but clarified it was annual and housing associated paid those fees now, but local authorities did not. In future, local authorities would have to pay fees if they had more than 1,000 homes. He clarified that the Council had earmarked some of the budget to pay those fees although the exact amount was not yet known.

It was queried if the Council had considered if Rotherfed, who were representatives of tenants could do the market research or was it assumed there would be a conflict, and would it be something that Rotherfed could look to do in the future? The Assistant Director of Housing indicated he couldn't comment on behalf of Rotherfed but from the Councils point of view there would be a conflict but the main reason the Council did not go to them was that it was a very specialist function, and a lot of people would be needed to carry out the surveys.

It was noted that inspections would be introduced for social landlords with more than a thousand properties and queried how many landlords were there in Rotherham excluding the Council have that had more than a thousand properties? The Assistant Director of Housing explained that if

a landlord had a thousand properties nationally then they would be inspected. Most of the housing association landlords that members would be familiar with in the borough that had general needs stock would have more than a thousand properties. A list of those organisations could be provided if requested.

In response to a query the Assistant Director of Housing explained that in terms of the consultation the company would take a representative sample of tenants and the information gained would start a wider conversation. It may reveal some strengths but may reveal areas for improvement that provided the Council with a view on where further engagement was needed. He provided assurance that there were lots of mechanisms to enable tenants engage with the Council. He believed that there would be a specific standard in relation to the speediness of repairs for tenants and 'Awaab's Law' could attach statutory timescales to some repairs.

It was acknowledged that it was important to try to reach all tenants as not everyone could travel to Council buildings to be involved in consultation events therefore some should be held in the locality.

It was noted that a lot of sanctions would be available for the inspectorate to choose from, such as they could look to stop local authorities applying for government grants, they could also look to intervene and get a repair completed and recharge the landlord for costs if they felt that was the right outcome.

In response to a query, he noted that the Council different to housing associations as the Council also had homelessness duties and the need to build more homes due to the size of the waiting list and it could not afford to stop investing in those functions. Some housing associations for example could stop building if they wanted to focus on managing their stock. The regulator would need to understand the additional requirements placed on Council and take that into account when considering possible sanctions.

The Assistant Director of Housing said he was really proud the Council had been able to introduce tenancy health checks and would aim to do them every four years.

It was noted that it would be a challenge to ensure the borough was ready for the new standards from April when the expectations had not yet been clarified by Government.

The Assistant Director of Housing provided assurance that the rents were set in line with the Rent Standard, which was a deadlocked government function and not a regulator of social housing function. There was no provision in the new framework, that he was aware of, for the regulator to increase rents.

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Resolved: That the Improving Places Select Commission:

1. Note the content of the report.
2. Requested that further information on the impact of 'Awaab's Law' be provided once available.
3. Requested that a full list of the larger landlords who had stock within the borough of more than 1,000 properties nationally be provided.
4. Requested information on the methods available on how tenants can engage with the Council outside of the meeting.

55. IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION - WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024

Consideration was given to the Work Programme circulated with the agenda. The Chair noted officers from the green spaces team had contacted the Commission to advise that no further changes to the Allotments annual update item schedule for the March meeting therefore they were seeking approval to defer this item to a future meeting.

Resolved: That the Improving Places Select Commission:

1. Received and noted the contents of the Work Programme.
2. Agreed to defer the Allotments Annual Update item to a future meeting.

56. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Commission's consideration.

57. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved: That the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on Tuesday 19 March 2024 commencing at 1:30pm.

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Public Report
Improving Places Select Commission

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 19 March 2024

Report Title

Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review – Voids Lettable Standard

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

Report Author(s)

Dean Borrill, Partnering Manager, Housing Property Services, Adult Care, Housing and Public Health, 01709 255771

Ward(s) Affected.

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel is a key component of the Council's Tenant Engagement Framework, enabling tenants to scrutinise landlord services and standards with the aim of improving performance, value for money and tenant satisfaction.

The Panel is facilitated by Rotherfed on behalf of the Council and consists of tenant and resident representatives from across the Borough.

The Panel has completed a review of the Council's Voids Lettable Standard. The report details the Panel's findings as attached at Appendix 1.

Following completion of the Tenant Scrutiny Review, the report and recommendations were discussed with the Housing Service and other relevant Council services and an action plan was developed in response to each of the recommendations.

This report provides Improving Places Select Commission with a summary of the findings of the review and the Council's response to each of the actions.

Recommendations

1. That Improving Places Select Commission notes the outcome of the Tenant Scrutiny Review, the actions proposed to deal with each recommendation and progress made to date.
2. That a further report detailing progress is presented to Improving Places Select Commission in 12 months.

List of Appendices Included

- **Appendix 1** Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review - Investigation into whether the lettable standard used by Rotherham Council during the voids process is suitable and meets tenant expectation.
- **Appendix 2** Tenants Scrutiny Review Action Plan.

Background Papers

None.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None.

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review – Voids Lettable Standard

1. Background

1.1 Tenant Scrutiny Panel reviews have provided an ongoing opportunity for tenants to work pro-actively with the Council, to look at various aspects of landlord service delivery, from a customer perspective and to develop recommendations and actions for service improvement.

1.2 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel identified that the voids process was an area where some improvements could be made following discussions with officers and tenants. Further discussion revealed that this was a large topic area, and that the investigation should be split into three separate sections.

1. Lettable standard
2. New tenant support and suitability
3. Downsizing

It was agreed that this investigation would focus on the lettable standard, with further work planned for the other two parts of the voids process in future.

1.3 The lettable standards set out the criteria a property must meet when a new tenant moves in, in relation to safety, repairs, and cleanliness. The standard was last reviewed by officers in 2019 when the new contracts were being procured for the repairs and maintenance service.

1.4 The Scrutiny Panel review consisted of the following:

- Review the lettable standard for Rotherham Council homes.
- Review the communications around the lettable standard both with contract partners and with tenants.
- Review the process and communications around tenants ending their tenancies.
- Consider the views of Rotherham Council tenants and their expectations for the standards in their new homes.
- Benchmark against other housing providers in relation to their lettable standards and communications with tenants
- Review the Social Housing White Paper and the impact that the lettable standard could have on compliance with these requirements.

1.5 During the review, six of the panel members undertook visits to void properties to look at the before and after conditions i.e. prior to works commencing and after completion of voids repairs and cleaning. The visits took place over a period of 14 weeks. Panel members referred to a copy of the lettable standard whilst conducting the visits. In total seventeen visits took place; 12 prior to works commencing and 5 when works to properties were completed and they were ready for re-let. It was planned by the panel that the same addresses would be visited, before and after works, so that a direct comparison could be conducted of the

improvements made. However, this plan could not be followed due to the properties becoming ready for re-let at various times. Instead, a video of the completed works was viewed at a panel meeting.

- 1.6 Panel members reviewed complaints relating to the voids process, the reasons for the complaints about the voids process and lettable standard were considered from the past two years. The panel noted that relatively few formal complaints had been received by the service during this time (less than one every two months).
- 1.7 A survey was conducted of new tenants who had moved into their homes, the majority of which with tenancies commencing between October 2022 and April 2023.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The Panel identified the following strengths with the current approach to void properties.
- The panel was happy with the targets and performance by the Council compared to other Local Authorities.
 - The panel found it extremely useful to compare the lettable standard with the standard used in other areas and thought that the Council performed well overall.
 - The panel was pleased that the letters were quite clear and that they had recently been reviewed.
 - Panel members were pleased that the cleaning staff show such flexibility across teams in meeting the two-day target.
 - The panel wished to express their thanks to the officers and other Council/contractor staff that are involved in bringing voids up to a lettable standard, having seen the poor condition that some properties are left in by previous tenants when they become void, panel members realised how difficult the task is of making these habitable in a short space of time.
- 2.2 The Panel developed eleven recommendations and four suggestions to improve the void process as listed below and detailed in the report attached as Appendix 1. The response to each action is summarised below and further detailed in the action plan attached as Appendix 2.
- 2.3 **Recommendation A- Gas Uncap and test target.**
Reconsider the target of five days to uncap gas supplies, for vulnerable people and those moving in during winter months.
- Response- the service is investigating options to reduce the turnaround time including developing efficiencies within processes.
- 2.4 **Recommendation B- Lettable Standard review**
- Review/update the existing lettable standard to assess against those standards used by other similar housing providers.

- Plan to review again whenever there are changes in legislation or at least every three years.

Response- the service is reviewing areas of the current lettable standard and benchmarking against other housing providers. However, any significant changes would require a change to the repairs and maintenance contracts.

2.5 Recommendation C- Publicised Lettable Standard

Provide a public version of the lettable standard, so that new tenants know what to expect when moving in e.g., decoration, cleanliness, heating. Provide this as both printed and online versions. The information should be compact and easy to read for everyone.

Response- the Service is producing a user-friendly version of the lettable standard with a view to making it accessible online and to be provided in their tenancy welcome pack.

2.6 Recommendation D- Outstanding repairs as tenants move in

Conduct a review of which repairs can be safely left until after the new tenant has moved in and make this clear to both contractors and new tenants.

Response- The majority of works are undertaken when the property is void. However, some major works which are in serviceable order and can wait i.e. kitchens, bathrooms, windows, doors will be programmed for a future date and the tenant will be made aware so that the letting is not delayed. Information provided at tenancy sign up is also being reviewed.

2.7 Recommendation E- Plumbing and heating issues

- Develop a plan to try and overcome the key issues with contracted void works, such as plumbing and heating issues.
- Consider gas being uncapped to test heating systems prior to the new tenant moving in.

Response- the service is investigating the additional cost of carrying out a safety check at the end of the void period. Additional visual checks to the heating system at handover are being implemented as part of the technical officer handover.

2.8 Recommendation F- Clear properties before cleaning

Provide clearer guidance to cleaning staff that they should not clean properties where contractors have left rubbish or where aids such as hospital beds remain in the property.

Response- Contractors have been told to issue a reminder to operatives that properties must be cleared. The process has been amended to ensure that there is no overlap between the contractor completing the void works and the cleaning team attending.

2.9 Recommendation G- Sub-standard repairs

Ensure that repairs that are sub-standard or missed by contractors are discussed at every contract performance review meeting (as a standard agenda item) and make sure that remedial actions/ improvements are agreed.

Response- The service is increasing handover inspection on void properties carried out by the Technical Officer. Both repairs and handovers have been added to the monthly contract performance meeting agenda to discuss and action. Also, a deep dive into the cause of the increased volume of major voids is ongoing.

2.10 Recommendation H- Customer feedback

- Introduce a 'new tenant survey' or provide a feedback system prior to welcome visits taking place.
- Provide a system to collate issues raised at welcome visits to identify trends.

Response- the service will implement a customer satisfaction survey to gather feedback following letting.

2.11 Recommendation I- Cleaning staff working conditions.

Consider improving working conditions for cleaning staff, in particular lighting and hot water.

Response- The cleaning teams are provided with head torches and if the property is too dark the clean is not conducted. The service investigated if the cleaning teams would benefit from hot water storage, however the cleaning products used are designed to be used with cold water, also the storage and transport of hot water posed a health and safety concern. The service also investigated the possible use of flood lighting; however, this was deemed not practical due to the limited space in the cleaning vans and points to plug in and charge. Long dusters are being provided to clean behind radiators.

2.12 Recommendation J- Tenancy termination letters

Amend the tenancy termination letters as summarised in the report to make them easier to understand and consider whether to also provide these online.

Response- the service is currently reviewing the tenancy termination procedure which will include updating relevant letters in consultation with tenants.

2.13 Recommendation K- Items left by vacating tenants.

Provide more clarity and emphasise the agreement when new tenants sign up for items left by vacating tenants such as outbuildings and decking.

Response- The service is developing a document for new tenants to sign to agree and accept responsibility for items, such as decking, left by previous tenants. Such items will be removed by the Council if the new tenant does not agree to them.

2.14 The Panel also made the following further suggestions:

2.15 **Spot-check targets.**

Set some targets for spot checks carried out on both cleaning standards and repairs i.e., how many outstanding /missed /unsatisfactory works are allowed/or provide a grading system. Discuss these targets and findings in the Repairs sub-group.

Response- The service is increasing handover inspection on void properties carried out by the Technical Officer. Both repairs and handovers have been added to the monthly contract performance agenda to discuss, monitor, and action. Quality assurance checks are also carried out by the Facilities services supervisors.

2.16 **ASSA Cliq key monitoring Monitor**

The efficient use of ASSA Cliq keys to make sure that operatives are not re-entering void properties following cleaning and that locks are changed immediately after cleaning is completed.

Response- following the review, an increased stock of ASSA locks has been acquired resulting in a change to the process to enable the locks to remain in place until they are removed by the Housing Options Service prior to the new tenancy, this has improved the efficiency for various teams to access the property. Also, a change in the process ensures that there is not overlap between the contractor and the cleaning teams as identified in recommendation F.

2.17 **On-site viewings**

Reconsider the option of in-person viewings being offered to ensure that people can see conditions and receive an explanation of standards on-site.

Response- This suggestion will be investigated further during the next tenant scrutiny topic; Voids – support to new tenants.

2.18 **Pre-contract meetings**

Provide feedback on the feasibility of conducting pre-contract meetings on site with contractors, like the arrangements for other housing providers, costing out the existing contractor-led approach versus pre-contract arrangements.

Response- Currently, all void properties are visited, and a scope of works is carried out by the Void technical officer before works commence.

- 2.19 Some service improvements have already been made since the review was completed. However, some are not possible to implement due to budgetary constraints, impact on letting turnaround times, contracts in place etc. The response to each of the recommendations is set out in Appendix 2.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal.

- 3.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel has developed eleven recommendations and four suggestions. The response to each of the recommendations is detailed above and in the action plan attached as Appendix 2. The plan also provides an update on progress to date.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Review has been discussed at the Housing Involvement Panel.
- 4.2 The action plan associated with this report (see Appendix 2) will be monitored at monthly Tenant Scrutiny Panel meetings, which are attended by Council officers, Rotherfed and tenant representatives.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision.

- 5.1 The Council's Housing Service along with the nominated lead officers in the action plan have responsibility for implementing the findings of the review and delivering the associated action plan within the designated timescales.
- 5.2 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel will receive regular updates on progress against the recommendations and actions.
- 5.3 A further report will be presented to the Improving Places Select Commission in 12 months' time, detailing progress on delivering the action plan.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 The implication of some recommendations such as enhancing the lettable standard and reducing the turnaround time will increase contractor costs.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 There are no substantive legal issues arising from the content of this report.
- 7.2 The Scrutiny Review will support the Council in meeting statutory and regulatory requirements arising from the current Regulatory Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard and Social Housing Regulator customer standards.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 A compact and easy to read Lettable standard will positively benefit engagement with children, young people, and vulnerable adults.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Please see attached Equality Analysis.
- 10.2 We will actively engage under-represented groups and use our customer data to ensure services and communications are accessible and meet the diverse needs of our tenants and neighbourhoods by contributing to the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2022-25 through the following:
- Understanding, listening, and engaging across all communities.
 - Delivering fair, inclusive, and accessible services.
 - Empowering people to engage and challenge discrimination and to promote good community relations.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 Please see attached Carbon Impact Assessment Report.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The Council has contracts in place with Mears and Equans to deliver void works. Changes to the lettable standard will require a variation to the contracts.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The key risk is the failure to engage with the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and inability to deliver against the recommendations in the action plan. This will be addressed through monitoring and reviewing progress detailed within the Action Plan. This will be further mitigated through ongoing monitoring and review by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and Improving Places Select Commission.

Accountable Officer(s)

James Clark, Assistant Director of Housing
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ROTHERHAM FEDERATION TENANT SCRUTINY



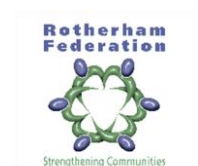
**Rotherham
Tenant Scrutiny**

**Investigation into whether the lettable standard
used by Rotherham Council during the voids
process is suitable and meets tenant
expectations**



Report August 2023

Rotherham Federation



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1. Background

Rotherham Federation Tenant Scrutiny was formed in April 2016. The Tenant Scrutiny panel provides an opportunity for tenants to scrutinise and positively challenge service delivery, identifying areas of concern and opportunities for improvement. This process strengthens the involvement of Rotherham tenants and provides links with Rotherham Council governance.

Tenant Scrutiny creates opportunities to:

- ✓ Build an effective partnership between Rotherham Council and its tenants and residents in the spirit of co-production, resulting in a joint-win for all.
- ✓ Provide a means of challenging landlords' services, standards and performance in a professional, constructive and collaborative manner.
- ✓ Help Rotherham Council to improve performance, value for money and tenant satisfaction.
- ✓ Represent the views of Rotherham Council's residents and make a positive difference on their behalf.

This is the seventh investigation by the Rotherham Federation Tenant Scrutiny panel. Previous reports have been submitted on the following topics:

1. Engaging Young Tenants in Rotherham (March 2017)
2. Responsive Repairs: Appointments, Communication Process and Customer Journey (February 2018)
3. Process of Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour Complaints (January 2019)
4. Home Aids and Adaptations for Tenants (November 2020)
5. Improving Tenant Satisfaction with the Repairs and Maintenance Service (June 2021)
6. How Rotherham Council Could Improve its Communications with Tenants (July 2022)

Choice of topic

Prior to choosing this topic the Tenant Scrutiny panel approached tenants for their views on what was important to them and what could be improved across Council Housing services. These same questions were asked of senior officers from the Council, discussing where they thought that a tenant's view would help them to review and consider potential improvements to their services.

The voids process was highlighted across all participants in this discussion as an area where some improvements could be made. Further discussion revealed that this was a large topic area and that the investigation should be split into three separate sections:

1. Lettable Standard
2. New tenant support and suitability
3. Downsizing

It was agreed that this investigation would focus on the Lettable Standard, with further work planned for the other two parts of the voids process following this report.

The Lettable Standard

Lettable Standards set out the conditions that a property will be in when a new tenant moves in, as regards safety, repairs, and cleanliness. The Lettable Standard used in Rotherham was last reviewed in April - November 2020, alongside the procurement process for a new contract partner. At the beginning of this investigation, work was commencing alongside contract partners to improve the Lettable Standard ensuring consistency across partners and a better offer for new tenants moving into void properties.

Legislation

Legislation that is relevant to this investigation is:

- **Fitness for Human Habitation Act 2018** – which focuses on buildings that are unstable, been neglected, or have an unsafe layout. Also required are enough natural light, ventilation, hot and cold water, drainage and facilities for cooking food. There must not be a serious problem with damp.
- **Housing Health and Safety (England) Regulations 2005** – lists 29 hazards that a tenant cannot be exposed to, including falls, pests, and mould.
- **Department for Communities and Local Government. A Decent Home: Definition and guidance for implementation June 2006** – also includes the need for reasonably modern facilities and services i.e. a kitchen (20 years old or less), a bathroom (30 years old or less), noise insulation.

Social Housing White Paper 2023

Relevant parts of Social Housing white paper to this investigation are:

Chapter 1 – To be safe in your home

- Consult on electrical safety in social housing
- Consult on fitting smoke and carbon monoxide alarms
- Engage tenants in safety issues

Chapter 2 – To know how your landlord is performing

- Tenant Satisfaction Measures including things that matter to tenants and compliance with health and safety obligations:
- Gas safety

- Electrical safety
- Fire safety
- Asbestos
- Water safety
- Lift safety
- Tenant satisfaction with health and safety of their home
- Tenant satisfaction with repairs and maintenance

Chapter 3 – To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly

Chapter 4 – To be treated with respect

Chapter 5 – To have your voice heard by your landlord

Chapter 6 – To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in

- Decent Homes Standard - including energy efficiency
- Impact of housing conditions on health

2. The panel and officers

The panel was made up of tenant and resident representatives from across Rotherham:

David Ramsden (Chair)	Keith Stringer	Julie Sharp	Ann Hitchens
Winnie Billups	Jo Workman	Sam Sharp	Mary Jacques
Winston Cook	Wendy Birch	Donna Draper	Frank Rees
Mohammed Ramzan Bashir	Barry Dealey	Phillip Clarke	

Thank you to these representatives for the time and commitment they have given to this investigation.

Officer support was provided by:

James Smith, RMBC Tenant Engagement Manager
 Callie Lamb, RMBC Tenant Involvement Officer
 Jemma Davenport, RMBC Housing Services Officer
 Phil Hayes, Rotherham Federation Chief Executive Officer
 Laura Swift, Rotherham Federation Administrative Officer
 Rebecca Morrison, Project Solutions

Valuable subject matter expertise was provided by four representatives of the Council:

Billy Wilson, Partnering Manager
 Andrew Lumb, Partnering Manager
 Louise Edwards, Specialist Clean Co-ordinator
 Keeley Harrison, Service Operations Manager

The panel wished to express their thanks to the above officers and other Council/contractor staff that are involved in bringing voids up to a lettable standard; having seen the poor condition that some properties are left in when they become void, panel members realised how difficult the task is of making these habitable in a short space of time.

3. Terms of Reference

Aim: To investigate whether the lettable standard used by Rotherham Council during the voids process is suitable and meets tenant expectations

Objectives:

To:

- Review the lettable standard for Rotherham Council homes
- Review the communications around the lettable standard both with contract partners and with tenants
- Review the process and communications around tenants ending their tenancies
- Consider the views of Rotherham Council tenants and their expectations for the standards in their new homes
- Benchmark against other housing providers as regards their lettable standards and communications with tenants
- Review the Social Housing white paper and the impact that the lettable standard could have on compliance with these requirements

Scope

- ☒ It was agreed that the investigation would concentrate only on the lettable standard and the voids process and would not include the content of planned further investigations into new tenant support/ suitability and downsizing.
- ☒ The allocations policy for Council homes would also not be included in the scope.

Measures of Success

- ✓ The lettable standard and relevant policies/procedures have been updated, if necessary, to meet tenant expectations and current practices.
- ✓ Communications around the lettable standard are suitable and work well (with contract partners and with tenants)
- ✓ Potentially greater tenant satisfaction and less complaints concerning the standard of homes when starting new tenancies
- ✓ Compliance with the relevant parts of the Social Housing white paper

Benefits

For tenants:

- ☑ Lettable standards that meet the expectations and needs of the majority of tenants when starting new tenancies
- ☑ Improved communications and clarity about the standard agreed

For the Council:

- ☑ Refreshed lettable standards and policies
- ☑ Possible improvements on the conditions left by tenants vacating properties
- ☑ Increased satisfaction and reduction in complaints from new tenants
- ☑ Potential learning from other housing providers

Risks

The panel acknowledged the following risks when embarking on this investigation. That:

- Staff are unable to attend/take part in tenant scrutiny meetings to share information
- Insufficient responses to the survey are received to be able to assess tenant satisfaction with existing processes and support
- Other Councils will not be forthcoming with information on their voids processes and lettable standard
- Rotherham Council teams' capacity means that recommendations made cannot be actioned

4. Methodology

The panel set out to review the lettable standard. Also to consider the process and arrangements in place to make sure that the agreed standard is met and that new tenants are happy with their new homes.

The investigation consisted of:

4.1 Voids visits

Six of the panel members undertook visits to void properties to look at the 'before' and 'after' conditions i.e. prior to works commencing and after completion of voids repairs and cleaning. The visits took place over a period of 14 weeks. Panel members referred to a copy of the lettable standard whilst conducting the visits. In total 17 visits took place; 12 prior to works commencing and 5 when ready for re-let.

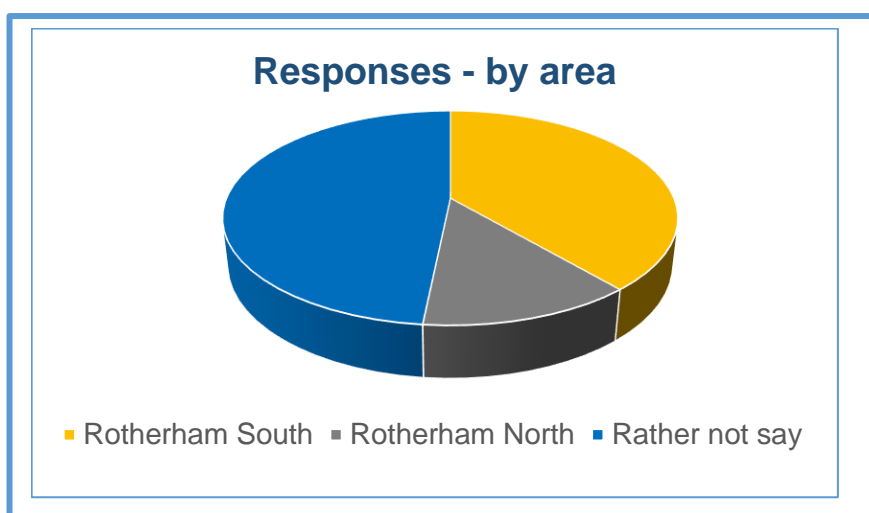
It was planned by the panel that the same addresses would be visited, before and after works, so that a direct comparison could be carried out of the improvements made. However this plan could not be followed due to the voids becoming ready for re-let at different times. Instead, a video of the completed works was viewed at a panel meeting. Unfortunately the panel did not feel that they were able to assess the repairs, cleaning and standards from the videos. Photographs of some of the properties visited can be found in Appendix 1.

4.2 Survey of new tenants

A survey was carried out of new tenants who had moved into their homes mostly between October 2022 and April 2023.

Questions were asked about their satisfaction with the cleanliness, repairs and safety of their new home, and the communications that they received as part of their move.

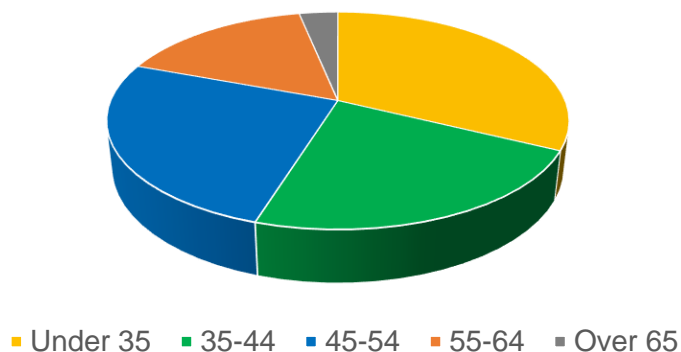
Approximately 200 surveys were sent directly to new tenants' email addresses. 31 responses were received (16% response rate):



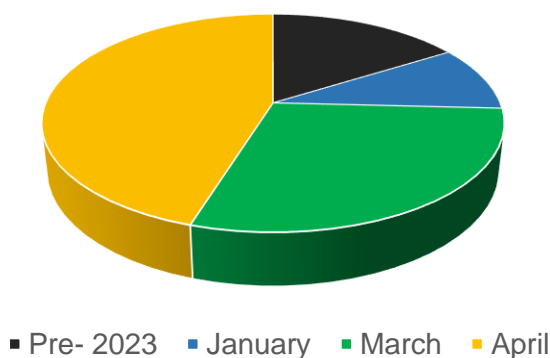
Most people would rather not say which area they live in

Most responses from under 55s.

Responses - by age



Responses - by move-in date



Vast majority moved in during March and April 2023

4.3 Benchmarking

Information was requested from eleven other housing providers of a similar size and demographic as Rotherham Council. Questions were asked concerning:

- Pre-termination visits and forms for the leaving tenant
- Their lettable standard
- Communications about the standard with both new tenants and contractors
- Cleaning arrangements
- Accessibility requirements
- Key Performance Indicators around voids
- Checks made on works carried out
- New tenant surveys

Just three responses were received (Kirklees, St Leger, and Wigan), but a website trawl was carried out on the other eight to find out what information they shared with tenants about the voids process/ lettable standard. Two other lettable standards were reviewed online for smaller housing providers; Red Kite Community Housing and STAR Shropshire.

The findings from the benchmarking exercise can be found throughout this report.

4.4 Review of complaints relating to the voids process

The reasons for complaint about the voids process and lettable standard were considered for the past two years. Very few formal complaints had been received by the service during this time (less than one every two months).

4.5 Interviewing officers

Council officers representing the Partnering team and Operations team were invited to attend the panel and share information on the voids process. The panel sent questions prior to these meetings to allow for officers to prepare their answers and to gather any necessary information.

4.6 Review of letters for termination of tenancies

The panel carried out a workshop to review the letters used by the Council when a tenant decides that they wish to end their tenancy. The letters were assessed as regards their layout, accessibility, and content/clarity and these comments were submitted to officers for their consideration.

4.7 Meetings

Panel meetings took place between September 2022 and July 2023 to consider, analyse and discuss the information received and to reach recommendations for this investigation.

5. Summary of Evidence

5.1 Void costs and targets

Over the past few years, Rotherham Council have handled approximately 30 void properties per week. However in April 2023, this reached 50 per week. The average cost to bring a void home up to a lettable standard is £3500, which means a spend of over £5.5m per annum from the Housing Revenue Account.

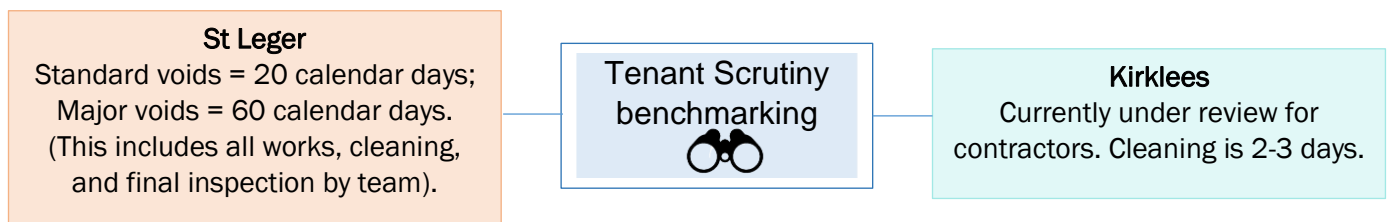
Key Performance Indicator (KPI)

The KPI for the void re-let time is currently under review to try to bring about greater tenancy sustainability (through increased support, checks on affordability, and the offer of tenancy - ready workshops).

The current target (April 2023) for contractors to complete void works is 17 days and current performance against this is 13 days.

In 2022, Council officers benchmarked themselves against some other councils and found that:

- The average void time is 68 days across Yorkshire and Humber
- The longest void time across Yorkshire and Humber was 159 days
- Rotherham's performance was at around 48 days, at this point, making them mid-table.

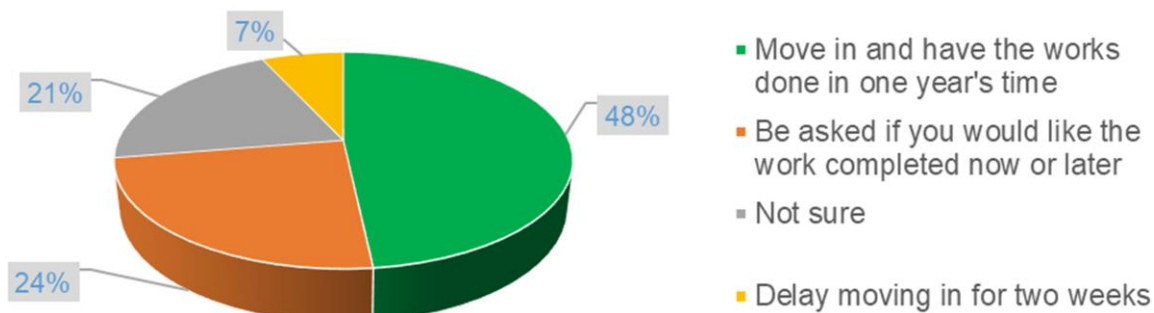


Rotherham seemed to be performing well compared to other housing providers.

Scheduled works

In order to meet the performance targets and reduce the costs of the voids process, the Council will consider whether major works to comply with decent homes standards e.g. new bathrooms and kitchens, should be carried out prior to the new tenant moving in or remain on the planned schedule. As part of the new tenant survey, the panel asked this question:

Would you delay moving in?



- If a new kitchen or bathroom was due within a year, 48% of new tenants would still like to move in and not delay their move.
- 24% of respondents said that they would like to be consulted on whether to move in or delay this.

PANEL VIEWS:

- ✍ The panel were happy with the targets and performance by Rotherham Council compared to other councils.
- ✍ The feedback from the tenant survey suggested that each new tenant should be consulted on whether they would like major works completed before moving in. This is likely to only cause a void delay to less than a quarter of properties.

5.2 Communications with leaving tenants

There are two letters sent to people who are ending their tenancies:

- Termination One – Confirming the request to end the tenancy and a notice form for completion (giving four weeks' notice).
- Termination Two – Confirmation of notice plus a checklist of next steps for both the Council and the tenant.

There are different letters used if a tenant has passed away and the next of kin is being contacted.

These letters were reviewed in 2022.

Tenants are asked to remove everything from the property; however some voids take three days to clear before works can commence. If a visit has been made, some furnishings that are in good condition may remain in the property, at the officer's discretion.

A comparison was made between the different responses to communications with the vacating tenant during the benchmarking exercise. (See Appendix 2 for full summary). All content was very similar to the Rotherham letters, but presented in different formats including leaflets and online information.

The Tenant Scrutiny panel also reviewed the letters in terms of layout, accessibility, content and clarity. Numerous comments were made and the full detail of these can be found in Appendix 3. Suggestions were made for improvement which included:

Layout

Using page numbers on all documents and using tick boxes for the Termination Two checklist.




Accessibility

- Removing council jargon and phrases that are difficult to understand such as 'remedy damage' 'liable to pay', 'notice to quit'.
- Making the information available in other formats such as braille, large print or easy read, plus in different languages.

Content/clarity

Various queries around the phrasing and wording of the letters and forms, such as replacing 'encourages' with 'must' when talking about clearing their belongings; more clarity around what to do with furniture that is part of a furniture package.

PANEL VIEWS:

-  The panel was pleased that the letters were quite clear and that they had recently been reviewed.
 -  However, they felt that further improvements could be made as described in Appendix 3. This would help people leaving tenancies to better understand their responsibilities.
 -  They did feel that including this information online would further help communication with tenants leaving their homes.
-

Tenancy termination letters

Make changes to the tenancy termination letters as summarised in the report to make them easier to understand and consider whether to also provide these online.

5.3 Lettable standard

The lettable standard has been agreed across Council and contract partner colleagues and acts as a standard for the works that are required each time a property becomes void, prior to re-let. The last revision of the standard took place in November 2020.

Feedback from visits

From the visits carried out by tenant scrutiny representatives and the new tenant surveys, there were a number of issues raised about whether these areas/items should be made clearer or be included in the Rotherham Council lettable standard.

These included:

- Leaving carpet grippers on floors

Response – the standard says that unnecessary fixings should be removed, but not specifically carpet grippers.

- Leaving decking in gardens

Response – the new tenant should sign to say they are responsible for any decking that they wish to keep (this should be made clear).

- Smoothing plaster filling ready for decorating

Response – contractors should ensure that plaster is smooth and this is included in the lettable standard (although not evident in all voids).

- Kitchen floor covering

Response – is a 'wet-room' floor the best option for a kitchen (found to be hard to keep clean)? The flooring used for kitchens is polyurethane, which is similar but does not have non-slip properties.

- Overgrown gardens

Response - Contractors have only three hours to complete gardens, without further charges, and sometimes the garden grows again by the time the tenant moves in.

- Collapsing outbuildings

Response – The new tenant would sign to say that they would like the outbuilding to remain, otherwise they should be demolished if in poor condition.

There was some concern expressed by officers that removal of grippers and decking is against the Council's environmental sustainability principles

Benchmarking

Looking at the other housing providers, the panel found five online:

- Kirklees – brief overview
- Warrington – Empty Homes Maintenance Strategy includes quite detailed lettable standard
- Wigan
- Red Kite (High Wycombe)
- STAR (Shropshire)

We were also given access to two paper copies of the lettable standards used in:

- Kirklees
- St Leger

Headlines from a comparison exercise

The comparison exercise looked at six other lettable standards and noted:

1. Areas where Rotherham's lettable standard performed well – where it includes items/more details that makes it better than some of the other lettable standards.
2. Things that could be improved – that were either better explained in other lettable standards or were not explicitly considered in the Rotherham version
3. Things that are missing from the lettable standard but other areas include them.

1. Areas where Rotherham's lettable standard performed well

- ✓ Safe balustrade to stairs,
- ✓ Checking that taps are on the correct sides,
- ✓ Replacing shower heads and hoses,
- ✓ Providing new shower curtains,
- ✓ Using halophane paint to cover mould (and another paint for graffiti),
- ✓ Putting air fresheners in every room,
- ✓ Fitting window restrictors to first floor,
- ✓ Keeping air bricks unobstructed and vermin/water proof,
- ✓ Changing the locks to outbuildings,
- ✓ Smooth plaster for decoration,
- ✓ Removal of unnecessary nails, screws, and fixings.

2. Things that could be improved

- ? Replacement of fences if damaged, without client having to request it (Kirklees and Wigan offer this as standard to the front of properties).
- ? External doors – it is good that number is fitted (but Warrington also fit a door with a spy hole and draught excluder as standard)
- ? Cleaning behind radiators – the lettable standard says 'as far as possible' (Wigan says behind *all* radiators)
- ? External windows – the lettable standard says 'correctly fixed' (Warrington replace any missing putty, and STAR clean them outside at ground floor level)
- ? Toilets – limescale is removed (Red Kite leave cleaning fluid in all the toilets)
- ? Paths – are checked for good run off for water, (Kirklees sweep the paths too)

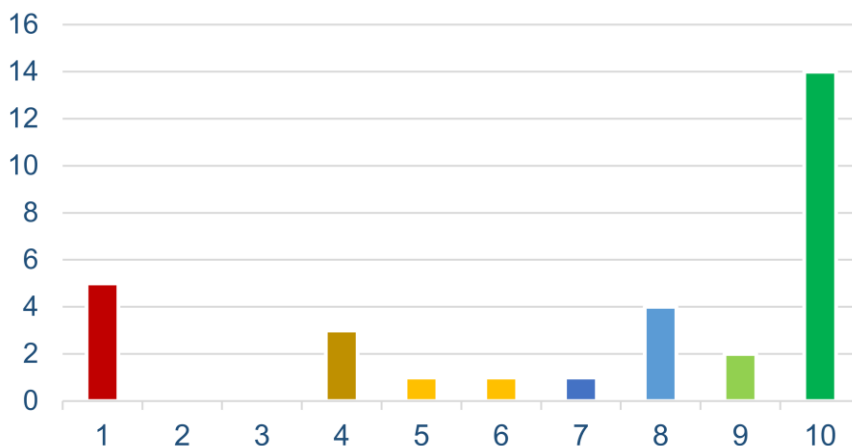
3. Things that are missing from the lettable standards but included in other areas

- ☒ Clothes posts
- ☒ Security screens
- ☒ Outdoor lighting
- ☒ Lightbulbs
- ☒ Hot water cylinder insulation
- ☒ Stop taps – accessibility and ease of turning
- ☒ Baths replaced by accessible showers (other areas specify that these won't be replaced)
- ☒ Extractor fans
- ☒ Curtain battens
- ☒ Internally glazed doors - are they replaced?
- ☒ Decoration allowance (other areas supply for vulnerable tenants)
- ☒ Smoke alarms – testing mentioned but nothing about how many (Kirklees provide heat detector in kitchen, smoke alarms in hall and landing, Carbon monoxide detector next to flued gas appliances)
- ☒ Plumbing – not clear if flushed and if any dead legs are removed
- ☒ Programmable heating
- ☒ Loft insulation (laid to 270/250 mm in Red Kite and Warrington)
- ☒ Fire rated kitchen door (half hour fire rated in Warrington)
- ☒ Number of electrical sockets (listed how many in each room in Warrington and STAR)

The summary of the full comparison of lettable standards can be found in Appendix 4.

Findings from the survey of new tenants:

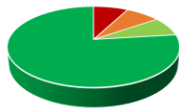
How satisfied with new home (where 1 is poor and 10 is good)?



- 16/31 (52%) of respondents were very satisfied.
- 5/31 (16%) were satisfied.
- 5/31 (16%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- 5/31 (16%) were very dissatisfied.

- There was a combination of areas showing dissatisfaction and satisfaction; Rotherham North showed nothing but satisfaction (but there were only four responses from this area)
- There was also a range of ages showing different levels of satisfaction, with no age group reporting more dissatisfaction than others.

Satisfaction in Rotherham South



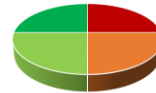
- Highly dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Highly satisfied

Satisfaction in Rotherham North



- Highly dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Highly satisfied

Satisfaction in other areas not specified



- Highly dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Highly satisfied

It feels like 'home' x 7

The view x 2

Moving away from
nuisance neighbours x
2

Near my family x 3

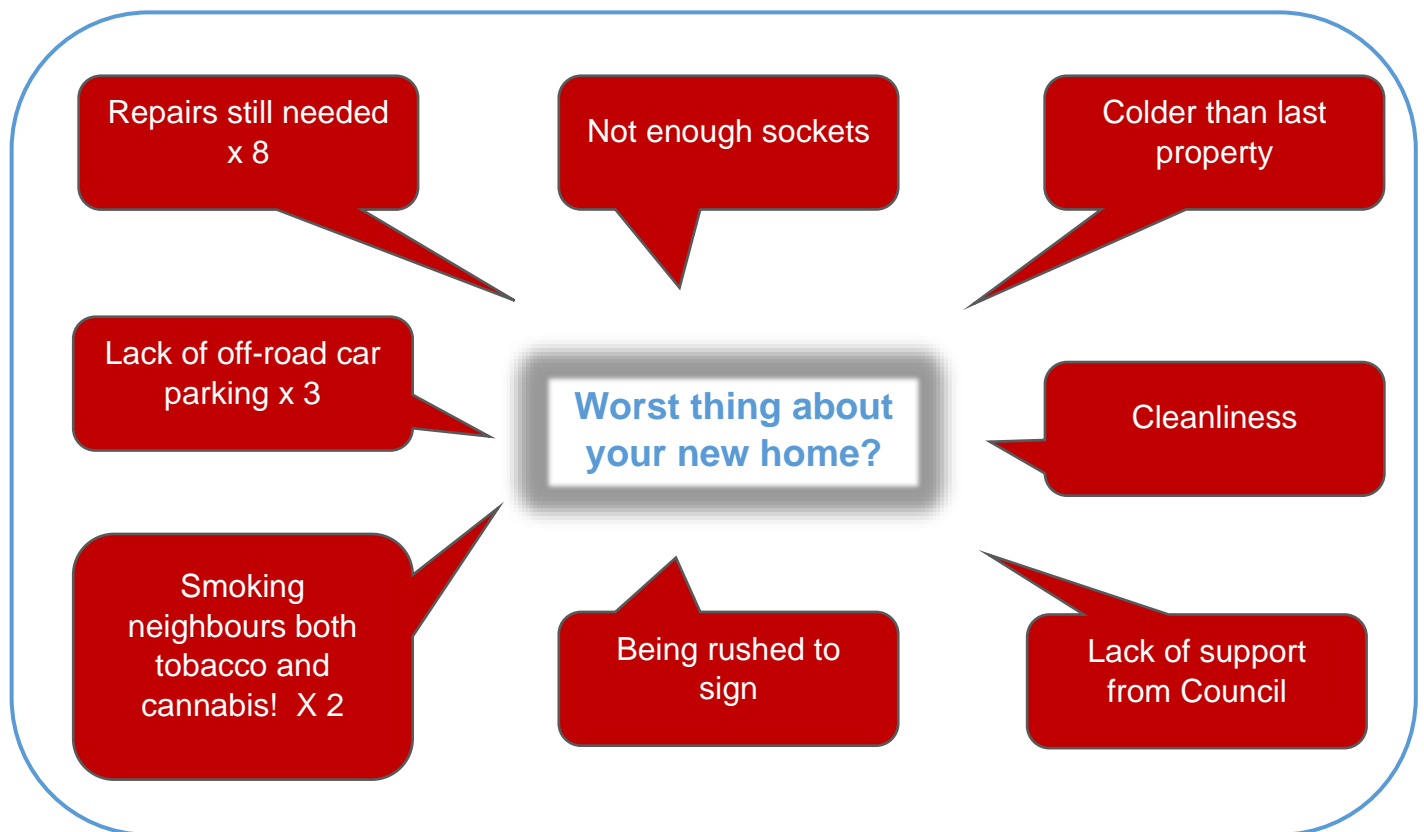
**Best thing about
your new home?**

Accessibility x 5

Good size x 5

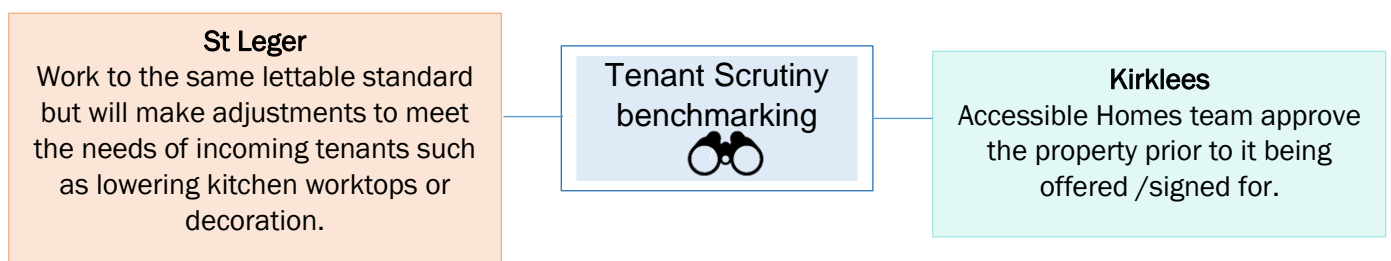
Very impressed with
cleanliness

Support from Council
e.g. carpet package









Accessibility needs

There is not a different version of the lettable standard in Rotherham for them to meet accessibility needs, as these are not generally known at the time of void works taking place. The Aids and Adaptations policy would be applied once it is known if a new tenant has a disability / accessibility needs. The lettings team will try to match to previously adapted properties as far as possible.



PANEL VIEWS:

-  The panel found it very useful to compare the lettable standard with that used in other areas, and thought that Rotherham performed well overall.
-  They did feel though that the 2020 version requires review, considering the points that other areas perform or explain better e.g. lightbulbs, loft insulation and number of electrical sockets.
-  Concern was expressed that survey respondents had reported rusty nails on decking and collapsing outbuildings that had been left by previous tenants. There was also clearly an issue with being able to clean carpet grippers that were also left in situ.
-  Panel members appreciated the comments made about the environmental impact; however couldn't suggest an alternative to disposing of certain items.
-  It was disappointing that 16% of people were not satisfied with their new homes at all and thought that this could be improved with better completion of repairs or communication with tenants on their expectations.
-  The panel understood the difficulties around tenants having unknown accessibility needs and would like to explore this further in the next panel investigation (Voids – support for new tenants)

Recommendations**Lettable Standard review**

- Review/update the existing lettable standard to assess against those standards used by other similar housing providers.
- Make arrangements to review again whenever there are changes in legislation or at least every three years.

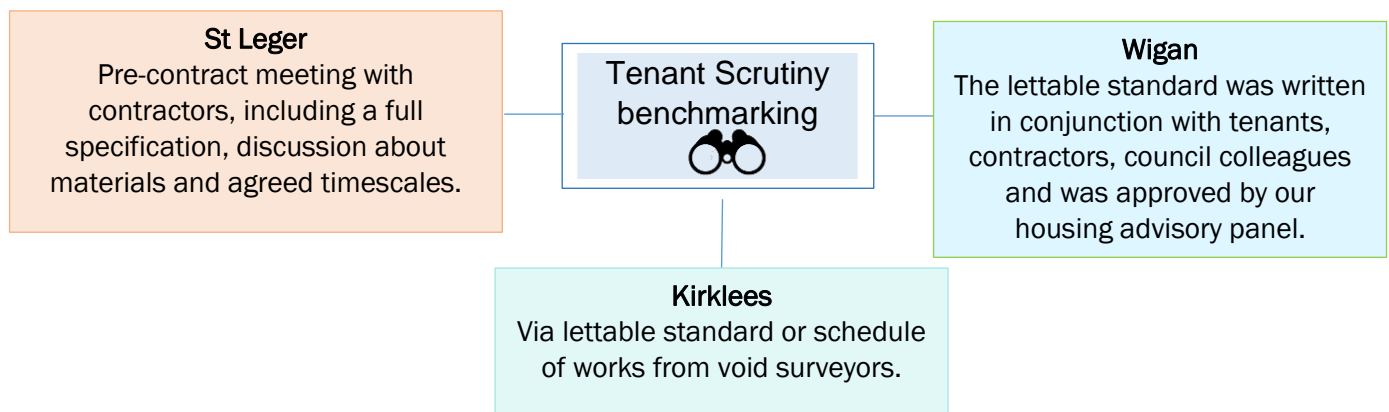
Items left by vacating tenants

Provide more clarity and emphasise the agreement when new tenants sign up for items left by vacating tenants such as outbuildings and decking.

5.4 Communications with contractors

For minor works, the initial voids process in Rotherham is contractor-led; they have the standard and decide what works are required in each void. The scope of work is then signed off by the contracts team and a record kept of the initial assessment and costs. For major works, a joint inspections and assessment of works would take place between contractors and the voids team. Contractors are expected to follow a 'right first-time principle' when completing void works.

Other housing providers follow a similar approach apart from St Leger, who specify full details of the works in each void:



PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ The panel recognised that there were pros and cons in the different ways to contract voids work; whilst it would be safer to conduct pre-contract visits to all properties, this is time consuming and costly to the Council.
- ✎ However there is a feeling that closer auditing/ checks on works may be necessary to ensure 'right-first time' and to increase new tenant satisfaction.
- ✎ It would be interesting to know how much it costs for contractors to go back and put things right when reported by new tenants as compared to the cost of pre-contract visits by officers.

Suggestions

Spot-check targets

Set some targets for spot checks carried out on both cleaning standards and repairs i.e. how many outstanding /missed /unsatisfactory works are allowed/or provide a grading system. Discuss these targets and findings in the Repairs sub-group.

Pre-contract meetings

Provide feedback on the feasibility of conducting pre-contract meetings on site with contractors, similar to the arrangements for other housing providers, costing out the existing contractor-led approach versus pre-contract arrangements.

5.5 Cleaning of void properties

The process

Voids cleaning is carried out by the Council's facilities team. Cleaning requests are received from contractors at 4:30pm each day and allocated to cleaning staff ready for the next day. If staff cannot clean the properties the following day, it will roll-over onto the next day. The cleaning team is fairly flexible; staff can be moved around if needed. There are 10 cleaning staff for voids with other cleaning teams that can be pulled in if necessary. Supervisors will also help to clean if needed.

Cleaning is included in the target to turn voids around in 17 days, usually expecting cleaning to take up to two days. On some occasions, the contractor also requires a pre-clean to enable operatives to carry out the necessary repairs. A final clean will still be required at such times.

The standard

Cleaning supervisors make sure that their teams take as long as is required for each void, rather than setting a time limit.

Staff have a cleaning specification checklist (Appendix 5) which is taken from the 2020 lettable standard. Cleaning staff tick the list as they have completed tasks and can make comments on the form if they have difficulties/ notice further areas of disrepair. On some occasions, mobility aids such as hospital beds, remain in place waiting for collection. When this occurs, the situation is reported through to the voids team and cleaning is paused.

There are some issues with contractors not clearing their rubbish away prior to leaving the void, and these are reported back to the contracts team if so. On a number of occasions, contractors are still working when the cleaning team arrives, or come back again after the property has been cleaned. Again these are reported through.

An Assa Cliq electronic lock system is used for all void properties which allows keyless access for various team members and provides a digital record of who is entering and leaving the property. Lettings teams arrange for a new lock to be fitted once works are completed, but this may take several days.

Travel times

The schedule is sent to the cleaning team and may include homes across the whole of the Rotherham district, meaning excessive travel times. Sometimes staff might lose 40-50 minutes with travel time in between visits and this is of particular importance when the contractors are not ready for the cleaners. However the cost of wasted journeys is far outweighed by the cost of empty homes to the Council.

Feedback/checks on cleaning

Complaints about cleaning standards have not been received by supervisors recently. If a complaint was received the supervisor would visit the property and speak to the new tenant.

Supervisors carry out approximately three spot checks per week to assess the cleaning standard. The cleaning teams are not informed of when/where the spot checks take place. In the past cleaning teams have been brought back in if the standard was not satisfactory.

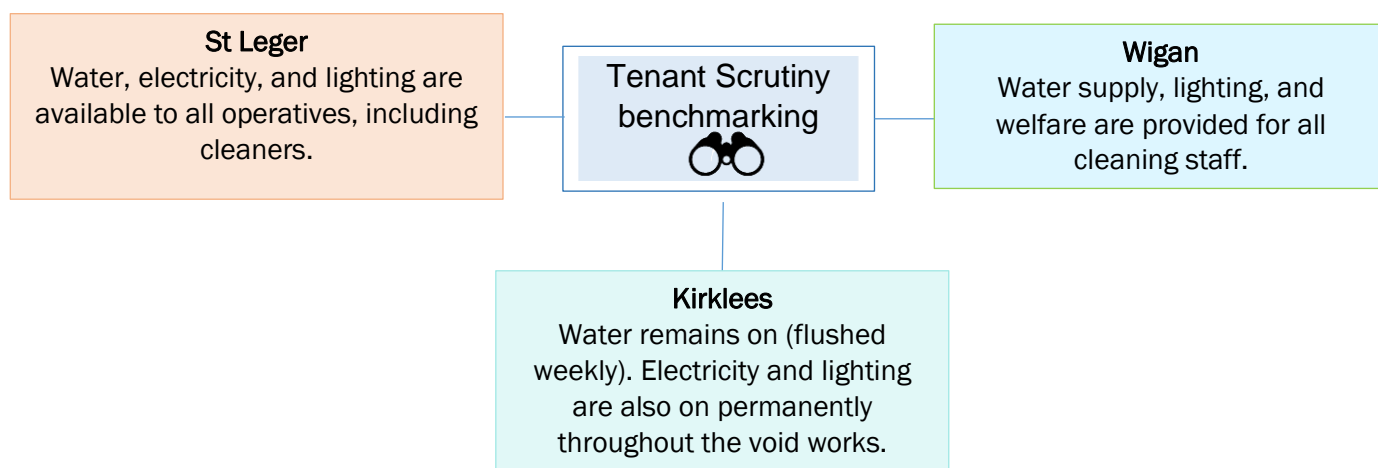
Arrangements - utilities

Water

Water supplies are often turned off and not available, so cleaning teams will bring their own. Cleaning usually takes place with cold water, unless there is a working shower for hot water. The availability of a working shower is the first thing to be checked by cleaning teams when they enter the property.

Lighting

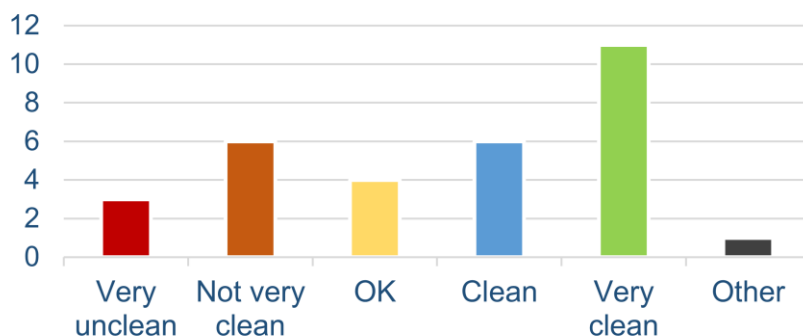
The checklist for each property will state whether electricity is available in the property. There can be an issue with adequate lighting in the winter months. Cleaning staff are provided with both head and hand-held torches for such occasions. Larger pieces of equipment such as floodlights on tripods could be considered, but these would be bulky to store and carry.



Benchmarking against three other housing providers found that Rotherham was the only Council to not provide lighting and water for cleaning.

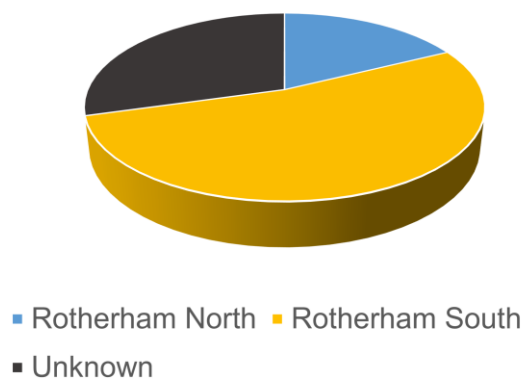
Findings from the survey of new tenants:

How satisfied were you with the cleanliness of your new home?

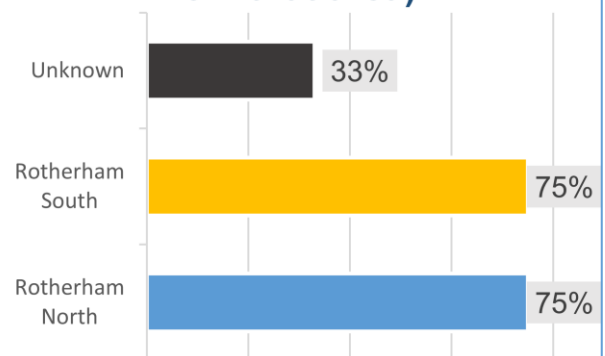


- 29% (9/31) found their new home to be very unclean/not very clean
- 55% (17/31) reported their new home to be clean or very clean

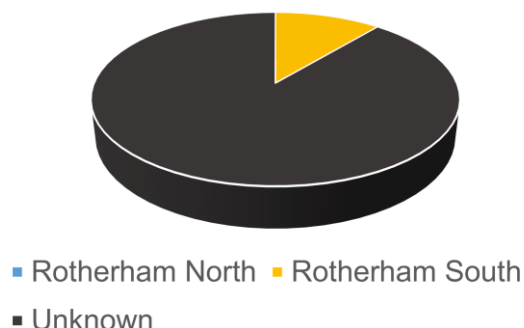
Very clean/clean by area



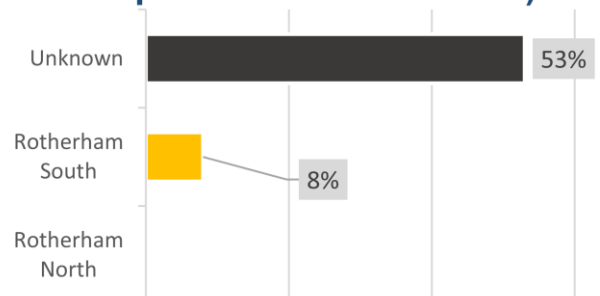
Very clean/clean by area (Percentage of responses from that area)



Very unclean/unclean by area

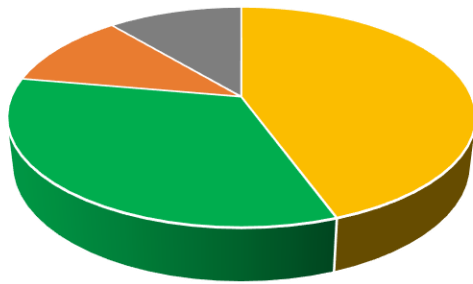


Very unclean/unclean by area (Percentage of responses from that area)



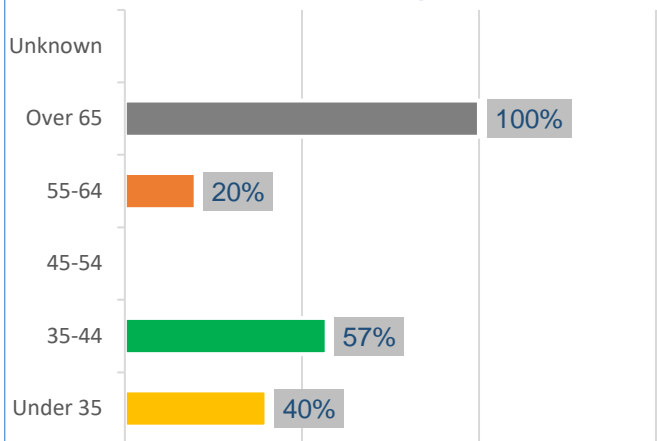
- 75% of people who stated the area that they lived in were happy with the cleanliness of their new home
- The majority of unclean homes were reported by people who did not want to add which area they lived in.

Very unclean/unclean by age



■ Under 35
 ■ 35-44
 ■ 45-54
■ 55-64
 ■ Over 65
 ■ Unknown

Very unclean/unclean by age (Percentage)



- The majority of people finding their homes unclean were below the age of 44.
- 40% of all under 35s and 57% of all 35–44 year olds were unhappy with the cleaning standard.

Comments on cleanliness

Sparkled

Very impressed with cleanliness

Perfect

Absolutely disgusting

Glass all over back yard and side grass

Lumps of concrete on floor – needed to be scraped off

Can't clean kitchen floor properly as like a wet-room floor

Cat hairs everywhere particularly behind radiators

Nails, screws, dust and plaster everywhere

Plaster on taps and floor

Pet hair everywhere and dirty toilet

Comments on cleanliness










Bits of glass everywhere

Feedback from visits made by panel members

Panel members conducting the first visits found that some properties were in extremely poor order and were impressed that these could be brought up to a lettable standard.

There were mixed results from the tenant scrutiny visits to voids, once they were ready for re-let. Some were found to be satisfactory, whereas others were disappointing as regards the level of cleanliness and did not appear to match the checklist that was available to cleaning staff. In particular, there were instances of nicotine staining to light fittings, pet hairs behind radiators, and dust and dirt stuck in old carpet grippers.

PANEL VIEWS:

-  The panel felt that they would like to express their appreciation to cleaning staff having seen the conditions in some of the properties during their first site visits.
-  It was disappointing that contractors sometimes arranged for cleaning staff to visit before they had finished their repairs and/or cleared their rubbish away. The panel wondered if this happened so that the total void time looked better in terms of repairs meeting target days.
-  Panel members were pleased that the cleaning staff show such flexibility across teams in meeting the two-day target.
-  It is important that travel times for cleaners are considered when monitoring the time taken for each void and that grouping of visits is provided as often as possible.
-  It was concerning that 29% of new tenants found the cleaning in their homes to be unsatisfactory, and the list of issues raised.
-  The panel was surprised that there is no target for the number of spot-checks carried out on cleaning standards.
-  It was worrying that cleaning teams are expected to clean with cold water only and torch lighting only, when other Councils say that full electricity and water is provided at their voids for cleaning.
-  Panel members felt that it was important to monitor the use of the Assa Cliq keys and the time taken to fit a new lock, to make sure that contractors are rarely going back to the property once cleaned.
-  There was some concern over the number of issues with cleaning reported in the new tenant survey.

Recommendations

Clear properties before cleaning

Provide clearer guidance to cleaning staff that they should not clean properties where contractors have left rubbish or where aids such as hospital beds remain in the property.

Cleaning staff working conditions

Give consideration to improving working conditions for cleaning staff, in particular lighting and hot water.

Suggestion

ASSA Cliq key monitoring

Monitor the efficient use of ASSA Cliq keys to make sure that operatives are not re-entering void properties following cleaning and that locks are changed immediately after cleaning is completed.

5.6 Tenant Expectations

Outstanding Repairs

It was confirmed by officers that it is at great expense to the Council, through loss of rent, if a void is delayed for any longer than is reasonable to carry out the necessary works.

Despite this, at the start of the investigation, officers were asked if people move into their new home with outstanding repairs still to be completed. It was stated that the only repair that should remain when people move in is the replacement of temporary doors. This is due to the order delays, with new doors taking up to three months to arrive. This only happens in a small number of cases and is explained to the tenant at sign-up.

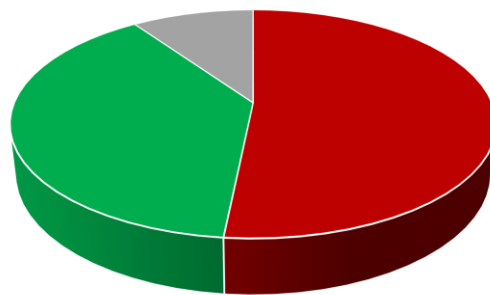
It was expressed by officers that some issues may arise from the lack of 'in-person' viewings so that the standard cannot be discussed and heating and other systems tested.

Gas uncapping

Gas cannot be uncapped until the new tenant has moved in and made arrangements with a gas supplier. The gas will be uncapped within five days of the move-in date.

Findings from the survey of new tenants:

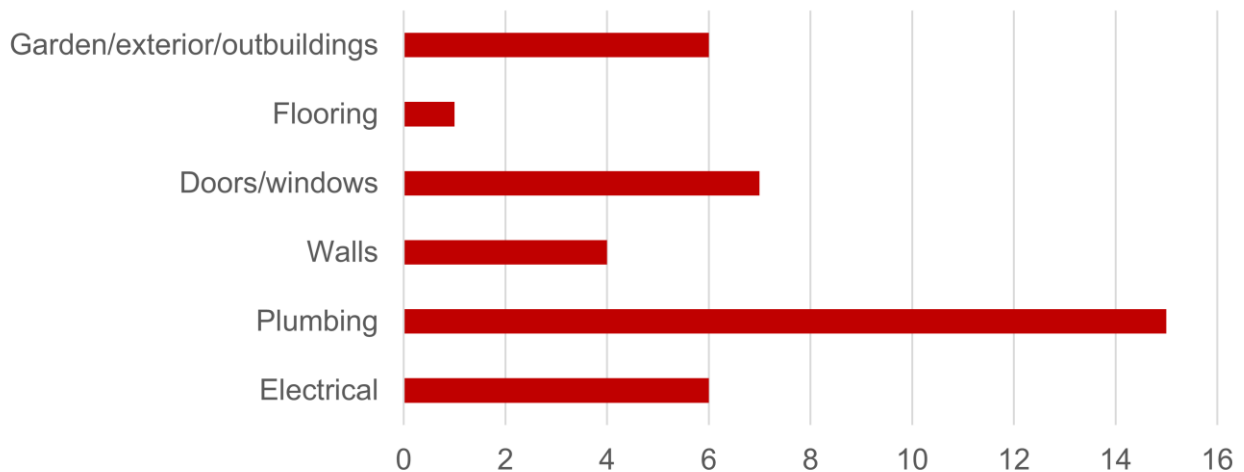
Were there repairs still to be done?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

- The majority of homes (52%) were reported to still need some repairs to be carried out
- The majority of repairs related to plumbing (39%) and doors/windows (18%). (see below)

Repairs needed



Heating on continuously/
thermostat not working x 3

Window locks stuck/ new
windows needed/ metal grids
need taking off x3

Leaking radiators/
showers/ taps x2

Comments on repairs still required

Gas uncapping took 20 days
(another one took two weeks)

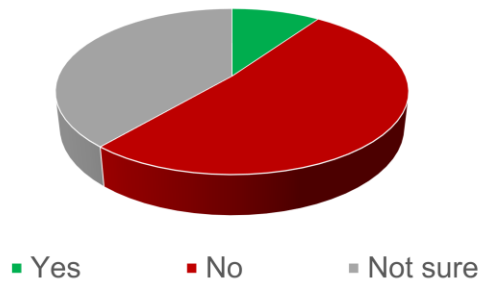
Damage from leak
never repaired

Downstairs wiring all wrong

Drains outside flooded
every time the taps ran

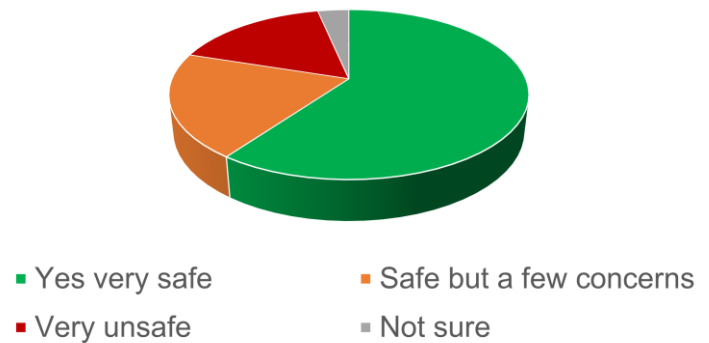
Outhouse collapsing

Were you told about the outstanding repairs?

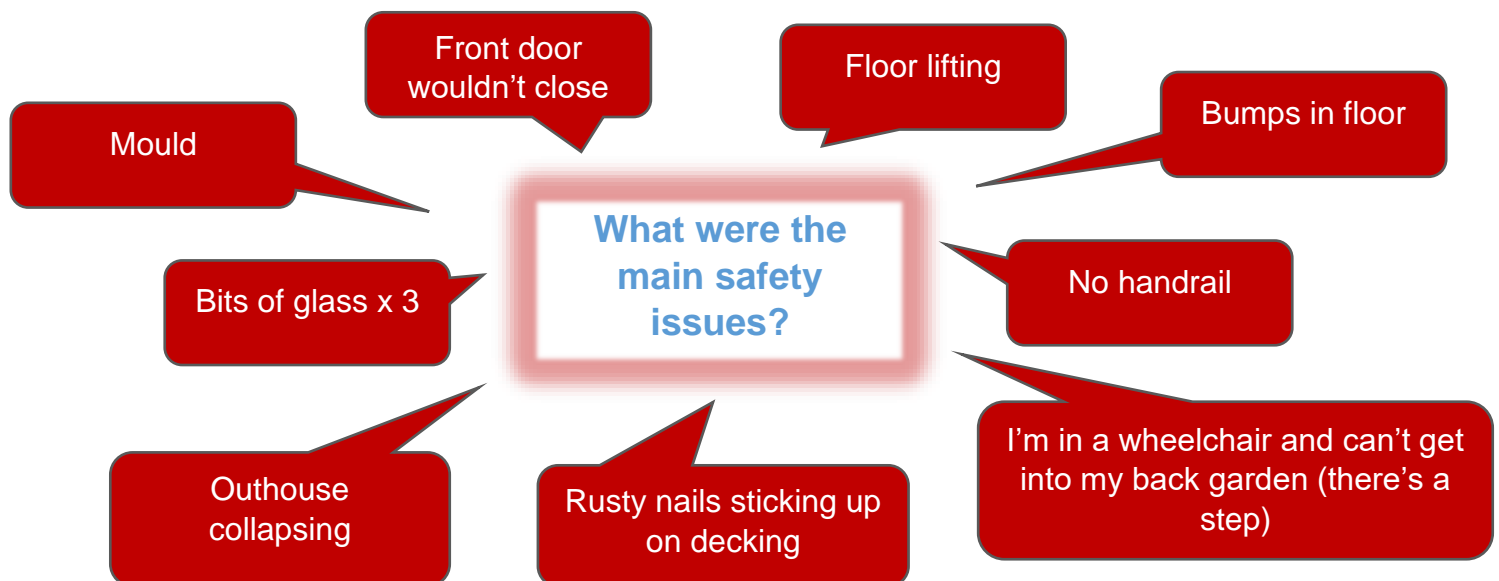


- Over 50% of new tenants were not told about the outstanding repairs before they moved in







Was your new home safe?



- 16% felt that their home was very unsafe when they moved in
- The most common reason seemed to be pieces of glass being left in the property



PANEL VIEWS:

-  The panel was disappointed with the number of people saying that they had outstanding repairs when they moved into their new home; especially as the panel was previously informed that only doors would remain on the list of works.
 -  In particular, there was concern that gas uncapping could take up to five days after moving in; which would be worrying in winter months and if the new tenant was vulnerable in any way.
 -  The panel wondered if the number of plumbing issues reported in the survey were due to the water not being turned on and checked prior to repairs being signed off, plus the gas not being uncapped to test heating systems.
 -  The reported presence of pieces of glass in several properties was concerning.
 -  Panel members thought that feeling safe was a priority when moving into a new home, and were concerned that 16% of survey respondents felt very unsafe.
 -  The panel were not keen on the virtual viewings as they didn't feel that this offered a clear picture of the conditions and dimensions in the properties.
-

Recommendations**Uncap target**

Reconsider the target of five days to uncap gas supplies, in particular for vulnerable people and those moving in during winter months.

Outstanding repairs as move in

Carry out a review of which repairs can be safely left until after the new tenant has moved in, and make this clear to both contractors and new tenants.

Plumbing and heating issues

- Develop a plan to try and overcome the main issues with contracted void works, such as plumbing and heating issues.
- Give consideration to gas being uncapped to test heating systems prior to the new tenant moving in.

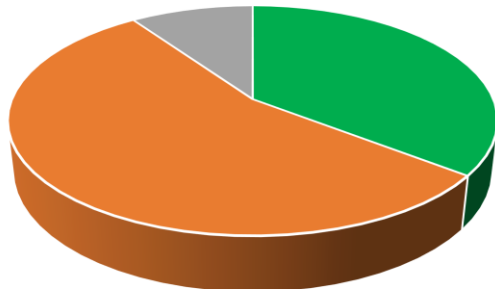
On-site viewings

Reconsider the option of in-person viewings being offered to ensure that people can see conditions and receive an explanation of standards on-site. (This suggestion will be investigated further during the next tenant scrutiny topic; Voids – support to new tenants).

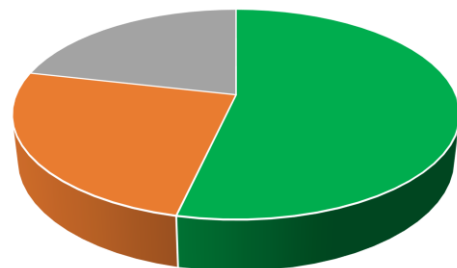
5.7 Communications with the new tenant

When all the work has been completed, an online viewing takes place; this makes the turnaround process shorter as all works and cleaning have already taken place and prospective new tenants are shortlisted quickly (previously, prior to the Covid pandemic, properties were advertised at the voids stage). If the tenant does not have internet access they are invited to Riverside House to take part in the online viewing. If adaptations are needed the viewing takes place in person, to ensure that all needs can be met.

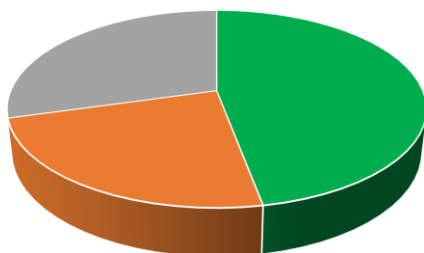
At the viewing stage, the video or visit allows lettings officers to explain the standard that can be expected by the new tenant when moving into their new home.

Did anyone tell you about the standard?

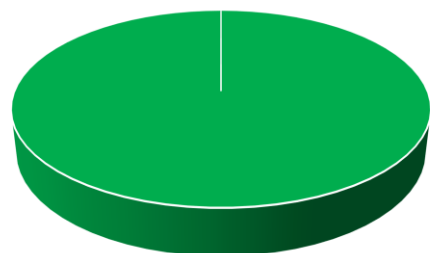
■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

Would you have liked a list of what things should be like in your new home?

■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

Not told about standard versus satisfaction

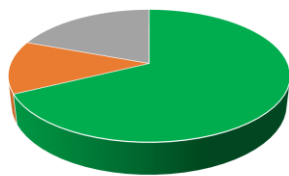
■ Very satisfied/satisfied
■ OK
■ Very dissatisfied/dissatisfied

Told about standard versus satisfaction

■ Very satisfied/satisfied
■ OK
■ Very dissatisfied/dissatisfied

- Only 11/31 (36%) of new tenants were told about the standard
- People were not dissatisfied just because they weren't told about the standard, with 47% of those who hadn't been told saying that they were still very satisfied/satisfied. Dissatisfaction with the voids process did *not* mean that people had not been told about the standard.
- However, everybody who was told about the standard said that they were satisfied with their new home.
- And 54% of new tenants said that they would have liked to have known what their new home would be like (with only 25% saying that they wouldn't).

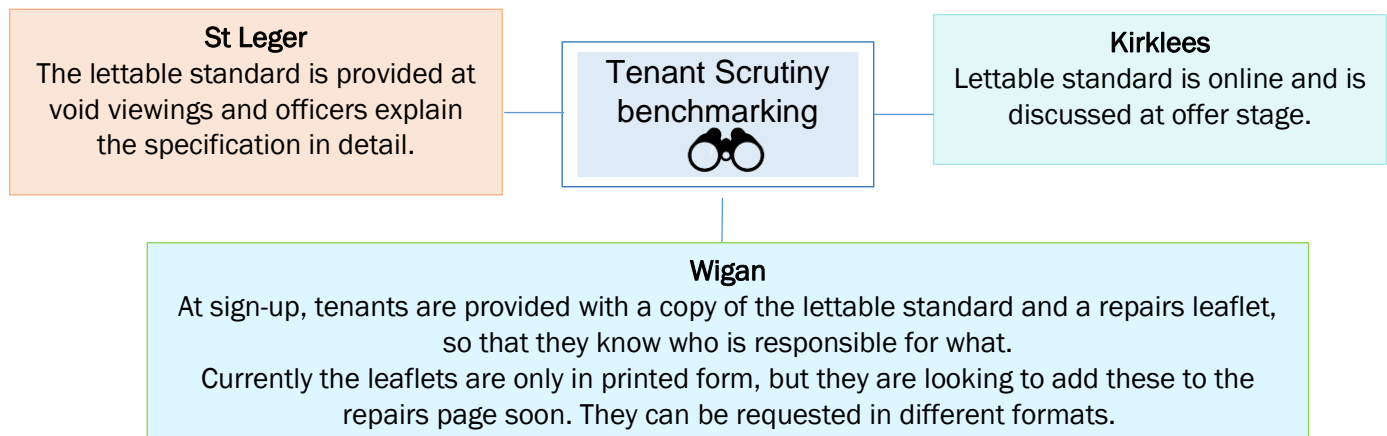
Did you know who to contact if there was a problem with your new home?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

- It was reassuring that 68% of respondents knew who to contact with any problems in their new home.

Information handed to new tenant



Online information

Rotherham Council has a 'Guide to you Home' document on their website, which has a section on 'moving into your new home'. This section includes who to contact e.g. Council Tax, Housing Benefit; Reconnection of utility supplies; tenant responsibilities; Council responsibilities.

The web trawl found that there was no new tenant advice online for five Council housing providers (Hull, Leeds, St Leger, Warrington, Wolverhampton).

Other Councils had some partial information:

- Dudley – Your New Home, which talks all about tenancy visits
- Sheffield – which is very vague and just talks about landlord commitments
- Wigan – just general tabs to follow for snippets of advice.

Three others had full information for new tenants online:

- Berneslai - 'what to expect when moving in', covering rent, insurance etc.
- Kirklees – 'Moving in and moving out', including what you can expect from your new home
- Nottingham – 'Information for Tenants' - tabs on tenants' safety responsibilities, documents required before renting etc.

PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ It was worrying that only 36% of new tenants reported that they were told about what to expect from the standard during their viewings.
 - ✎ Although the videos for online viewings did say about areas needing work, the panel felt that it wasn't fully emphasised that the new tenant would need to carry these works out when they moved in or live with them.
 - ✎ Although only a small majority of people (54%) said they would like information on the standard before they moved in, the panel felt that it would be helpful to publish a leaflet or similar to manage new tenant expectations better. This would hopefully increase satisfaction levels with new homes.
 - ✎ Panel members were keen for Rotherham to make improvements to help with them being exemplary against other providers, and would prefer both online and printed information for people moving into their new home.
-

Recommendations

Publicised Lettable Standard

Provide a public version of the lettable standard, so that new tenants know what to expect when moving in e.g. decoration, cleanliness, heating. Provide this as both printed and online versions. The information should be compact and easy to read for everyone.

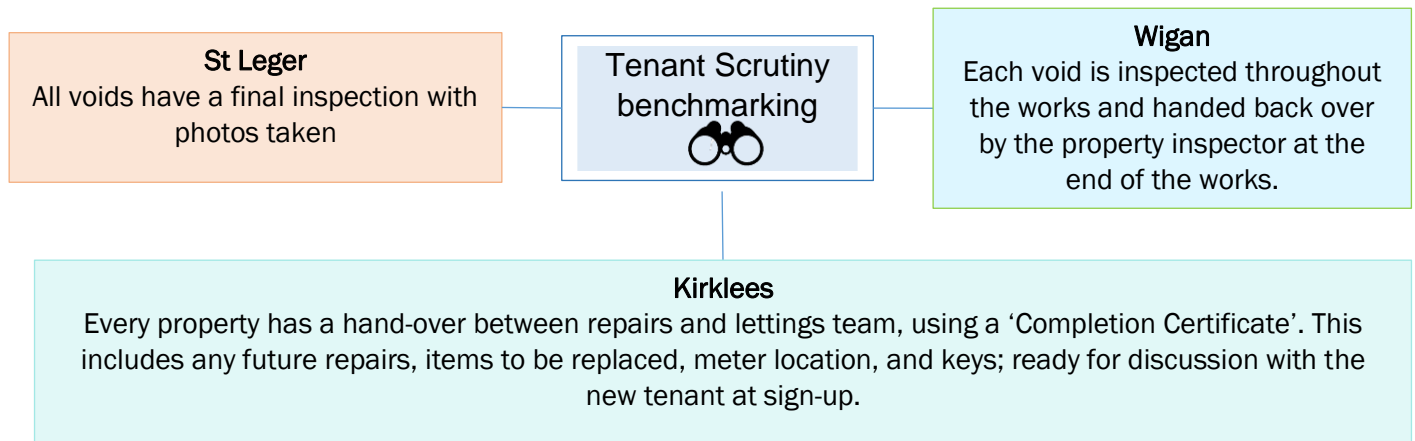
5.8 Quality Assurance/ Customer feedback

Quality checks on void works

Other than the cleaning checks made by supervisors as described in section 5.4, quality audits are also carried out on repairs:

- 100% of all voids are inspected by contract partners before handing back to the voids team
- For all major works, joint handovers take place between contractors and Council officers
- Random spot checks by the voids team for 10% of minor works
- Quality assurance team carry out spot checks on both minor and major works at random.

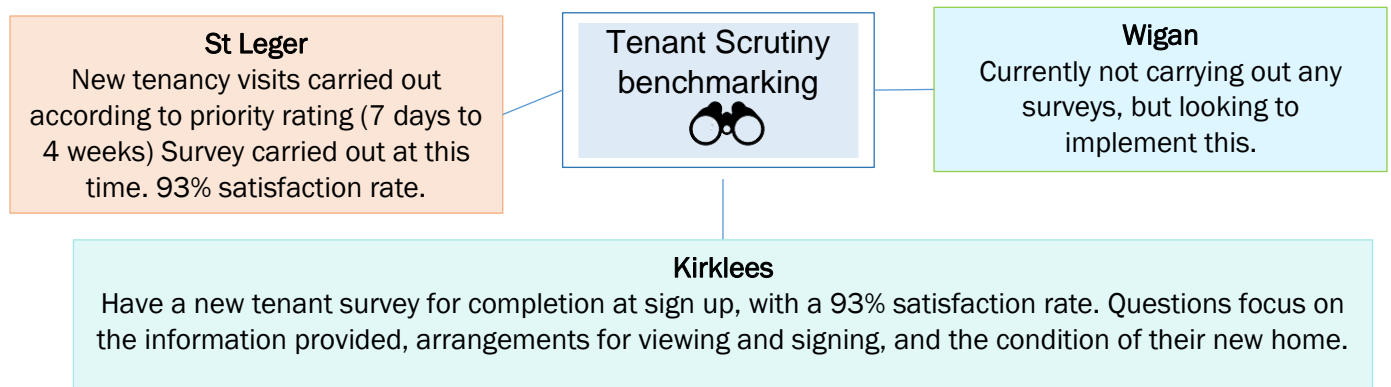
There is a healthy challenge culture across teams (particularly if the same void has been checked) and some items are discussed at contractor meetings.



Customer feedback

During the virtual viewings, Advice Officers will highlight any issues that potential tenants raise whilst watching the videos and feed these back to the voids team.

For all new tenancies, a welcome visit is made by housing officers after six to eight weeks, allowing the new tenant to settle in first. The welcome visit form includes asking new tenants if there are any issues with their new home. Feedback from new tenants is not requested before this time. At the welcome visit, the officer will report any further repairs and issues through to Key Choices or voids team for them to action. Issues raised on the welcome visits form are not collated anywhere central.



Customer complaints

Not many complaints are received by the voids team (less than six each year). Of those that were upheld from May 2021 to May 2023, these related to:

- Central heating, boiler, gas uncapping, water leaks x 6
- Flooring defective
- Leaking roof
- External paving
- Plastering
- Old pipework embedded in plaster
- Property not cleared of soiled clothing
- Pieces of broken glass x 2
- Poor high-level cleaning (tops of cupboards)
- Missing skirting boards

PANEL VIEWS:

- The panel acknowledged that it is difficult to carry out an inspection at the conclusion of all works, but were surprised that other areas can achieve this.
 - Panel members thought that a survey similar to other areas would help to monitor satisfaction levels amongst new tenants and highlight areas that may need improvement in a timelier manner.
 - It would also be useful to collate information from the Welcome Visits to further support contract management and improve standards in new homes.
 - There was some concern that the majority of upheld complaints again seemed to focus on heating and plumbing issues (similar to those issues raised by survey respondents).
-

Recommendations

Sub-standard repairs

Ensure that repairs that are sub-standard or missed by contractors are discussed at every contract performance review meeting (as a standard agenda item) and make sure that remedial actions/ improvements are agreed.

Customer feedback

- Introduce a 'new tenant survey' or similar to provide a feedback system prior to welcome visits taking place.
- Provide a system to collate issues raised at welcome visits to identify trends.

Suggestions

Spot-check targets

Set some targets for spot checks carried out on both cleaning standards and repairs i.e. how many outstanding /missed /unsatisfactory works are allowed/or provide a grading system. Discuss these targets and findings in the Repairs sub-group.

6. Recommendations

Recommendations (in order of priority):

Priority ranking	Recommendation	Page Number
A	Recommendation A: Uncap target Reconsider the target of five days to uncap gas supplies, in particular for vulnerable people and those moving in during winter months.	31
B	Lettable Standard review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review/update the existing lettable standard to assess against those standards used by other similar housing providers. ○ Make arrangements to review again whenever there are changes in legislation or at least every three years. 	21
C	Publicised Lettable Standard Provide a public version of the lettable standard, so that new tenants know what to expect when moving in e.g. decoration, cleanliness, heating. Provide this as both printed and online versions. The information should be compact and easy to read for everyone.	34
D	Outstanding repairs as move in Carry out a review of which repairs can be safely left until after the new tenant has moved in, and make this clear to both contractors and new tenants.	31
E	Plumbing and heating issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop a plan to try and overcome the main issues with contracted void works, such as plumbing and heating issues. ○ Give consideration to gas being uncapped to test heating systems prior to the new tenant moving in. 	31

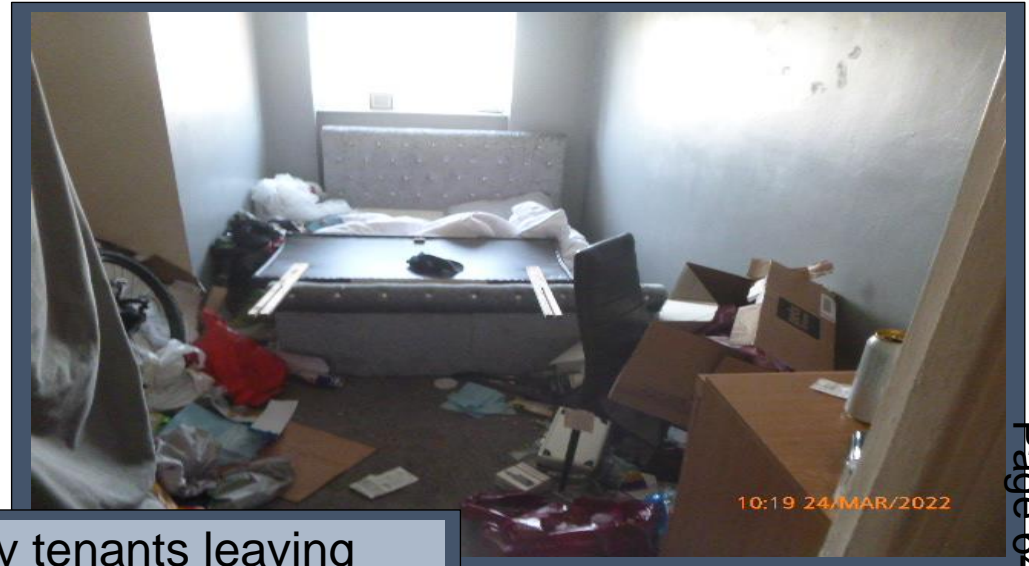
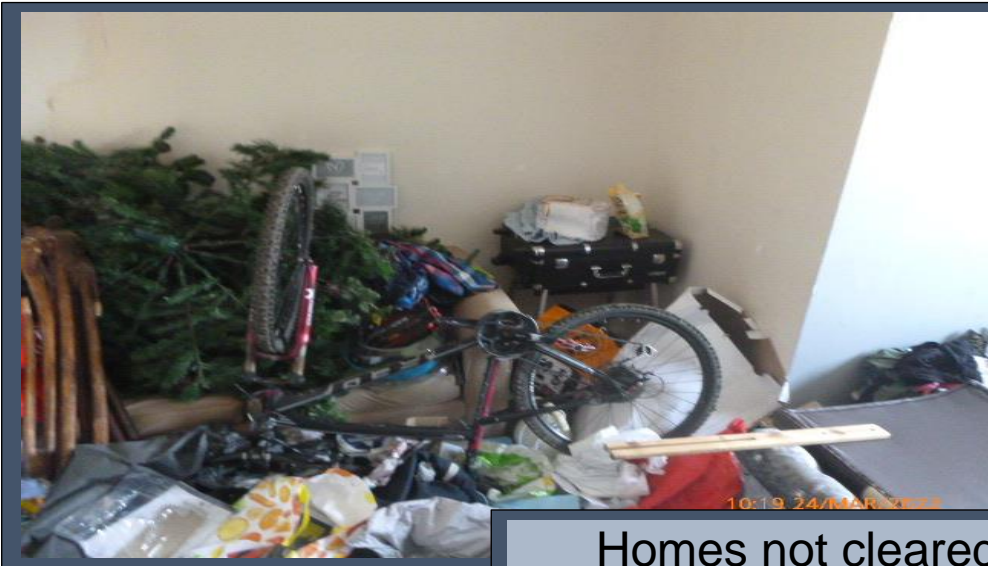
F	Clear properties before cleaning Provide clearer guidance to cleaning staff that they should not clean properties where contractors have left rubbish or where aids such as hospital beds remain in the property.	28
G	Sub-standard repairs Ensure that repairs that are sub-standard or missed by contractors are discussed at every contract performance review meeting (as a standard agenda item) and make sure that remedial actions/ improvements are agreed.	37
H	Customer feedback <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introduce a 'new tenant survey' or similar to provide a feedback system prior to welcome visits taking place. ○ Provide a system to collate issues raised at welcome visits to identify trends. 	37
I	Cleaning staff working conditions Give consideration to improving working conditions for cleaning staff, in particular lighting and hot water.	28
J	Tenancy termination letters Make changes to the tenancy termination letters as summarised in the report to make them easier to understand and consider whether to also provide these online.	15
K	Items left by vacating tenants Provide more clarity and emphasise the agreement when new tenants sign up for items left by vacating tenants such as outbuildings and decking.	21

Suggestions	
1.	<p>Spot-check targets</p> <p>Set some targets for spot checks carried out on both cleaning standards and repairs i.e. how many outstanding /missed /unsatisfactory works are allowed/or provide a grading system. Discuss these targets and findings in the Repairs Sub-group.</p>
2.	<p>ASSA Cliq key monitoring</p> <p>Monitor the efficient use of ASSA Cliq keys to make sure that operatives are not re-entering void properties following cleaning and that locks are changed immediately after cleaning is completed.</p>
3.	<p>On-site viewings</p> <p>Reconsider the option of in-person viewings being offered to ensure that people can see conditions and receive an explanation of standards on-site. (This suggestion will be investigated further during the next tenant scrutiny topic; Voids – support to new tenants).</p>
4.	<p>Pre-contract meetings</p> <p>Provide feedback on the feasibility of conducting pre-contract meetings on site with contractors, similar to the arrangements for other housing providers, costing out the existing contractor-led approach versus pre-contract arrangements.</p>

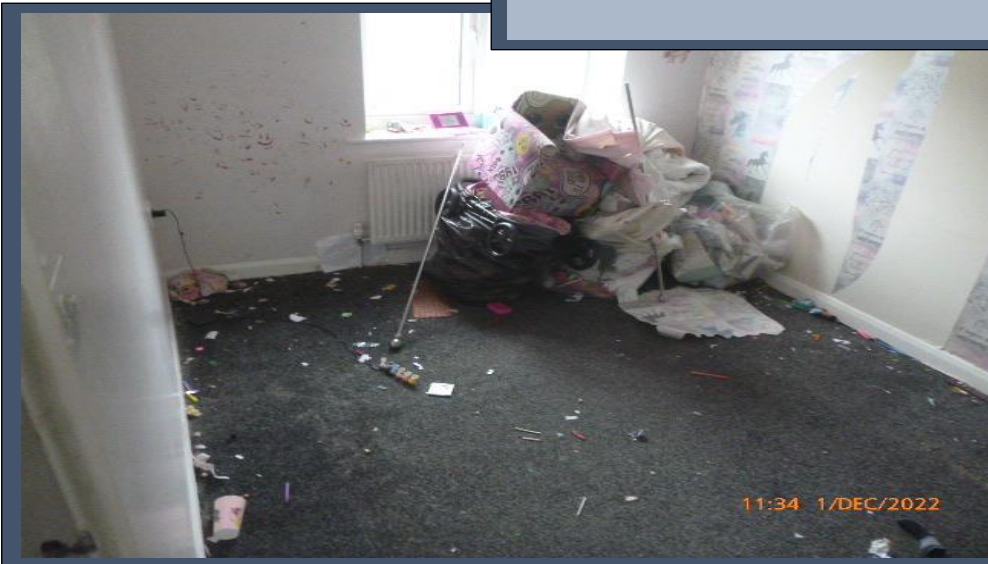
7. Appendices

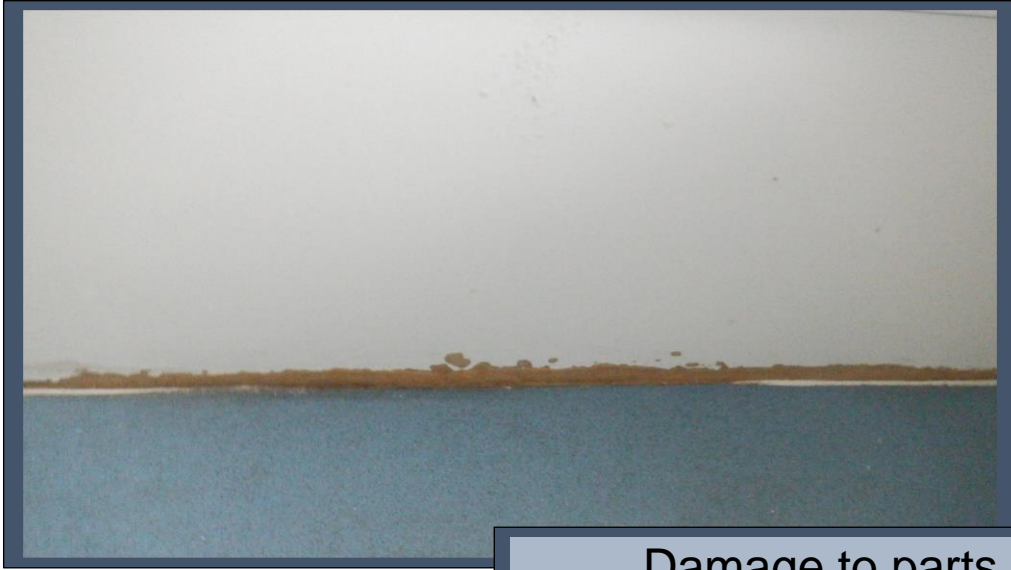
- 1 – Photographs of some of the properties visited
- 2 - Communications with vacating tenant
- 3 – Tenant Scrutiny comments on Rotherham termination letters
- 4 – Summary of full comparison of lettable standards across benchmarking providers
- 5 – Cleaning specification checklist

Appendix 1 - Photographs from some of the void properties visited



Homes not cleared by tenants leaving





Damage to parts of the properties

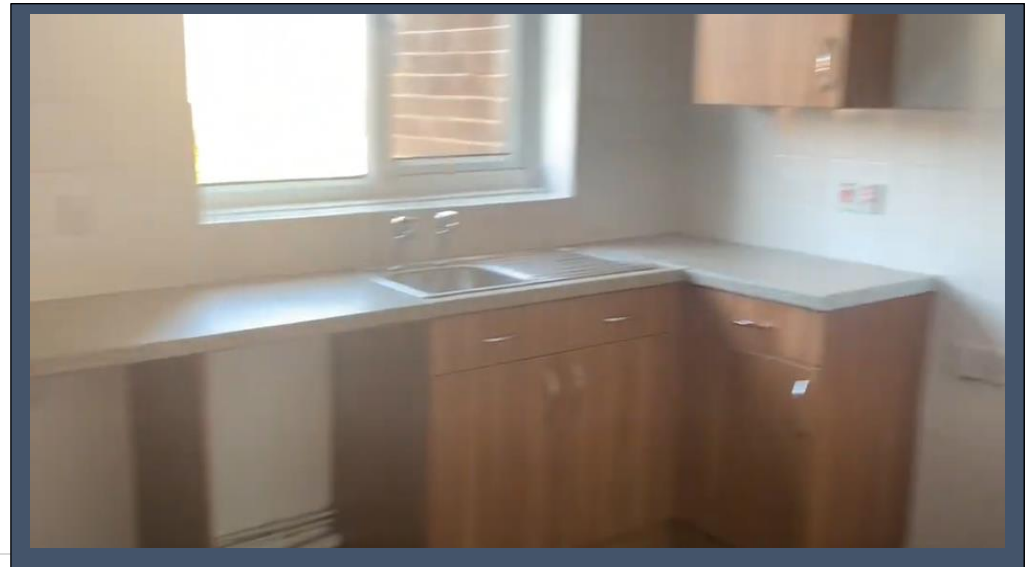
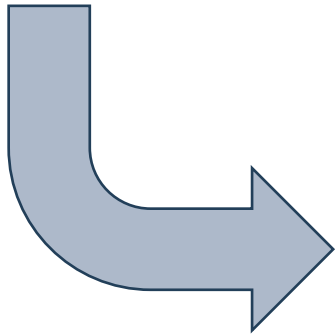


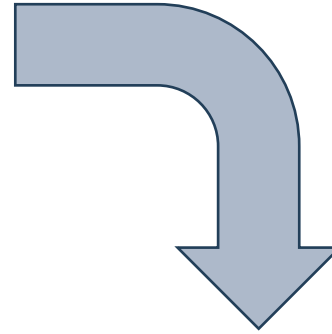
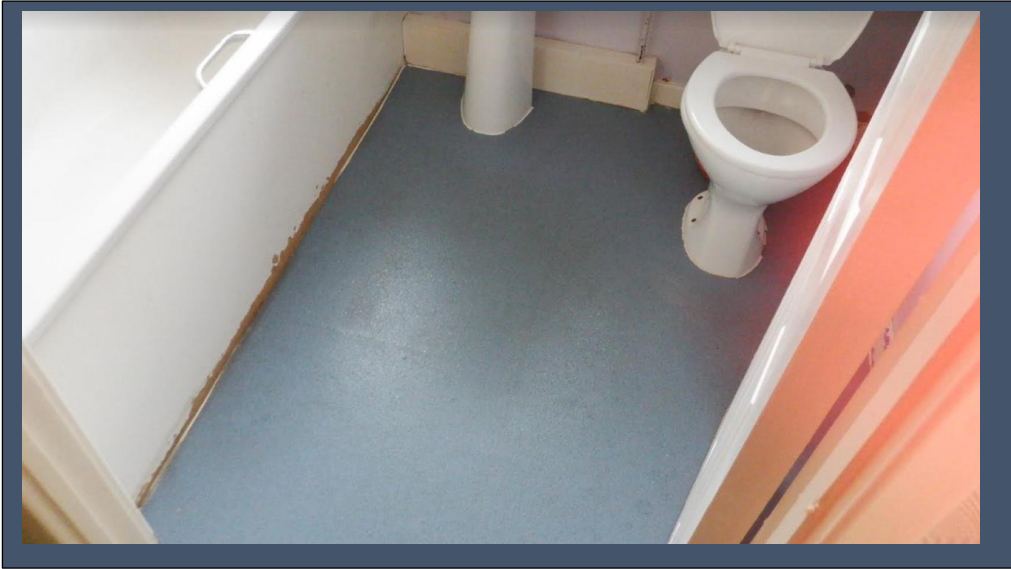


Damage to garden and items left behind,
including large play equipment

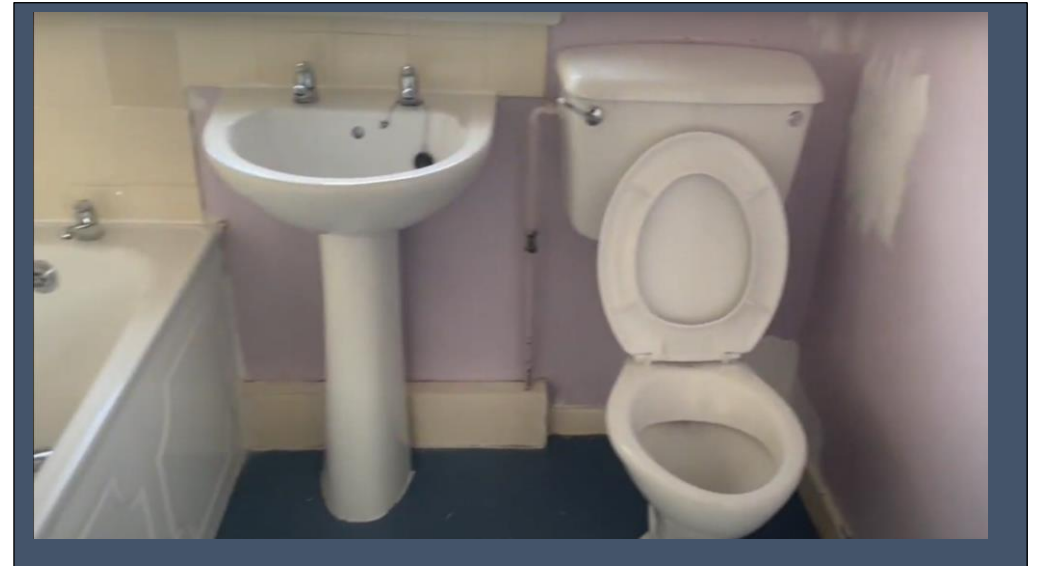


Before and after – new kitchen window





Before and after – new bath panel fitted



Appendix 2 - Communications with vacating tenant

Barneslai - online:

- Ending your tenancy – can notify online
- Moving to another property
- Letting us know someone has died
- After you've given notice:
 - Clearing the property
 - Rent payments
 - Gas, electric, water
 - Post
 - Property condition inside
 - Gardens and outside
 - If you need to extend your notice

Kirklees – leaflet:

- Four weeks' notice and termination online form
- Paying your rent – till tenancy ends
- Belongings left in property – charged for removal/ bulky waste charges/ recycling sites
- Removal of Gas installations – cookers and fires
- Meter readings – on leaving day
- Turning off supplies – gas/electric/water and open taps in winter
- Improvements made during tenancy – list of things that may be reimbursed (charge for removal of unauthorised works)
- Next steps – key safe outside to drop keys in
- Moving Out Checklist – tick boxes

St Leger – fact sheet:

- How to give notice – in person – complete a form
- How much notice – four weeks unless to another Council home or residential care
- Anything I don't want – remove everything or get charged
- Before hand keys in – must be unoccupied, clear of everything and clean. Fill in fish ponds and sand pits in garden.
- Changes made to home – must be replaced/ fixed, or will be charged
- Carpets and curtains – check with Empty Homes team
- Security alarms – hand in keys and codes
- Extending notice period – apply to St Leger
- Retract notice – in writing within four weeks
- Hand in keys – Monday 12 o clock
- Rent owed – legal action
- Furnished tenancies – furniture collected before they leave
- Unwanted furniture – charged for removal. List of charities that collect
- Bulky waste – phone number (small charge)
- Moving out checklist
- Contacts

Wigan – letter

- Keys – hand-in arrangements
- Gas and Electric – British Gas take over day after move out
- Security (alarms)
- Rent – and recovery of debts
- Housing benefit – cancelled once move out
- Pre-termination inspections and rechargeable repairs – all inspected. Charged for removal of furniture and rubbish left; cleaning if in poor state; putting back things that have been removed; putting right any unsatisfactory alterations; renewing locks if less than two keys handed in.
- Meter Readings – final readings
- Advertisement – advertised in weekly property list
- Further help – if can't settle account

Appendix 3 – Full list of tenant scrutiny comments on termination letters

All documents

Layout -ve

- Need page numbers.

Layout +ve

- Clear and straightforward.

Accessibility -ve

- Is it available in different formats like braille, audio, large print or easy read?
- Needs to be available in different languages.
- Lots of Council jargon – see separate slides for lists.

Content / clarity +ve

- Useful contact numbers are good.
- Additional information is clear and makes sense on the whole.

Layout -ve

- Need to be able to tick more than one box for reason to quit.

Accessibility -ve

- Council jargon and phrases that are difficult to understand:
 - Notice to Quit
 - Tenancy notice period
 - Legally binding
 - Forwarding address
 - Fixtures and fittings
 - Put right the damage
- Section six – is very complicated and confusing (would cause anxiety). The panel feel that this could be clearer.

Content / clarity -ve

- Letter - It is not a 'request to end' but a notice
- Letter - Doesn't say where to hand keys in to – needs an address
- Letter - Needs to define 'empty property'
- Section One – the tenancy address may not be the current address if they have moved out already
- Section One – needs more explanation of what happens if only one person leaving

Content / clarity -ve

- Section Two - Needs the option of 'prefer not to say' and 'other reason' boxes on reason for leaving
- Section Two - Should you ask for more information about domestic abuse as well as hate crime?
- Section Three – needs to be clear that you mean where you will live after leaving this home (some people may already have left too)

Content / clarity -ve

- Section Four - The garage notice period is shorter and so needs to be a separate form (They will need the garage up until moving in to their new property)
- Section six – do people know what 'good condition' means?
- Section six - Panel is not happy that people can look around your home before it is vacated – this part of the form needs re-wording

Layout +ve

- The information is good as it's set out in sections It would be better as a checklist you could tick off.

Accessibility -ve

- Council jargon and phrases that are difficult to understand -
 - Legally binding
 - If applicable
 - Bulky items (needs further description)
 - Fixtures and Fittings
 - Rectified
 - Liable to pay
 - Confirmation
 - Remedy damage

Content / clarity -ve

- Letter - 'Encourages' tenants to clear – shouldn't this be 'must' or 'expect'
- Letter - No mention of arrangements for leaving items behind – how to get permission.
- Letter - Needs to be clear that you are charged for bulky items.
- Next steps - Should repeat where to hand keys in to.
- Next steps - Furniture package section needs re-wording for clarity. What do you leave and what goes? Don't think 'be left in the property' is needed, as later it says to contact a number.

Content queries

- If technical officers visit before the tenancy has finished why are they left in such a state?
- If the tenancy is finished early why can't one rent be stopped. Avoiding the tenant from paying two rents.
- Housing Benefit - You aren't allowed housing benefit on two properties at once how does this work when ending one council tenancy and starting another council tenancy.

Content queries

- Removal service - Who will help disabled people to get items outside for the removal service 'bulky items'?
- Property keys - How does the end of tenancy work if you are moving to another council property? Often you do not get the keys in advance, so you would not be able to get keys at midday Monday and hand keys in on the same midday Monday. Has any council officer followed this process or a customer on the journey?

Appendix 4 - Summary of the full comparison of lettable standards across benchmark

	Rotherham	Kirklees	St Leger	Wigan	Warrington	Red Kite	STAR
Loft insulation	Existing loft insulation laid equally				Loft insulated to 250mm	270mm	Insulated
Balustrade to stairs	Replaced if missing/damaged				Replaced if missing/damaged	Replaced	
Internal doors	Kitchen door?				Kitchen door half hour fire rated with door closers		
Electric sockets	????	Adequate			4 double sockets in kitchen and living room, 2 doubles in bedrooms, 1 double in hall and landing		Minimum 5 single in kitchen and 4 singles in all other rooms
Removal of gas fires	Removed and wall/flue made good				Removed and fireplace bricked up	Removed and bricked up	

	Rotherham	Kirklees	St Leger	Wigan	Warrington	Red Kite	STAR
Smoke / heat/CO detectors	Test – but no mention of how many CO detector – need to seek authorisation to fit	Heat detector in kitchen Smoke alarms each floor – hall and landing CO detector adjacent to flued gas appliances				Hallway, landing, living room and heat detector in kitchen	
Sink taps	Check that taps on right sides (R cold, Left hot)						
Plumbing	Not sure if flushed?	Any dead legs in pipework removed All pipework flushed					
Heating	Programme not mentioned	Programmable					
Toilets	Limescale removed					Cleaning fluid left in all toilets	
Hot water cylinder	No mention	Compliant			Jacket provided for cylinder		Insulated
Stop tap	No mention			Accessible	Eased		Turns freely

	Rotherham	Kirklees	St Leger	Wigan	Warrington	Red Kite	STAR
Shower head	Replaced shower head and hose every time				Disinfected or replaced		
Shower curtain	New every time						
Missing baths	Not mentioned?					Not replaced if previously removed to fit a shower	
Extractor fan	????	Mechanical extracting in kitchen and bathroom			Serviced		
Polystyrene tiles	Removed			Removed	Removed	Removed	
Plastering	'Smooth for decoration'				Smooth finish		
Internal doors		Any glazed doors replaced					
Decoration Allowance	No mention?				If supported/ sheltered housing	For sheltered homes or elderly/disabled tenants	Decorating packs supplied
Graffiti/ mould	Halophane paint used to cover mould					Decorated	

	Rotherham	Kirklees	St Leger	Wigan	Warrington	Red Kite	STAR
	and other paint for graffiti						
Air fresheners	Yes					All around the house	
Carpet grippers and nails	Unnecessary nails, screws and fixings removed					Removed	
Lightbulbs						Low energy bulbs fitted in entrance, landing, lounge, and bathroom	
Curtain battens							In every room
Behind radiators	Clean as far as possible to rear	As far as possible		Clean behind all radiators			
External Windows	Correctly fixed				Putty replaced if damaged		Cleaned outside at ground floor level
First floor windows	Restrictors fitted				Restrictors fitted		

	Rotherham	Kirklees	St Leger	Wigan	Warrington	Red Kite	STAR
EXTERNAL							
External doors	Number fitted				Spy hole and draught excluder fitted		
Clothes post	No mention?					Not fitted	
Security screen	No mention?					Fitted during void and removed day before occupancy	
Paths	No mention of sweeping, but does say laid so water runs off	Swept					
Outdoor lighting	No mention?	Adequate and suitably located					
Fencing	Repair if possible. Remove if dangerous. Only provide replacement if requested by client.	Fencing to the front of the property will be repaired/replaced where required		Fencing and gates replaced only at the front, not rear unless on to public land			

	Rotherham	Kirklees	St Leger	Wigan	Warrington	Red Kite	STAR
Air bricks	Mention air bricks not obstructed and are vermin/water proof						
Outbuilding	Change the lock						

Appendix 5 - Cleaning Standard Checklist

Property Address: _____

Deep Clean: Yes / No

Electricity in Property: Yes / No

Clean all kitchen work surfaces and grease from, fans, walls and ceilings	Tick when checked/cleaned
All work surfaces to be cleaned thoroughly and all traces of food and grease or any other type of stains removed	
Any paint drips to be removed	
Work surfaces to be disinfected	
Shadows caused by heated appliances to be removed	
No wipe marks or smears to be left on the surfaces	
Grease on fans, walls and ceilings to be removed	
Clean all kitchen units and cupboards (internally and externally)	Tick when checked/cleaned
All surfaces of the kitchen units to be cleaned thoroughly. Pay particular attention to the sides of the cooker, fridge and washer space	
All door and unit edges to be cleaned and particular attention given to the finger pulls on unit doors.	
All shelving to the kitchen units to be cleaned including the underside of shelves	
The kick boards and any other trims to be thoroughly cleaned and no dirt or rubbish is to be left between kick boards and floor or unit sides and walls	
Clean all wall tiles in property	Tick when checked/cleaned
All wall tiles within the property to be thoroughly cleaned to remove all dirt and grease	
All grout, mastic joints and corners to be cleaned	
Tiles to be disinfected	
Clean Bathroom Suite and WC	Tick when checked/cleaned
Bath and wash hand basin, including brassware to be thoroughly cleaned	
All stains to be removed including lime residue from the washbasin or bath caused by dripping taps	
Paint splashes to be removed from any items of the suite	
Floor to be disinfected	
Remove/scrape WC pan to remove all lime scale deposits	
Label left attached to WC to confirm clean	
WC to be cleaned to front, rear and all pipework including waste pipe	
Clean down all interior paintwork, doors, skirting boards and architraves	Tick when checked/cleaned
Remove all dirt and debris from tops of skirting boards and architraves throughout the property	
Wipe clean skirting boards and architraves throughout the property to remove dirt and grease	
Wipe dirt and stains from all door faces and casings (internal and external) and from any other areas of paintwork within the property	
Clear debris and dirt from door threshold strips (internal and external)	
Remove dirt from the rear of all central heating pipe work	

Clean fronts of all radiators and as far as possible to the rear	
Windows	Tick when checked/cleaned
All internal windows to be cleaned and buffed	
All smears to be removed from windows	
Sweep all floors to property including staircase treads	Tick when checked/cleaned
Sweep all floors to the property to remove all dirt and debris	
Remove all rubbish from open floor board joints	
Clean dirt and debris from all corners of rooms	
Deodorise rooms as necessary	Tick when checked/cleaned
All rooms in property to be deodorised with a suitable agent	
Leave internal doors open for air circulation	
Mop all hard floors	Tick when checked/cleaned
All hard floors (including storage cupboards) to be swept, mopped clean and disinfected	
Particular attention should be paid to the removal of scuffmarks and paint splashes	
Mopped/cleaned floors are to be left clear of bad smearing	
Vacuum clean any carpets left in property	Tick when checked/cleaned
Carpets which the Void Technical Officer allow to be left in the property will be vacuumed and cleaned to a good standard	
All timber/chip board flooring to be hoovered and cleaned to a good standard without using water/liquids	
Remove all cobwebs from property	Tick when checked/cleaned
Sweep all corners, window frames and cupboards to remove all cobwebs from the property	
Leave air freshener in each room of property	Tick when checked/cleaned
Deodorise all rooms	
If property is accessed via a communal area, leave deodorising block in communal entrance way	
Clean external doors	Tick when checked/cleaned
External doors are to be free from dirt, dust and cobwebs, including door surround and door cills (inside and outside)	

To be completed by a member of staff upon completion of cleaning to the property;

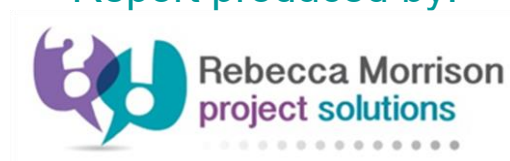
Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Comments:

Report produced by:



rebecca.morrisonps@gmail.com

07931 471131

On behalf of:



Rotherham Federation

Tenant Scrutiny Review- Void Lettable Standard

Progress/indicator RAG status	
	Work is significantly behind schedule and no progress has been made, and/or Progress has been made but the timescale has not been achieved
	Progress is being made, progress is good, and the action is likely to be achieved within timescale. Or the action has been completed but evidence is required to demonstrate achievement
	The action has been completed and there is a record of evidence to support its completion.

Recommendation (in priority order)	Lead Officer	Actions	Target Date	RAG Status	Update
Recommendation A: Uncap and test target. Reconsider the target of five days to uncap gas supplies, for vulnerable people and those moving in during winter months	Void Supervisor	Review the process for ensuring both gas and electric supplies are cleared of debt and transferred to the new tenant, to prevent a delay to the uncap and test for the new tenant.	November 2023	Complete	A 3-stage process has been developed and implemented to ensure the energy supply is cleared of debt and transferred to the new tenant to ensure that it does not delay the uncap and test.
	Partnering Manager	Establish a performance management framework to monitor the availability of a minimum of eight appointment slots per day for gas uncaps, per contractor.	November 2023	Complete	Contractors have Key Performance Indicator's for availability of eight appointment slots per day. This is performance managed on a weekly basis by the Gas, Electrical and Mechanical supervisor.
	Partnering Manager	Review the average turnaround time to establish whether further slots are required and the associated costs.	August 2024	On timescale	Discussions to take place with Mears and Equans to understand costs associated with further appointment slots availability.
	Partnering Manager	Investigate the possibility of leaving gas and electricity supply on	November 2023	Complete	There is a health and safety risk with leaving gas and electric live in

Tenant Scrutiny Review- Void Lettable Standard

		throughout the void works so that meters do not need to be uncapped.			empty homes. Benchmarking has been undertaken with other housing providers which identified that most organisations isolate both gas and electric whilst the property is void for the same reason. Therefore, the supplies will continue to be capped to mitigate against potential risks.
	Partnering Manager Housing Advice and Assessment Manager	Review and update documentation provided to tenants on tenancy sign up to ensure tenants are aware of the importance of organising the gas uncap as soon as possible and that once complete they will start to incur standing charges.	August 2024	In progress	Information regarding standing charges is currently being developed.
Recommendation B: Lettable Standard review. Review/update the existing lettable standard to assess against those standards used by other similar housing providers. Plan to review again whenever there are changes in legislation or at least every three years.	Partnering Manager	Undertake a review of the lettable standard.	November 2024	In progress	Benchmarking will be undertaken with other housing providers and a consultation process will be undertaken with tenants. The review will be undertaken as part of a wider review of the Repairs and Maintenance policy.
	Partnering Manager	Review policy on renewing boundary fencing whilst the property is void.	November 2023	Complete.	To renew boundary fencing as part of the void would significantly increase the costs. Therefore, fencing is only removed if in poor condition or a safety risk.

Tenant Scrutiny Review- Void Lettable Standard

					This is reviewed by the voids technical officer on a property-by-property basis, fencing is only installed based on any health and safety risks (if there was a fall from heights) The tenancy agreement states that fencing is Tenants responsibility.
	Voids Supervisor	Investigate if temporary front doors are installed with spyholes.	August 2023	Complete	<p>Instruction has been given to fit spyholes in all temporary front doors.</p> <p>All external front doors are installed with Spyholes. In the instance where a temporary door is fitted during a void, due to a new door on order, the tenant will be informed of timescales for the new door to be fitted prior to moving in.</p>
	Partnering Manager Service Operations Manager	Review the cleaning Standard to see if cleaning is carried out behind radiators.	August 2023	Complete	<p>Long thin dusters have been purchased which assists in reaching behind radiators. This is conducted by the cleaning team on the final clean.</p> <p>Checks are to be included in future 100% handovers conducted by Void Technical Officers.</p>
	Voids	Review whether all carpet grippers	August 2023	Complete	Carpet grippers are now being

Tenant Scrutiny Review- Void Lettable Standard

	Supervisor	should be removed, and floor area made good.			removed whilst the property is void.
	Voids Supervisor	Review if extractor fans are fitted whilst property is void.	Implemented	Complete	Fans are currently fitted in void properties where one is not present or not operating in the bathroom and kitchen.
	Partnering Manager	Review if decoration allowance is offered and when is it offered.	November 2023	Complete	Currently there is no decoration allowance granted as the properties are brought up to a standard to allow new tenant to decorate, however in exceptional circumstances, if a property is in a poor decorative state a decoration allowance can be granted by the Housing Advice and Assessment Team.
Recommendation C. Publicised Lettable Standard Provide a public version of the lettable standard, so that new tenants know what to expect when moving in e.g., decoration, cleanliness, heating. Provide this as both printed and online versions. The information should be compact and easy to read for everyone.	Voids Supervisor Partnering Manager Project Development Officer	Produce a user-friendly version of the lettable standard which sets out the expectations for the new tenant. (i.e., stripping wallpaper Etc).	November 2024	In progress	Housing Property Services to develop a tenant friendly guide to the lettable standard with a view to making it accessible on the internet and in the handover pack provided to new tenants. Will be developed in partnership with the Screen Team (our tenant communications forum).
Recommendation D. Outstanding repairs as tenants move in.					
	Partnering	Increase the number of quality	February 2024	Complete	100% of works are checked by

Tenant Scrutiny Review- Void Lettable Standard

Conduct a review of which repairs can be safely left until after the new tenant has moved in and make this clear to both contractors and new tenants.	Manager Voids Supervisor	assurance checks on void properties to ensure all repairs have been completed.			supervisors working for contractors. Processes have been revised to increase the number of quality assurance checks by RMBC Technical Officers. Currently all major voids are inspected on handover, the increase would be on minor voids, we are currently unable to inspect all minor voids with current staffing levels.
	Partnering Manager	Provide information on reporting damp & mould to the tenant on tenancy sign up.	August 2024	In progress	Letter to be amended to include information on damp and mould.
	Partnering Manager	Provide Training to all staff on identifying and reporting Damp and Mould to ensure it is dealt with before the property is re-let.	December 2023	Complete	Damp and Mould training has been provided to housing staff and contractors to highlight the importance of identifying and treating mould.
	Partnering Manager	Ensure that information on planned work to be undertaken after the property is let is communicated to tenants so they are aware of timescales of work to be carried out.	June 2024	In progress	Develop process for recording repairs and communicating to tenants.
Recommendation E. Plumbing and heating issues	Partnering Manager	Investigate if the heating system can be tested once works are	April 2024	Complete	Currently Gas safety checks are conducted at the beginning of the void before being Cap off, this

Tenant Scrutiny Review- Void Lettable Standard

<p>Develop a plan to try and overcome the key issues with contracted void works, such as plumbing and heating issues.</p> <p>Consider gas being uncapped to test heating systems prior to the new tenant moving in.</p>		complete before letting to the tenant.			highlights any potential repairs/replacements that require carrying out. An additional safety check at the end of the voids work would come at an additional cost. The service would not have the capacity to accommodate the additional gas check
	Partnering Manager	Review Quality assurance handover form to include checks for the heating system/boiler, plumbing (flush toilet/taps)	August 2024	Amber	<p>Amend the Quality Assurance form to include a visual inspection the Heating system to be carried out on handover.</p> <p>Checklist to include visual inspections of the Boiler, Boiler pressure, Radiators, and pipework.</p>
	Partnering Manager Voids Supervisor	Review Legionella process to ensure that checks are being carried out and documented correctly.	November 2023	Complete	Checks are being undertaken and documented on a spreadsheet. KPI in place for monitoring by Senior Management Team
<p>Recommendation F. Clear properties before cleaning.</p> <p>Provide clearer guidance to cleaning staff that they should not clean properties where contractors have left rubbish or where aids such as hospital beds</p>	Partnering Manager Voids Supervisor	Increase the number of quality assurance checks on void properties to ensure all repairs have been completed.	August 2024	In progress	<p>100% of works are checked by supervisors working for contractors.</p> <p>Processes have been revised to increase the number of quality assurance checks by Technical Officers. Currently all major voids are inspected on handover, the increase would be on minor voids,</p>

Tenant Scrutiny Review- Void Lettable Standard

remain in the property.					we are currently unable to inspect all minor voids with current staffing levels.
	Voids Supervisor	Review process to ensure that the contract partner is not in the property when the cleaning teams attend.	June 2023	Complete	The process has been changed ensure that the contract partner is not present during the clean.
Recommendation G. Sub-standard repairs Ensure that repairs that are sub-standard or missed by contractors are discussed at every contract performance review meeting (as a standard agenda item) and make sure that remedial actions/ improvements are agreed.	Partnering Manager	Increase the number of quality assurance checks on void.	April 2024	Complete	100% of works are checked by supervisors working for contractors.
	Voids Supervisor				Processes have been revised to increase the number of quality assurance checks by Technical Officers. Currently all major voids are inspected on handover, the increase would be on minor voids, we are currently unable to inspect all minor voids with current staffing levels.
	Voids Supervisor	Add a re-occurring agenda item on issues identified within voids to the monthly operational contract meeting for discussion.	March 2024	Complete	Both Repairs and handovers to be added to monthly agenda to discuss. Void Supervisor to start up meeting with each partner.
Recommendation H. Customer feedback Introduce a 'new tenant survey' or similar to provide a feedback system prior to welcome visits taking place.	Advice and Assessment Manager	Implement a customer satisfaction survey for lettings	November 2024	In progress	Meetings have commenced to review the new Tenant Welcome Pack. The survey will be incorporated as part of this work.

Tenant Scrutiny Review- Void Lettable Standard

Provide a system to collate issues raised at welcome visits to identify trends.					
Recommendation I. Cleaning staff working conditions. Consider improving working conditions for cleaning staff, in particular lighting and hot water	Service Operations Manager Partnering Manager	Investigate if hot water storage can be provided to cleaning team.	November 2023	Complete	This has been investigated and will not be progressed because the chemicals used are effective in cold water, best practice states not to use hot water. The products used are assessed for their effectiveness in communal areas and Void properties. It is not possible to carry hot water around in fleet vehicles. In addition, hot water presents a safety risk to cleaning operatives.
	Service Operations Manager Partnering Manager	Investigate if cleaning teams can use flood lighting.	November 2023.	Complete	This has been investigated and will not be progressed because the crew cabs are already full of cleaning products and equipment required for the job. Many require a source of electricity to work. All staff have been provided with head torches that effectively light the way to an electricity box. If there is no electricity in the property and it is not light enough for them to undertake the required duties the clean would not be completed. Please note that all cleaning duties are carried out during daylight hours. Very few properties are gridded so there is no

Tenant Scrutiny Review- Void Lettable Standard

	Service Operations Manager	Explore solutions to assist in cleaning behind radiators.	November 2023.	Complete	Long thin dusters have recently been purchased which assists in reaching behind radiators. This is conducted by the cleaning team on the final clean.
Recommendation J. Tenancy termination letters	Housing Services Officer	Update the tenancy termination letters as summarised in the report to make them easier to understand and consider whether to also provide these online.	November 2024	In progress	Letters are currently being reviewed.
Recommendation K. Items left by vacating tenants. Provide more clarity and emphasise the agreement when new tenants sign up for items left by vacating tenants such as outbuildings and decking.	Voids Supervisor Advice and Assessment Manager	Develop a process for items left in properties and hand over to new tenants.	August 2024	In progress	Process to be developed.

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Public Report
Improving Places Select Commission

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 19 March 2024

Report Title

Update: Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review - Improving Communication with Tenants

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

Report Author(s)

James Smith, Tenant Engagement Manager, Adult Care, Housing and Public Health.
01709 808131

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

A report detailing the Tenant Scrutiny Panel review of how the Council communicates with tenants, together with a number of recommendations, was presented to Improving Places Select Commission on 21st March 2023.

IPSC requested that an update be provided in 12 months' time.

This report and the accompanying presentation to be delivered at the meeting, provides an overall summary of progress made in response to the recommendations and the associated action plan.

Recommendations

1. That the Improving Places Select Commission note the progress made in delivering the scrutiny review action plan.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1: IPSC Report Tenant Scrutiny Review of Communications

Appendix 2: Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review Action Plan.

Appendix 3: Presentation detailing progress to date.

Background Papers

Meeting Minutes, Improving Places Select Commission, 21st March 2023.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None.

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public
No

Update: Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review - Improving Communication with Tenants

1. Background

- 1.1 Since its inception in 2016, the Tenant Scrutiny Panel has undertaken several tenant scrutiny reviews of various aspects of the Council's Housing Services. The reviews have subsequently been reported to the Improving Places Select Commission.
- 1.2 Tenant Scrutiny Panel reviews have provided an ongoing opportunity for customers to work collaboratively with the Council, to look at various aspects of landlord service delivery, from a customer perspective, and to develop recommendations and actions for service improvement.
- 1.3 The Review set out nine recommendations and four further suggestions for service improvement which are detailed in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.
- 1.4 The scrutiny review was undertaken in the context of the publication of the Social Housing White Paper but prior to the publication of the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards. However, the recommendations and associated outcomes of the review directly contribute towards the Council delivering the outcomes and expectations of the new consumer standards. Specifically, the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard, which requires that:
 - Registered Providers must ensure that communication with and information for tenants is clear, accessible, relevant, timely and appropriate to the diverse needs of tenants.
 - Registered Providers must ensure that landlord services are accessible, and that the accessibility is publicised to tenants. This includes supporting tenants and prospective tenants to use online landlord services if required.
 - Registered providers must communicate with tenants and provide information so tenants can use landlord services, understand what to expect from their landlord, and hold their landlord to account.
 - Registered providers must provide tenants with information about the available landlord services, how to access those services, and the standards of service tenants can expect.
- 1.5 The scrutiny review has contributed to the wider work being undertaken to ensure that the Council provides information about its housing services, which is fully accessible to tenants and that information and communication is publicised in a clear, relevant, and timely way that is appropriate to the diverse needs of Council tenants.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel developed nine recommendations and four further suggestions to improve communications with tenants.

- 2.2 The recommendations and associated actions have required the involvement of other services within the Council, in terms of scoping of actions and delivery.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel developed nine recommendations and four further suggestions which have been responded to through the delivery of the associated action plan.
- 3.2 Appendix 2 details the actions agreed, and progress made is detailed in Appendix 3, the presentation which will be delivered to the IPSC meeting.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 Consultation on the proposal is documented within Appendix 1, which is the original IPSC report presented on 21st March 2023.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The original timetable of activity, detailed in Appendix 1, has been met.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications. Any costs because of this activity are already included in the base budget.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 There are no substantive legal issues arising from the content of this report.
- 7.2 The recommendations and findings within assist the Council with its preparation for the introduction of the Consumer Standards by the Regulator for Social Housing.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no HR implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 Improved accessibility to landlord services and improved communication opportunities positively benefit children, young people and vulnerable adults.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Details of the assessment outlining equalities and human rights implications can be found in Appendix 1.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 Details of the assessment outlining CO₂ emissions and climate change can be found in Appendix 1

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 Details of the assessment outlining Implications for partners can be found in Appendix 1.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The key risk identified within the report at Appendix 1 was successfully addressed through the development, monitoring and delivery of the review action plan.

Accountable Officer(s)

James Clark, Assistant Director of Housing
Paul Walsh, Head of Service, Housing and Estate Management

James Smith, Tenant Engagement Manager
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Public Report
Improving Places Select Commission

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 21 March 2023

Report Title

Tenants Scrutiny Panel action plan update - Improving Communication with Tenants

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Ian Spicer, Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

Report Author(s)

Lynsey Skidmore, Housing Operations Manager, Adult Care, Housing and Public Health. 01709 334950

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel is a key component of the Council's Tenant Engagement Framework, enabling tenants to scrutinise landlord services and standards with the aim of improving performance, value for money and tenant satisfaction.

The Panel is facilitated by Rotherfed on behalf of the Council and consists of tenant and resident representatives from across the Borough.

The Panel has completed a review of how the Council communicates with tenants, with reference to the requirements within the Social Housing White Paper. The report detailing the Panel's findings is attached as Appendix 1.

Following completion of the Tenant Scrutiny Review, the report and recommendations were discussed with the Housing Service and other relevant council services and an action plan agreed to support delivery of the recommendations.

This report provides the Improving Places Select Commission with a summary of the findings of the review and the associated action plan.

Recommendations

1. That Improving Places Select Commission note the outcome of the Tenant Scrutiny Review, the actions proposed to deal with each recommendation and progress to date.
2. That a further report detailing progress is presented to Improving Places Select Commission in 12 months time.

List of Appendices Included

- **Appendix 1** Tenants Scrutiny Panel Review - Investigation into how Rotherham Council could improve its communications with tenants.
- **Appendix 2** Tenants Scrutiny Review Action Plan.
- **Appendix 3** Initial Equality Screening (Part A).
- **Appendix 4** Equality Analysis Form (Part B).
- **Appendix 5** Carbon Impact Assessment.

Background Papers

None.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None.

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

1. Background

- 1.1 Since its inception in 2016, the Tenant Scrutiny Panel has undertaken several tenant scrutiny reviews of various aspects of the Council's Housing Services. The reviews have subsequently been reported to the Improving Places Select Commission.
- 1.2 Tenant Scrutiny Panel reviews have provided an ongoing opportunity for customers to work pro-actively with the Council, to look at various aspects of landlord service delivery, from a customer perspective and to develop recommendations and actions for service improvement.
- 1.3 The Panel has most recently completed a review of how the Council communicates with tenants, with particular reference to the requirements within the Social Housing White Paper. The Social Housing White Paper published in 2020 sets out the actions the Government will take to ensure that residents in social housing are safe, are listened to, live in good quality homes, and have access to redress when things go wrong.
- 1.4 In undertaking the review, the Panel focussed particularly on the following Chapters within the White Paper:
 - 1.4.1 Chapter 2: To know how your landlord is performing – the Regulator to introduce a set of tenant satisfaction measures for all landlords to know how they are performing. Satisfaction will be measured on the things that matter most to tenants, including tenant satisfaction that their landlord listens to their views and takes notice of them and tenant satisfaction with landlord's engagement with tenants.
 - 1.4.2 Chapter 5: To have your voice heard by your landlord – to provide new opportunities and an empowerment programme for social housing residents to support more effective engagement between landlords and residents. Also, to give tools for tenants to influence their landlords and hold them to account.
- 1.5 The Panel have undertaken a review of various methods of communication used across the Housing Service except for:
 - Social media, as some Panel members had limited experience.
 - Leaflets, as they were too wide-ranging for the investigation.
- 1.6 The review included:
 - A survey where individual Panel members scored each method of communication.
 - A survey of other housing providers; providers were asked for any learning points from their own communications approaches and if there were any examples of innovative practice.

- Interviews with Council officers representing Housing, Customer Services, Learning and Development, and Communications and Marketing.
- A 'Website Challenge' to assess the content of the Council website against six other housing providers.
- A review of the newsletters used by six other housing providers to assess against the Council's Home Matters magazine.
- Panel meetings to discuss the information and to agree the recommendations.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The Panel identified the following strengths with the current approach to communications.
- 2.1.1 A training matrix has been developed with a training passport for each job role and employee. This includes a training module on communication.
- 2.1.2 Improvements to the telephony system including a new menu of options to direct calls to the correct service and the introduction of a call back system.
- 2.1.3 Digital inclusion survey undertaken to understand barriers to accessing information online.
- 2.1.4 Standards are being drafted for all Council services on principles to follow for writing letters.
- 2.1.5 Use of Ward e-newsletters.
- 2.2 The Panel developed nine recommendations and four suggestions to improve communications as listed below and detailed in the report attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.3 Recommendations
- 2.3.1 Letters- review letters to make sure that they are understandable and written in plain language for all residents. Have a mechanism in place to review letter templates with customers.
- 2.3.2 Strategy- Provide an over-arching strategy on how the Council communicates with people living in Rotherham. Inform tenants how Council officers will communicate/ consult with them.
- 2.3.3 Complaints and Compliments- Provide a link tile on the web page to allow people to find information on how to make a complaint/ comment or pay a compliment. Include reassurance on the linked page that it is useful to receive feedback and that there will not be repercussions from making a complaint.

- 2.3.4 Website - Consider the accessibility of the website by having links at the top of the home page to allow people to adjust the settings to their needs. Check and change text on the website that uses acronyms or jargon
- 2.3.5 Newsletter accessibility- Improve the accessibility of the newsletter for all customers by offering the newsletter in other formats e.g. easy read, other languages
- 2.3.6 Telephone calls - Review the new telephone system and make sure that the target of six minutes to speak to a real person is being met. Ensure that robust measurement is in place to monitor this target and respond to shortfalls going forward
- 2.3.7 Complaints and Compliments- Consider running an 'It's OK to complain' campaign to encourage more feedback from tenants.
- 2.3.8 Newsletter circulation- Improve the publicity and access to the ward e-newsletters. Conduct a consultation exercise to find out if tenants still like to receive their newsletter by post or if they would prefer it by email. Possibly design a hybrid model to meet customer needs.
- 2.3.9 Staff training - Work closely with Rotherham Federation representatives to develop training courses on communications/ customer care (This could include videos of tenant feedback/ tenant representative attendance/ listening to customer call recordings). Improve the handling of bereavement conversations by incorporating into training courses/ providing staff guidance
- 2.4 Further Suggestions:
 - 2.4.1 Tenant Communications Working Group – once the website development has commenced and customer advice/ testing is required, it may be useful to set up a temporary working group involving officers and tenant representatives.
 - 2.4.2 Tenant editorial board – consider resurrecting the Home Matters editorial board and looking to increase publication of tenants' voice/stories.
 - 2.4.3 Home Matters look – consider making the front page less cluttered
 - 2.4.4 Surveys – consider the use of more online and telephone surveys to consult and communicate with tenants.
- 2.5 Most of the recommendations developed are not housing specific and require the involvement of other services within the Council. A series of meetings have taken place with relevant services to discuss the recommendations and develop the actions within the plan.

- 2.6 The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has recently published a consultation 'implementing the new consumer regulatory regime: directions to the Social Housing Regulator on mutual exchange and tenant involvement' which proposes a strengthened requirement for Registered Providers of social housing to offer tenants a wide range of opportunities to get involved, ensure that tenants' views are considered when making decisions relating to their housing management and places a greater emphasis on transparency. The work of the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and the recommendations and actions detailed within this report, will continue to ensure that the Council meets regulatory requirements.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel have developed nine recommendations and four suggestions. The response to each of the recommendations is detailed in the action plan attached as Appendix 2. The plan also provides an update on progress to date.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 The Tenants Scrutiny Review has been discussed at the Housing Involvement Panel.
- 4.2 The action plan, associated with this report (see Appendix 2), will be monitored at monthly Tenant Scrutiny Panel meetings, which are attended by Council officers, Rotherfed and tenant representatives.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The Council's Housing Service along with the nominated lead officers in the action plan have responsibility for implementing the findings of the review and delivering the associated action plan within the designated timescales.
- 5.2 The Tenant Scrutiny Panel will receive regular updates on progress against the recommendations and actions.
- 5.3 A further report will be presented to the Improving Places Select Commission in 12 months' time, detailing progress on delivering the action plan.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications as the Action Plan will be delivered within existing resources and budgets.

- 6.2 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in the report. However, any identified need to procure goods, services or works in relation to delivering any of the actions will be procured in line with the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended) as well as ensuring social value commitments are secured.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 There are no substantive legal issues arising from the content of this report.
- 7.2 The Scrutiny Review will support the Council in meeting statutory and regulatory requirements arising from the current Regulatory Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard and Social Housing Regulator customer standards.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 Improved accessibility for services will positively benefit engagement with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Please see attached Equality Analysis.
- 10.2 We will actively engage under-represented groups and use our customer data to ensure services and communications are accessible and meet the diverse needs of our tenants and neighbourhoods by contributing to the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy 2022-25 through the following:
- 10.2.1 Understanding, listening, and engaging across all communities.
- 10.2.2 Delivering fair, inclusive, and accessible services.
- 10.2.3 Empowering people to engage and challenge discrimination and to promote good community relations.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 Please see attached Carbon Impact Assessment Report.
- 11.2 Through the Tenant Engagement Framework, we will contribute towards reducing carbon footprint and emissions through a flexible menu of options including hybrid working and accessing services online and being able to self-serve. This will help reduce the need for transport and waste.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The Council has a contract in place with Rother Fed (local Tenant Federation provider) to support the delivery of the work undertaken by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel, as part of the Council's Tenant Engagement Framework.
- 12.2 The Council will continue to seek out best practice and consider how to continually improve scrutiny and engagement with tenants through its Exemplar Accreditation and membership of national tenant participation advisory service, TPAS.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The key risk is the failure to engage with the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and inability to deliver against the recommendations in the action plan. This will be addressed through monitoring and reviewing progress detailed within the Action Plan. This will be further mitigated through ongoing monitoring and review by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel and Improving Places Select Commission.

Accountable Officer(s)

James Clark, Assistant Director of Housing
Paul Walsh, Head of Housing Operational Services
Lynsey Skidmore, Housing Operations Manager

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

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This report is published on the Council's [website](#).

Appendix 2 - Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

This review and action plan supports service delivery against the following **Regulator of Social Housing – Tenant Satisfaction Measures:**

TP01	Overall satisfaction
TP06	Satisfaction that the landlord listens to tenants' views and acts upon them.
TP07	Satisfaction that the landlord keeps tenants informed about things that matter to them.
TP08	Agreement that the landlord treats tenants fairly and with respect.

This review and action plan also support service delivery against the following **Tenant Engagement Framework 2022-25** outcomes:

Outcome 1	Putting our customers at the heart of everything we do.
Outcome 2	Delivering a range of options to give all our tenants an opportunity to get involved.
Outcome 4	Enable tenants to scrutinise and challenge our performance by providing open, transparent, and accessible information.

Recommendation (in priority order)	Lead Officers	Actions	Target Date	Update
Recommendation A: Letters Continue to work through Council forms and letters to make sure that they are understandable and written in plain language for all residents. Have a process in place to review the letter templates with customers. <u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u>	Tenant Involvement Coordinator Housing Heads of Service Head of Customer Services Rotherfed	Establish a Tenant Communications Group. Develop a forward work programme to review letters, documents and the Home Matters magazine. All letters will be reviewed to ensure they are understandable, relevant,	June 2023 June 2023 July 2023	Housing Services letters were last reviewed in September 2021 just before housing staff started using a new computer system called 'NEC'. NEC is a housing management system which allows staff to view information linked to tenants and their properties. Screen team in operation and

Appendix 2 - Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved communication with tenants. Moving some services on-line. Improved customer satisfaction. Better engagement with tenants. Customer easy read and input. 	Communications and Marketing Manager	thoughtful with an appropriate and suitable tone.		<p>reviewing communications regularly. Letters will form part of their forward plan.</p> <p>Tenancy Health check form, and Environmental Works Schemes letter and a questionnaire reviewed so far.</p>
<p>Recommendation B: Strategy</p> <p>Provide a strategy on how the Council communicates with people living in Rotherham.</p> <p>Inform tenants how Council officers will communicate/ consult with them.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved communication with tenants. Moving some services on-line. Improved customer satisfaction. <p>Recommendation B: Strategy cont.</p>	<p>Communications and Marketing Manager</p> <p>Tenant Involvement Coordinator</p>	<p>Provide information detailing how the Council will communicate, engage, and consult with tenants.</p> <p>Ensure all staff across the Housing Services are familiar with and refer to the tenant communication and engagement bullet points.</p> <p>Develop a forward communication plan to be regularly reviewed by the proposed Tenant Communications Group and Housing Involvement Panel.</p>	<p>December 2022</p> <p>June-December 2023</p> <p>June 2023</p>	<p>The Tenant Engagement Framework provides details of how the Council will communicate, engage, and consult with tenants.</p> <p>A Customer Access Strategy and Digital Strategy are in place which set out how customers can access council services and what information is available to customers in a digital format.</p> <p>Consultation and Engagement Framework sets out guidelines for Council staff to follow when undertaking any type of public consultation and engagement activity.</p> <p>A Housing training programme is being developed for roll out from June 2023.</p>
Recommendation C: Complaints and	Customer	Provide a direct link from	March 2023	The current web page can be

Appendix 2 - Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

<p>Compliments web pages</p> <p>Provide a link tile on the web page to allow people to find information on how to make a complaint/ comment or pay a compliment.</p> <p>Include reassurance on the linked page that it is useful to receive feedback and that there will not be repercussions from making a complaint.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased feedback from customers to improve and shape services to meet customer needs. Improved communication with tenants. Improved website. 	<p>Services Manager</p> <p>Complaints Manager</p>	<p>the housing webpage to the Complaints contact us page.</p> <p>The following sentence is to be added to the complaint webpage 'please be assured that making a formal complaint will not affect the services you are entitled to, that are the subject of your complaint'.</p>	<p>March 2023</p>	<p>navigated by selecting 'contact us' at the bottom of the webpage which then provides a list of contact options including 'make a complaint, comment or suggestion'</p> <p>A housing specific contact tile on the housing web page has been developed which links directly to the contact us page.</p> <p>Complain about Council Services – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council</p> <p>Reassurance about making a complaint is included on complaint acknowledgement letters and the web page.</p>
<p>Recommendation D: Website</p> <p>Consider the accessibility of the website by having links at the top of the home page to allow people to adjust the settings to their needs (perhaps similar to Berneslai and Wolverhampton).</p> <p>Check and change text on the website that uses acronyms or jargon</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved communication with tenants. Improved website. Website is more accessible for 	<p>Head of Customer Services</p> <p>Housing Heads of Service</p> <p>Communications and Marketing Manager</p>	<p>Review the content of the housing webpages with the Tenant Communications Group, to ensure language is clear and understandable including removing any acronyms.</p>	<p>September 2023</p>	<p>The bar at the bottom of the webpage has an accessibility link. The accessibility statement advises customers of what they can expect on the website, how they can make use of supportive technology to improve their own experience, and signpost people to other support formats if needed.</p> <p>This includes an option to change colours, language translation, zoom in to 300%, navigate using a keyboard or speech recognition software and listen using a screen reader.</p>

Appendix 2 - Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

<p>customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer easy read and input. • Digitalisation of services 				<p>Before information is published online it goes through a number of accessibility checks and is assessed against our agreed website style and standards.</p> <p>The Tenant Engagement Team have reviewed their web pages in collaboration with tenants. Housing Web pages will follow.</p> <p>15125 customers are signed up to housing online to self-serve.</p> <p>Tenant communications group regularly reviewing the website.</p>
<p>Recommendation E: Newsletter accessibility</p> <p>Improve the accessibility of the newsletter (Home Matters) for all customers by offering the newsletter in other formats e.g. easy read, other languages.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved accessibility • Ensuring communications available to all tenants 	<p>Tenant Involvement Coordinator</p> <p>Communications and Marketing Manager</p>	<p>Establish a Tenant Communications Group.</p> <p>Housing Senior Management Team and Communications to review the content and purpose of the Home Matters magazine.</p> <p>Review the existing Home Matters with the Tenant Communications Group.</p> <p>Agree a programme of work with the Group, to enable the Group to shape and influence content in future editions.</p>	<p>June 2023</p> <p>February 2023</p> <p>July 2023</p> <p>July 2023</p>	<p>Meeting with Communications and Housing Senior Management Team on 10th February for an initial discussion and to agree a review of the content for the magazine.</p> <p>The written content of the magazine can be extracted in Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) format for publishing on the website. The website then enables translation into other languages and formats through the accessibility function on the website.</p>

Appendix 2 - Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

		Ensure that the Home Matters magazine is available in other formats including other languages, large font, speech recognition etc.	July 2023	Screen team met to review the last edition of home matters, made a number of suggestions for improvements, which were implemented. Improved version to be posted shortly.
Recommendation F: Telephone calls Review the new telephone system and make sure that the target of six minutes to speak to a real person is being met. Ensure that robust measurement is in place to monitor this target and respond to shortfalls going forward. <u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved customer satisfaction Improved access to services. Digitalisation of services Efficiencies and use of resources. 	Customer Services Manager	Review the telephone system and response times.	March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporting on that measure to the council and the chief exec each quarter. Performance will be published on website, but not sure when Performing around 3 mins at moment, targets may change Chief exec runs customer experience board - ensures we're delivering consistently high quality services
	Customer Services Manager	Promote and embed customer service standards.	March 2024	Customer service standards have been rolled out and lots of work done to embed including training sessions for staff, an Intranet page, requirements for Team Leaders to make this an agenda item in meetings.

Appendix 2 - Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

	Customer Services Manager	Promote self-serve capabilities through Housing Online, to provide choice of service access routes.	September 2023	Digital inclusion officers have been recruited to carry out group workshops for tenants who want to understand how to get online (part of this will involve promoting council self-serve options), not just reporting repairs etc but to navigate their way around a device. Should a team of Digital Volunteer Champions be created, the team will offer training to the champions so that they can provide sustainable support across the borough. The champions will promote the council on-line services.
	Customer Services Manager	Provide periodic performance data to the Housing Involvement Panel	June 2023	HIP review underway including collaborative agenda planning. Customer Services happy to come along and present whenever needed
Recommendation G: Complaints and Compliments Consider running an 'It's OK to complain' campaign to encourage more feedback from tenants <u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customers know when to use the complaints procedure and the benefits for doing so. Improved services shaped to meet 	Complaints Manager	Provide a direct link from the housing webpage to the Complaints page.	May 2024	Information provided in all editions of Home Matters about how to complain / pay a compliment. We'll also do an article for the May Home Matters edition, aimed at helping tenants to speak out if they have worries and helping them to understand who it is best to speak to with certain issues.

Appendix 2 - Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

<p>customer needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved customer experience and journey 				<p>The article will make it clear that a formal complaint is an option, and is fine to complain, but that there are other steps that can be taken first, which are better for everyone.</p> <p>The complaints team are producing a new web page for Housing complaints too, which achieve the action around the complaints tile. The page will be completed by May</p>
<p>Recommendation H: Newsletter circulation</p> <p>Improve the publicity and access to the ward e-newsletters.</p> <p>Conduct a consultation exercise to find out if tenants still like to receive their newsletter (Home Matters) by post or if they would prefer it by email.</p> <p>Possibly design a hybrid model to meet customer needs</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficient model & Distribution plan developed based on results of consultation. 	<p>Tenant Involvement Coordinator</p> <p>Communications and Marketing Manager</p> <p>Senior Communications Officer</p>	<p>Review the combination between the Tenant Involvement webpages and Ward e-newsletters.</p> <p>Review tenant communications requirements and ensure that information is being sent to tenants in a format that they require.</p>	<p>June 2023</p> <p>July 2023</p>	<p>Ward e-newsletter publicised via social media and sign up to the council website.</p> <p>Link to ward e-newsletters added to the tenant engagement web page</p> <p>Housing service committed to making home matters more accessible and Screen Team will be involved in helping with this.</p> <p>No set commitment for the consultation exercise, this will need agreement from a senior level and will involve conversations around resource and budgets before anything is agreed.</p>
<p>Recommendation I: Staff training</p>	<p>Learning and Development</p>	<p>Training course on customer service to be</p>	<p>June 2023</p>	<p>The Learning and Development</p>

Appendix 2 - Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

<p>Work closely with Rotherham Federation representatives to develop training courses on communications/ customer care (This could include videos of tenant feedback/ tenant representative attendance/ listening to customer call recordings)</p> <p>Improve the handling of bereavement conversations by incorporating into training courses/ providing staff guidance.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff are skilled in holding conversations where customers are experiencing grief and loss. • Reduction in related complaints • Enhanced customer service and understanding of customer needs 	<p>Manager</p> <p>Tenant Involvement Coordinator</p> <p>Rotherfed</p>	<p>developed which includes case studies/sound clips from tenants.</p> <p>Comprehensive housing training programme to be delivered which includes customer service and bereavement conversations.</p> <p>The following sentence is to be added to the complaint webpage 'please be assured that making a formal complaint will not affect the services you are entitled to, that are the subject of your complaint'.</p>	<p>June 2023- March 2024</p>	<p>Officer has produced train the trainer training which has been signed off by Housing Managers, it's currently with customer services who are doing some work to ensure the training is in line with new consumer stds. The training will then be tolled out,</p> <p>Housing Services have carried out a full-scale Learning Needs Analysis Activity leading to the production of a training plan. Bereavement support is embedded within this plan.</p>
<p>Tenant Communications Working Group</p> <p>Once the website development has commenced and customer advice/ testing is required, it may be useful to set up a temporary working group involving officers and tenant representatives.</p> <p><u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenants voice in communications • Communications shaped to meet customer needs • Enhanced customer services 	<p>Tenant Involvement Coordinator</p> <p>Rotherfed</p>	<p>Establish a Terms of Reference detailing the purpose of the group and format of the meetings.</p> <p>Stimulate interest from tenant representatives.</p> <p>Establish a Tenants Communications Group.</p>	<p>April 2023</p> <p>April 2023</p> <p>June 2023</p>	<p>Screen Team in place and going well.</p> <p>Customer services team previously worked with around 8 tenants to test parts of the portal.</p>

Appendix 2 - Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

Tenants Home Matters Editorial board Consider resurrecting the Home Matters Editorial Board and looking to increase publication of tenants' voice/stories. <u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenants voice in communications • Communications shaped to meet customer needs • Enhanced customer services 	Tenant Involvement Coordinator Rotherfed	Home Matters Editorial Board to be embedded within the Tenant Communications Working Group. Review the content of the Home Matters magazine to include more tenants case studies/soundbites.	June 2023 July 2023	Screen Team in place and going well. Reviewing Home Matters is built into their forward plan.
Home Matters look Consider making the front page less cluttered. <u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u> Improved home matters magazine to meet customer needs	Communications and Marketing Manager	Review design of the Home Matters magazine.	July 2023	Screen Team helped to design most recent edition and Marketing are committed to working with the group to make further improvements.
Surveys Consider the use of more online and telephone surveys to consult and communicate with tenants. <u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased engagement and customer feedback • Services shaped to meet customer needs • Improved customer journey and satisfaction • Tenants voice representative of borough 	Tenant Involvement Coordinator	Implement Tenant Engagement Framework action plan. Tender Tenant Perception Survey Undertake Tenant Perception Survey.	November 2022- May 2024 March 2023 July 2023	As part of the new Tenant Engagement Framework, an Online Survey tool has been developed for tenants who cannot attend meetings to feedback on services and polices. For the new Tenants Perception Survey, we are using telephone and online options for the survey.

Appendix 2 - Tenant Scrutiny Review- Improving Communication with Tenants

wide demographics				
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Meeting the requirements of the Social Housing White Paper.				



Tenant Scrutiny Panel: Communications plan update

www.rotherham.gov.uk

Recap

- Initial Improving Communications Report heard by IPSC in March 2023
- Report detailed 9 recommendations (A – I) and 4 further suggestions made by the Scrutiny Panel
- Report set a date for 12-month review of progress

Summary of progress to date

- All actions are fully achieved
- All 4 further suggestions achieved
- The Panel are happy with our progress

Key outcomes

Website improvements

Quality Training

The Screen Team

Home | Housing | Tenant Engagement

TENANT ENGAGEMENT

MAKING SURE TENANTS ARE AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING WE DO!

Your Council want all our tenants to feel valued, that their voice is heard and that services can be shaped to meet their needs.

By working together with the Tenant Engagement team, you'll influence the future of housing services and council homes, helping to make your neighbourhoods cleaner and safer places to live. You will also be able to have a say on how money is spent in your local area.

All our pages are interactive and will allow you to:

- Register your interest in joining in with our opportunities
- Suggest topics for our panel to discuss
- Comment on our performance
- Leave feedback on our services.



GET INVOLVED



YOUR COMMUNITY



NEWS & EVENTS



Improving Communication with tenants: Training Module



www.rotherham.gov.uk

Rotherham
Metropolitan
Borough Council

- The Tenant Scrutiny Panel Investigated how The Council can improve communication with tenants

- This training was developed in line with their suggestions



Impact of key outcomes

Website changes	Staff Training	Screen Team
<p>Recommendation C: Complaints and compliments web pages</p> <p>Provide a link tile on the web page to allow people to find information on how to make a complaint/ comment or pay a compliment.</p> <p>Include reassurance on the linked page that it is useful to receive feedback and that there will not be repercussions from making a complaint.</p>	<p>Recommendation I: Staff training</p> <p>Work closely with Rotherham Federation representatives to develop training courses on communications/ customer care.</p>	<p>Recommendation A: Letters</p> <p>Continue to work through Council forms and letters to make sure that they are understandable and written in plain language for all residents.</p>
<p>Recommendation D: Website accessibility</p> <p>Consider the accessibility of the website by having links at the top of the home page to allow people to adjust the settings to their needs.</p> <p>Check and change text on the website that uses acronyms or jargon.</p>		<p>Recommendation E: Newsletter accessibility</p> <p>Improve the accessibility of the newsletter (Home Matters) for all customers by offering the newsletter in other formats e.g., easy read, other languages.</p>
		<p>Recommendation H: Newsletter circulation</p> <p>Improve the publicity and access to the ward e-newsletters.</p> <p>Conduct a consultation exercise to find out if tenants still like to receive their newsletter (Home Matters) by post or if they would prefer it by email.</p> <p>Possibly design a hybrid model to meet customer needs</p>
		<p>Further suggestion 1: Communications working group</p> <p>Once the website development has commenced and customer advice/ testing is required, it may be useful to set up a temporary working group involving officers and tenant representatives.</p>
		<p>Further suggestion 2: Tenants Home Matters editorial board</p> <p>Consider resurrecting the Home Matters Editorial Board and looking to increase publication of tenants' voice/stories.</p>
		<p>Further suggestion 3: Make Home Matters less cluttered.</p> <p>Consider making the front page less cluttered.</p>

The remaining recommendations

Recommendation B: Strategy

Provide a strategy for how the council communicates with people living in Rotherham

Recommendation F: Telephone calls

Review the telephone system and make sure the target of 6 minutes to speak to a real person is being met. Ensure that robust measurement is in place.

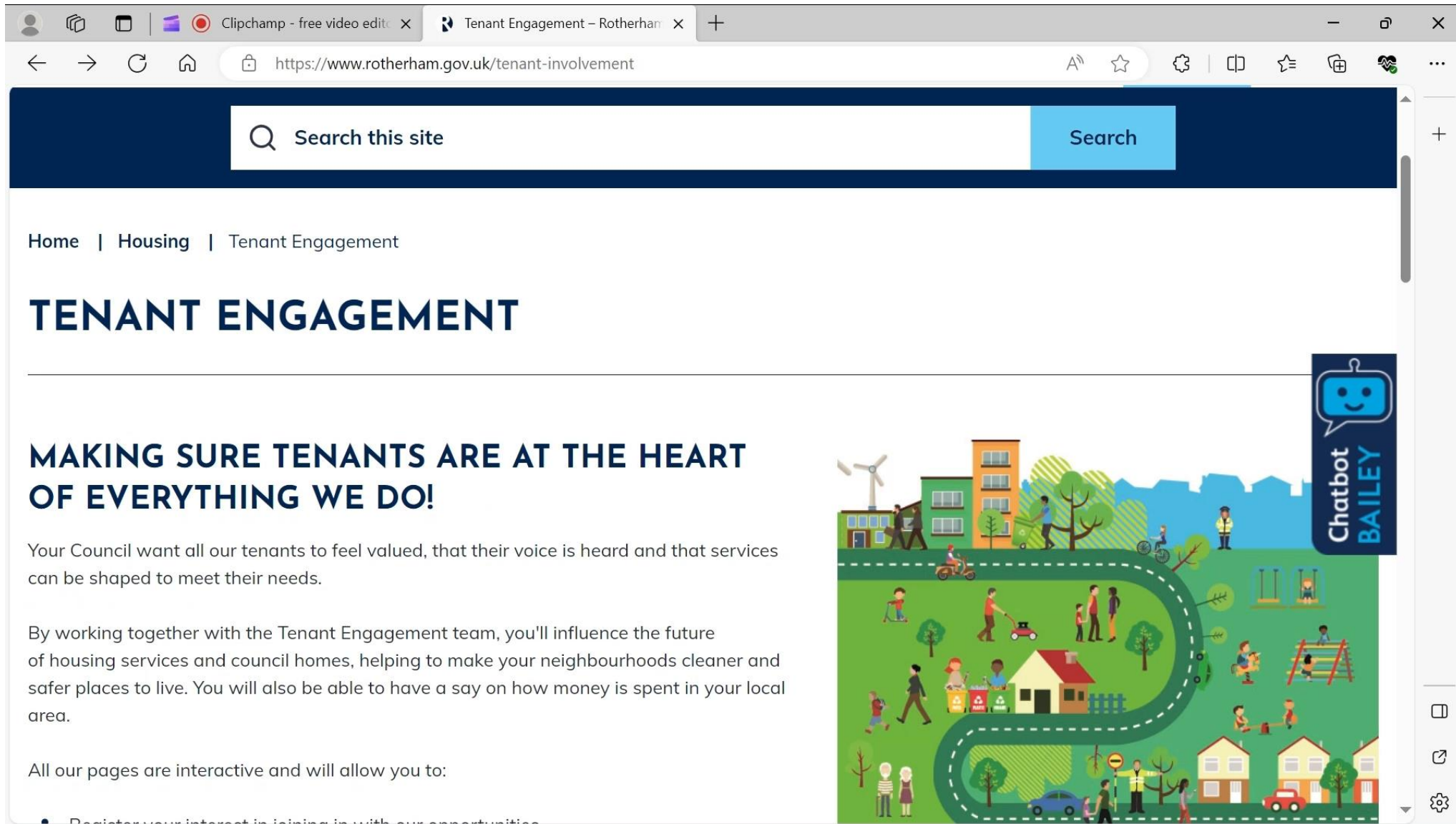
Recommendation G: Complaints and Compliments

Consider running an it's ok to complain campaign to encourage more feedback from tenants

Further recommendation 4: Surveys

Consider the use of more on-line and telephone surveys to consult and communicate with tenants

The Tenant Engagement Website video



Meet The Screen Team video

The Screen Team: Home Matters session



Improved action plan format

The old

Recommendation B: Strategy Provide a strategy on how the Council communicates with people living in Rotherham. Inform tenants how Council officers will communicate/ consult with them. <u>Anticipated Outcomes:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved communication with tenants. Moving some services on-line. Improved customer satisfaction. Recommendation B: Strategy cont.	Communications and Marketing Manager	Provide information detailing how the Council will communicate, engage, and consult with tenants.	December 2022	The Tenant Engagement Framework provides details of how the Council will communicate, engage, and consult with tenants.
	Tenant Involvement Coordinator	Ensure all staff across the Housing Services are familiar with and refer to the tenant communication and engagement bullet points.	June-December 2023	A Customer Access Strategy and Digital Strategy are in place which set out how customers can access council services and what information is available to customers in a digital format.
		Develop a forward communication plan to be regularly reviewed by the proposed Tenant Communications Group and Housing Involvement Panel.		Consultation and Engagement Framework sets out guidelines for Council staff to follow when undertaking any type of public consultation and engagement activity.

The new

Recommendation (in priority order)	Lead Officer	Actions	Target Date	Rag Status	Outcome
Recommendation F. Clear properties before cleaning. Provide clearer guidance to cleaning staff that they should not clean properties where contractors have left rubbish or where aids such as hospital beds remain in the property.	Dean Borrill (Partnering Manager)	1. <i>Review the handover process to include 100% handover inspections on all voids.</i>	December 2024	Amber	Implementation of 100% Quality Assurance checks completed by Void Technical Officers on handover.
	Neil Muscroft (Voids Supervisor)				
	Dean Borrill (Partnering Manager)	2. <i>Contact Mediquip to look at how the collection of medical equipment can be improved.</i>	December 2024	Amber	Contact Mediquip to discuss process for picking up large medical items before property is ready for re-let.
	Neil Muscroft (Voids Supervisor)	3. <i>Review process to ensure that the contract partner is not in the property when the cleaning teams attend.</i>	June 2023	Green	The process has been changed from Am and Pm cleaning slots, to 8am-4pm the following day. This will ensure that the contract partner is not present during the clean.

Thanks for listening, and do you have any questions?

Public Report
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 13 March 2024

Report Title

Scrutiny Review Recommendations – Nature Recovery

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive

Report Author(s)

Caroline Webb, Senior Governance Advisor
01709 822765 or caroline.webb@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The purpose of this report is to outline the outcomes and recommendations of the spotlight review into nature recovery undertaken by members of the Improving Places Select Commission. The review was prompted by Council's declaration of a nature crisis at its meeting of 25 May 2022, with a request that a review be held into how the Council can support improvements to ensure a more natural environment is enhanced.

Recommendations

- 1. That OSMB receives the report and considers the following recommendations:**
 - 1) Consider what resources are required to enable RMBC to lead on the Nature Emergency and co-ordinate its response to the Environment Act 2021, including the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Enhanced Biodiversity Net Gain, and other statutory reporting.
 - 2) In line with the RMBC Nature Crisis Motion (and the mandatory Enhanced Biodiversity Duty), consider how RMBC's response to the nature crisis can be implemented, reported, and resourced (taking note of the response to climate action).
 - 3) Consideration be given to the expansion of the Councillor's role as nature champions. This to include:

- a. How member stewardship of natural assets and geodiversity and be enhanced.
 - b. How nature recovery and climate action can be built into ward plans.
 - c. The involvement in overview and scrutiny in future monitoring and steering of this work.
 - d. Support through the Member Development Programme to ensure Members are equipped with appropriate skills and knowledge to undertake this activity.
- 4) Contribute to the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (including appropriate resourcing) detailing Rotherham's involvement in meeting South Yorkshire national and global targets of "30 x 30" as required by the Environment Act 2021.
 - 5) Consider and plan for how the RMBC estate including all green and blue infrastructure such as allotments, cemeteries, parks and sports fields, amenity spaces, communal gardens, railway and highway verges, field margins and hedgerows, rights of way and access routes, woodlands and nature reserves canals, rivers and other water dependent habitats; can contribute to biodiversity strategies and targets; demonstrating compliance with the Council's obligations for the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty (taking external advice where necessary).
 - 6) Prioritise Local Wildlife Sites and Woodlands - especially those in RMBC ownership- to contribute to these targets, with a coordinated 'one council' programme to increase their positive conservation management with resourced management, monitoring and reporting.
 - 7) Continue and expand the positive work already underway including tree planting, meadow management, changes in verge management, community engagement etc (as stated in the RMBC Nature Crisis motion)
 - 8) Utilise appropriate evidence and information from the forthcoming Rotherham State of Nature report, alongside the forthcoming SYLNRS, and the agreed priority species lists, to set local species recovery targets and work plans, and ensure sufficient resources are secured to embed this approach in long term management opportunities.
 - 9) Continue to apply robust planning policies and other policy tools to contribute to nature's recovery across the Borough, noting that Local Planning Authorities must have regard to the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy once published.
 - 10) Plan to work towards zero non-essential use of pesticides and zero glyphosate by the Council;
 - 11) Work with communities to support expansion of household composting, and supporting the development of nature rich gardens, including through awareness raising of the waste hierarchy and minimising the use of new and scarce resources and the associated impacts on the natural environment that these issues have; substantive resourcing and engagement plans will be essential.
 - 12) Work with partners, stakeholders, Parish Councils, communities, schools and residents on the above where appropriate.

2. That the report, as approved, be forwarded to Cabinet for its consideration.

- 3. That Cabinet is asked to formally consider its response to the above recommendations within two months of its receipt, in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.**

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 - Council Meeting: Notice of Motion

Appendix 2 – Acknowledgement and thanks

Background Papers

N/A

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

N/A

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Scrutiny Review Recommendations – Nature Recovery

1. Background

- 1.1 In May 2022, the Council resolved to declare a nature crisis (Appendix 1). It noted that almost half of all UK wildlife is in long term decline and 15% of species were at risk of extinction. The motion stated that the climate crisis was hastening the destruction of the natural environment, damaging habitats and disrupting ecosystems. The declaration of a nature crisis was first taken up by local people and groups, and called on the Council to do so too, noting that a thriving environment underpinned a healthy, prosperous society.
- 1.2 The resolution committed the Council to a range of activities, including ensuring its response to tackling climate change was extended to be complement the aligned cause of nature crisis. It also committed the Council to continue its work to enhance biodiversity by adopting innovative approaches to support wild flowered areas and ecological approaches to grounds maintenance.
- 1.3 It asked that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board consider commissioning a review into how the Council can support improvements to ensure a more natural environment is enhanced. At its meeting of 14 September 2022, it was agreed that Improving Places Select Commission would add this to its work programme for 2023.
- 1.4 It should be noted that in order to expedite its referral to Cabinet at the beginning of the 2024/25 Municipal Year, the report has been submitted to OSMB for approval prior to its consideration by Improving Place Select Commission.

2. Key Issues

2.1 What is 'nature recovery'?

- 2.1.1 The earth is warming at an unprecedented rate through the activities of humans, particularly burning fossil fuels but also through changes in land and maritime use and agriculture. The long-term changes in climate, commonly referred to as global warming, has had a direct impact on weather systems. This means that locally more frequent heatwaves, flooding and damaging storms and other adverse weather can be expected. These events can all have a significant impact on human lives and nature.
- 2.1.2 As the climate changes, the threat to habitats and wildlife increases. The Local Government Association¹ states that the natural environment has an innate value, fundamental to health and well-being. It is the foundation of a productive economy, providing attractive neighbourhoods and access to green spaces. However, it asserts that the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Citing evidence published by the House of

¹ [Nature recovery for local authorities | Local Government Association](#) (2024)

Common and in the State of Nature report², it reports that the UK, along with most other countries, has experienced a significant loss of plants, animals and fungi. Across the UK species studied have declined on average by 19% since 1970³.

2.1.3 Nature Recovery is about taking action to take better care of the environment, to ensure that it is healthier for future generations. The UK Government has committed to halting the long-term decline of species abundance and protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030⁴ (colloquially known as “30x30”). This will be achieved by restoring or creating wild-life rich habitats and halting the decline in species abundance. The ambition is to achieve high quality, accessible, natural spaces with increased biodiversity close to where people live and work, with a focus around the equal distribution of environmental benefits and resources to all. EIP23 makes a commitment that everyone should live within 15 minutes’ walk of a green or blue space.

2.1.4 The Environment Act 2021 introduced new duties for local authorities which are relevant to nature recovery and biodiversity including:

- All planning permissions granted in England (with a few exemptions) will have to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain [mandatory from February 2024 for all major applications and April 2024 for all small sites] (S98-101)
- Enhanced duty for local authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity (S102) and report on their actions (S103)
- Local Planning Authorities will need to comply with the above duty and have regard to the Local Nature Recovery Strategy in local planning policy and decisions (S102).
- Responsible authorities appointed by the Secretary of State (S105) to lead the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), working with a broad range of stakeholders.

2.2 Methodology:

2.2.1 The purpose of the review was to consider strategic approaches already in place and propose any additional interventions that can help the Council achieve its targets and fulfil its responsibilities in respect of biodiversity and nature recovery under the Environment Act 2021.

2.2.2 The review started its evidence gathering in March 2023, concluding its work later in the calendar year. Evidence was gathered through stakeholder meetings with partners and officers and fact-finding visits. In addition, expert testimony was received from Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust and other key organisations. Members of the review group were also provided

² [State of Nature 2023 - report on the UK's current biodiversity](#)

³ as above

⁴ [Climate adaptation for nature \(parliament.uk\)](#)

with written testimony and research, details of which are outlined in Appendix 2 of the report.

2.2.3 The review's scope included consideration of the following themes:

1. Protecting existing biodiversity against threats (including wildlife crime) and supporting nature recovery throughout the Borough including animal, plant, and fungi species to contribute to the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Nature Recovery Network and targets;
2. Assessing the condition and management of Rotherham's protected sites including Local Wildlife Sites, utilising appropriate evidence and information from the Rotherham State of Nature report⁵;
3. Assessing the implications of climate change on biodiversity in the borough.

2.2.4 The review group consisted of the following members:

- Cllr Ken Wyatt, Chair
- Councillor Tinsley, Vice Chair
- Councillor Havard
- Councillor Browne
- Councillor McNeely
- Councillor Taylor

2.2.5 Witnesses were drawn from the Council and its partners. The Chair would like to put on record his thanks for the contribution of each participant and their evident commitment to tackling this issue.

- Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust
- Sorby Natural History Society
- Nature Action Rotherham
- Sheffield Area Geology Trust
- South Yorkshire Police – Rural Crime Unit
- River Catchment Partnership
- Environment Agency
- South Yorkshire Woodland Partnership
- South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority
- Severn Trent Water
- Yorkshire Water
- Members of the Rotherham Local Wildlife Sites Panel
- Renewi
- Regeneration and Environment Services, RMBC

⁵ It was noted that Rotherham State of Nature report was independently produced and therefore its recommendations and conclusion may not be supported in entirety by RMBC.

- Planning Services
- Climate Team
- Green Spaces
- Ecology
- Trees and Woodland
- Asset Management (Cleaning)

2.2.6 The Chair also extends his thanks to Katherine Harclerode (former Governance Advisor) who supported the review and has since left the authority.

2.3 **Summary of issues raised:**

2.3.1 Members assessed the state of biodiversity in Rotherham, examining pollution levels in air, soil and water and the associated impact on biodiversity. The impact of wildlife crime was also considered. Consultees were asked to highlight species and ecosystems currently at risk and identify where efforts should be focussed to ameliorate effects of pollution where possible and protect existing biodiversity.

2.3.2 Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust (SRWT) gave a comprehensive presentation focusing on the state of nature in Rotherham, including:

- 1) Protecting biodiversity against threats
- 2) Rotherham's protected sites
- 3) Implications of climate change on biodiversity
- 4) Pollution – water, (soil, air)

2.3.3 SRWT shared some headlines on the national 'State of Nature' and highlighted that many of the national environmental concerns or threats were also factors in Rotherham. This included the impact of agricultural management, climate change, pollution, woodland and freshwater management, wild-life crime, and invasive non-native species. As an illustration of nature depletion, examples were given of local decline in bird species abundance, the rise in numbers of invasive non-native species (e.g. Japanese knotweed, Himalayan Balsam etc) and the impact of disease and pests. Using data from the Weston Park weather station (Sheffield), it was outlined that there had been a steady rise in mean temperatures locally, with this rise accelerating over recent decades. It was highlighted that the effects of climate change and rising temperature would affect the ecological health and biodiversity of the borough, making it less able to mitigate and adapt to future challenges.

The invasive species data and weather data are from Rotherham where SRWT led a partnership 'Sheffield State of Nature Report' (2018). Bob Croxton from the Sorby Natural History Society and Sheffield Bird Study group was developing a Rotherham 'State of Nature' report which has not yet been published.

2.3.4 As part of a co-ordinated response to the threats, key bodies across the sub-region have formed a Local Nature Partnership. The partnership has

assessed the condition and management of Rotherham's protected sites including Local Wildlife Sites. Current mapping undertaken by South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority suggested that just over 3% of Rotherham was identified as core nature sites: priority habitat as 'good' or 'fairly good' condition, with almost 13% identified as restoration: priority habitat not in good condition. Woodland cover in Rotherham was also below the national average of 13%, requiring over 1000 hectares of planting to bring it in line with this standard. However, by mapping sites there was a greater opportunity to increase the size, quality and connectivity of sites and generate Bio-diversity Net Gain (BNG) through green infrastructure schemes, woodland creation and local projects.

- 2.3.5 As part of its evidence gathering, Members examined biodiversity improvement actions currently in place. With a view to enhancing biodiversity, the meeting sought to establish what action is already being taken by the Council, community organisations and partners to achieve targets and uphold duties under the Environment Act 2021.
- 2.3.6 Using case studies to illustrate how "30 x 30" (30% of land for nature by 2030) was being delivered, SRWT outlined the work undertaken under the Rotherham Rivers Programme (2013-2027+). The programme aims to create a network of connected, high quality habitats along the waterway corridors of the Don and Rother in Rotherham, supporting clean water, natural flood storage, increased biodiversity and enjoyment opportunities for people as part of a thriving landscape. Working with partners, including the Environment Agency and Rotherham Borough Council, the programme aims to look after habitats in the River Don and River Rother catchments in South Yorkshire, to create a resilient ecological network from the moors of the Peak District to the floodplain of the Lower Don Valley and the heart of urban Sheffield and Rotherham.

Funding from a range of partners allowed improvements to be made to the river corridors, including:

- Better water quality
- More resilience to flooding
- Control of invasive plant species
- Increased the amount of quality ecological data
- More opportunities for the public to enjoy nature reserves
- Better partnership working in the area and involvement of local site users
- This programme involved over 100 volunteers, with RMBC undertaking over 560 hours of community engagement.

- 2.3.7 The RMBC Climate Change Manager outlined that extensive work had been undertaken to reduce the Council's carbon footprint in recent years, with many of the initiatives supporting both climate reduction and nature recovery agendas. This includes tree planting, management of green

spaces and opportunities for ‘greening’ and increasing biodiversity across arable land. It was noted that there were opportunities to closely align both agendas to provide nature-based solutions to reduce the impact of climate change; including construction, landscaping, sustainable drainage, catchment-wide schemes for flood management and sympathetic planting.

- 2.3.8 A detailed presentation was given on the specific implications of the Environment Act 2021 across Planning, Green Spaces and Ecology teams and decision-makers in the Council and the Combined Authority (SYMCA). SYMCA is the Responsible Authority for the preparation of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), working with each of the four local authorities within the South Yorkshire region and the Peak District National Park. The LNRS was to be completed by March 2025.

The Enhanced Biodiversity Duty is a strengthened duty on the Council who is now required to strategically review its policies and operations at least every 5 years and assess what action they can take ‘to further’ the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. Under new legislation, the Council will need to establish appropriate working practices, to deal with all planning applications for both large sites (mandatory from February 2024) and small sites (mandatory from April 2024) to deliver BNG+10% for all development proposals (with few exemptions).

Other requirements include:

- Ensuring the ongoing monitoring and reporting of environmental impacts to satisfy and strengthen the Council’s approach to meet the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty.
- Updating of all condition monitoring of the Council’s adopted local sites series: including Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites identified in the Sites and Policies Document.
- Ensuring that the Local Plan “Has regard to... the LNRS when published”
- In the longer term, five to ten years, consider refreshing the Rotherham Biodiversity Action Plan and Green Infrastructure Strategies, and the preparation of a State of Nature Report and Biodiversity Strategy. I

It was highlighted that these duties will most certainly cross council joint action and require additional staffing, capacity and funding. It was recognised that this presents a significant challenge for all local authorities and will be a barrier to the delivery of future nature recovery activities.

- 2.3.9 Evidence was presented demonstrating how current planning requirements protected biodiversity and nature recovery, and how requirements were expected to evolve within planning policy.

It was highlighted that over 70% of the borough was allocated as “Green Belt”, with approximately 15% designated as Non-Statutory Protected

Sites⁶. Requirements for biodiversity governed existing planning decisions through legislation (e.g. Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981), National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) guidance and local planning policy.

In meeting these requirements, key challenges were identified, particularly around enforcement on biodiversity obligations and how skills and capacity of existing and future staff can be supported.

- 2.3.10 In a submission to the review, the Environmental Services Manager highlighted the impact of climate change on the Grounds Maintenance Service. With warmer winters, and wetter summers, it was noted that growth was rarely slowing down, which meant that the maintenance schedules were not as effective as they once were. It was felt that comparison with other local authorities and ground maintenance companies would be helpful to establish how other bodies were coping and adjusting to the continual demand.

Climate change had also made an impact on the die-back of evasive plant species and grasses, which meant that native flowers were taking longer to establish or were not viable. Collaboration between the Climate Change team, and specialists in the Ecology Team could assist Ground Maintenance to adapt.

Over several years, wildflower sites had been planted, (some of which had received national recognition) – it was noted that over the last two years this had increased from 5000m² to 15,000m² however, the Service needed assistance to understand the net gain from this and other activity to encourage natural biodiversity.

- 2.3.11 An overview was given of how Cleaning Services supported the biodiversity and climate change challenge. It was outlined that with over 350k hours of cleaning activity undertaken across schools, Council and community buildings per year, it was important that there was continuous review of utility use; procurement strategies for products and equipment; and environmental impact.

The service only used products which minimised harm across the life-cycle of use i.e. from the sourcing of the raw material, through production, transportation, usage and then environmental impact after use. Current work was on-going to develop cost effective toxin-free sanitisers and cleaning agents.

Rotherham cleaning services only procure from accreditor suppliers who:

- Traded ethically and sustainably;
- Provided supporting information for any claims made;
- Provided only quality, fit for purpose products.

⁶ These are areas which have been designated for protection including local wildlife sites; regionally important geological sites or local nature reserves.

Assurance was given that environmental factors were a material consideration of the service, underpinned by an aim to eliminate any product or process which opposes the biodiversity or climate change challenge objective stated by the Council.

2.3.12 A series of site visits were organised on local wildlife habitats, with the review panel taken through key issues and concerns by expert witnesses:

- Local Wildlife Site 127, 'Centenary Riverside LNR'
- Silverwood
- Herringthorpe Valley Park

Whilst it was noted that there was a good level of monitoring and records of wildlife in Rotherham, the site visits reinforced the previous evidence provided by other expert witnesses. In summary, this included:

- Variable levels of site quality with many wildlife habitats being in poor condition (as outlined in the mapping exercise);
- Decline in varieties of species of wild birds, insects and rare plants;
- Impact of rural crime and site security with examples given of the negative impact of off-road vehicles, poaching, vandalism and arson;
- How greater emphasis could be placed on utilising local conservation expertise.

Other points raised in the discussions included:

- How crime can be 'designed out' of wildlife sites by increasing visitor numbers and natural surveillance. (Although consideration also needed to be given to managing the impacts of increased pressure on wildlife sites created by encouraging increased visitor numbers.)
- Improving communication and information sharing of local projects and initiatives.
- Maximising opportunities for external funding (for example the National Lottery).
- Consider how nature mitigations can be built into new developments. For example, the installation of bat bricks, swift boxes, wildlife-friendly soffits etc should be considered as part of new developments or refurbishment of existing housing stock.

2.3.13 Complimenting the local sites visits, further information was given on Local Wildlife Sites.

Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) were identified and selected locally using scientifically determined criteria and surveys. Local Wildlife Sites Panel and Local Geological Sites Panel oversaw site selection process. The panels endorsed qualifying sites for the Council approval (through the officer delegated decision process). The boundaries were included in the Council internal and external mapping systems.

2.3.14 In respect of the Local Wildlife Sites Panel, the local sites system duties involve staff from Green Spaces and Planning Policy Teams and the input

of external experts on the panels. The Biological Records Centre was central to its operation. The work required in the maintenance of the local sites system was reported as significant and varied. Although there was a rolling 10-year program of site monitoring, there have been gaps in on site local wildlife site monitoring due to vacancies and backlogs.

- 2.3.15 Local Wildlife Sites were areas of land that were especially important for wildlife and some of the Borough's most valuable wildlife areas. They have a huge part to play in the natural green fabric of our towns and countryside. They made up a web of steppingstones and corridors for wildlife, forming key components of ecological networks. It is anticipated Local Wildlife Sites will be a central component of the forthcoming SYLNRS. The Council had responsibilities to local sites through the enhanced biodiversity duty and the boundaries were needed for the Local Plan satisfying national and local planning policy. The network of sites added to the character and fabric of Rotherham making it more resilient to climate change factors, offering its natural services to the local communities.
- 2.3.16 The LWS panel were concerned about damage to sites from development, vandalism and poor or little management. Most Local Wildlife Sites were privately owned although a significant number were under Council ownership (e.g. green spaces, housing, asset management or schools). Whilst land under the stewardship of Green Spaces were managed for biodiversity, it was unclear if this was extended to other sites in Council ownership. It felt that there was greater potential for the Council to improve biodiversity present on all its sites recognising that issues such as nature recovery and climate actions are cross-cutting.
- 2.3.17 A written submission was received from the Rotherham Local Geological Sites Panel (RLGSP). It outlined the rich geodiversity of the Borough and gave examples of the important role of geodiversity in the formulation of a nature recovery strategy. RLGSP advocated a holistic and sympathetic understanding of landscapes and argued that highlighting geological foundations and features of an area and its (natural) sites will enhance the general public interest, understanding and engagement with the natural world and biodiversity.

2.4 Recommendations

- 2.4.1 The motion, as agreed, committed the Council to a range of activities, including ensuring its response to tackling climate change was extended to compliment the aligned cause of nature crisis. It also committed the Council to continue its work to enhance biodiversity by adopting innovative approaches to support wild flowered areas and ecological approaches to grounds maintenance. The review group thanked the local groups and residents for its assistance and advice in bringing forward the motion.
- 2.4.2 The review group thanked officers, partners and expert witnesses for their openness in responding to enquiries. They were assured by the evident commitment across agencies to address the challenges of nature recovery. The examples given showed the complexity and sensitivity of this work and

the part each agency plays. The review hopes that the observations and recommendations make a timely contribution to this vital agenda.

2.4.3 The recommendations are as follows:

- 1) Consider what resources are required to enable RMBC to lead on the Nature Emergency and co-ordinate its response to the Environment Act 2021, including the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Enhanced Biodiversity Net Gain, and other statutory reporting.
- 2) In line with the RMBC Nature Crisis Motion (and the mandatory Enhanced Biodiversity Duty), consider how RMBC's response to the nature crisis can be implemented, reported, and resourced (taking note of the response to climate action).
- 3) Consideration be given to the expansion of the Councillor's role as nature champions. This to include:
 - a. How member stewardship of natural assets and geodiversity and be enhanced.
 - b. How nature recovery and climate action can be built into ward plans.
 - c. The involvement in overview and scrutiny in future monitoring and steering of this work.
 - d. Support through the Member Development Programme to ensure Members are equipped with appropriate skills and knowledge to undertake this activity.
- 4) Contribute to the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (including appropriate resourcing) detailing Rotherham's involvement in meeting South Yorkshire national and global targets of "30 x 30" as required by the Environment Act 2021.
- 5) Consider and plan for how the RMBC estate including all green and blue infrastructure such as allotments, cemeteries, parks and sports fields, amenity spaces, communal gardens, railway and highway verges, field margins and hedgerows, rights of way and access routes, woodlands and nature reserves canals, rivers and other water dependent habitats; can contribute to biodiversity strategies and targets; demonstrating compliance with the Council's obligations for the Enhanced Biodiversity Duty (taking external advice where necessary).
- 6) Prioritise Local Wildlife Sites and Woodlands - especially those in RMBC ownership- to contribute to these targets, with a coordinated 'one council' programme to increase their positive conservation management with resourced management, monitoring and reporting.
- 7) Continue and expand the positive work already underway including tree planting, meadow management, changes in verge

management, community engagement etc (as stated in the RMBC Nature Crisis motion)

- 8) Utilise appropriate evidence and information from the forthcoming Rotherham State of Nature report, alongside the forthcoming SYLNRS, and the agreed priority species lists, to set local species recovery targets and work plans, and ensure sufficient resources are secured to embed this approach in long term management opportunities.
- 9) Continue to apply robust planning policies and other policy tools to contribute to nature's recovery across the Borough, noting that Local Planning Authorities must have regard to the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy once published.
- 10) Plan to work towards zero non-essential use of pesticides and zero glyphosate by the Council;
- 11) Work with communities to support expansion of household composting, and supporting the development of nature rich gardens, including through awareness raising of the waste hierarchy and minimising the use of new and scarce resources and the associated impacts on the natural environment that these issues have; substantive resourcing and engagement plans will be essential.
- 12) Work with partners, stakeholders, Parish Councils, communities, schools and residents on the above where appropriate.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 Members are recommended to approve the recommendations.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 See paragraphs 2.2.5 and Appendix 2.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 Implementation of any recommendation made to a partner organisation is at the discretion of the relevant partner organisation.
- 5.2 Implementation of recommendations addressed to a directorate of the Council is a matter reserved to the relevant directorate. Timescales for Council directorates responding to scrutiny recommendations are outlined in the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules contained in the Constitution of the Council.

6 Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 Any financial or procurement implications arising from this report will be considered as part of the Cabinet response to its recommendations.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no HR implications directly arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 There are no implications directly arising from this report.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

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10.1 Members of the OSMB review group have due regard to equalities and human rights in developing recommendations.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 Referenced throughout the report.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 The implications for partners are described in the main sections of the report. Implementation of any recommendation is at the discretion of the relevant partner organisation. The recommendations contained in this report are offered acknowledging the contributions that have been made by each of the partner organisations.

13 Risks and Mitigation

13.1 There are no risks directly arising from this report.

Accountable Officer(s)

Emma Hill, Head of Democratic Services and Statutory Scrutiny Officer

Report Author: Caroline Webb, Senior Governance Advisor
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This report is published on the Council's [website](#).

Appendix 1:

[Agenda item - NOTICE OF MOTION - NATURE CRISIS - Rotherham Council](#)**25 May 2022 – Council Meeting**

This Council notes we are in the middle of a nature crisis. Almost half of all UK wildlife is in long term decline and 15% of species are at risk of extinction. The climate crisis is only hastening this destruction of the natural environment, damaging habitats and disrupting ecosystems. Yet it is these very habitats that have the potential to lock up carbon and fight back against rising global temperatures. It is essential that we not only protect these spaces, but let them thrive – for the benefit of people, planet and nature. We recognise that the terms Nature, Ecological and Biodiversity can be and are often used interchangeably by people and, for the purpose of this motion, all mean the same thing.

Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta's review into The Economics of Biodiversity, commissioned by Her Majesty's Treasury, highlighted that humanity does not exist in isolation from nature but sits within it. Nature is an asset on which all aspects of our society depends and with biodiversity declining faster than at any time in human history, we are undermining the productivity, resilience and adaptability that nature lends our society.

As we recover from the Covid-19 crisis, the need for nature-rich green spaces where we live and work is clearer than ever and will help health, education and the economy build back stronger. We recognise that the Climate and Nature emergencies are intrinsically linked with each other and also to social justice; and by building a better world to deal with the Climate and Nature Crises we will also be building a better society. We recognise that action must be taken now to remedy this and to put nature into recovery at a local level, not only to benefit Rotherham, but in support of regional, national and international work to do the same.

This Council therefore notes and recognises that

- a) Nature is in long term decline and urgent action must be taken to reverse this.
- b) A thriving natural environment underpins a healthy, prosperous society.
- c) The nature and the climate crises are intrinsically linked and that the impacts of the climate crisis drive nature's decline, while restoring nature can help to tackle the climate crisis.
- d) Local people and groups have recognised the issues and have declared a Nature Crisis for Rotherham themselves and call on the Council to do so too.

This Council resolves to:

- 1. Therefore, this Council proposes to declare a Nature Crisis for Rotherham.
- 2. Ask the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to consider commissioning a review into how the Council can support improvements to ensure a more natural environment is enhanced.

3. Ensure our responsiveness on tackling climate change is extended to be complimentary to this separate but well aligned cause.
4. Continue to further our work on enhancing biodiversity by adopting innovative approaches to support wild flowered areas and ecological approaches to grounds maintenance.
5. Note the ongoing significant progress the Council is making through its Climate Change Action Plans for a carbon neutral Council by 2030 and Borough by 2040.

On being put to the vote, the motion as submitted was declared as carried by majority.

Appendix 2:

The Chair thanks the following Subject Matter Experts and Advisors consulted:

- Abbi Reid, MCIWM
- Robert Croxton, Naturalist
- Bill Bailey, Naturalist
- Cara Case, CPSS
- Dr Nicola Rivers, MCIEEM, SRWT
- Liz Ballard, Chief Executive SRWT
- Roy Mosely, SRWT
- Duncan Hawley, SAGT
- Kim Phillips, MBE
- Erika Phoenix, Catchment Partnership
- Sgt. James Shirley, SYP Rural Crime
- Sgt. Paul Jameson, SYP Rural Crime
- Katie Dearnley, SYP Engagement and Consultation Officer
- Richard Sulley, SYMCA Policy
- Laurie Heykoop, SYMCA Policy
- Andrew Fairburn, Severn Trent Water
- Tim Myatt, Yorkshire Water
- Claire Barrow, Environment Agency

Improving Places Select Commission – Work Programme 2023-24 – presented in March 2024

Chair: Cllr Ken Wyatt
Governance Manager: Barbel Gale

Vice-Chair: Cllr Adam Tinsley
Link Officer: Paul Woodcock

The following principles were endorsed by OSMB at its meeting of 5 July 2023 as criteria to long/short list each of the commission's respective priorities:

Establish as a starting point:

- What are the key issues?
- What is the desired outcome?

Agree principles for longlisting:

- Can scrutiny add value or influence?
- Is this being looked at elsewhere?
- Is this a priority for the council or community?

Developing a consistent shortlisting criteria, e.g.

- T: Time: is it the tight time, enough resources?
- O: Others: is this duplicating the work of another body?
- P: Performance: can scrutiny make a difference
- I: Interest: what is the interest to the public?
- C: Contribution to the corporate plan

Meeting Date	Agenda Item
06 June 2023	Environment Act 2021 Update
11 July 2023	Draft Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy Cost-of-Living and Rent Arrears Playground Equipment: Procurement and Installation
19 September 2023	Site Visit to Ickes Lock Flooding Alleviation Update Combined Storm Overflows
24 October 2023	Neighbourhood Working Annual Report Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Update
Winter 2023/24	Review: Household Waste Recycling - Reusable Items
12 December 2023	Bereavement Services Annual Report Road Safety and Cumwell Lane Update Social Frontiers
6 February 2024	Markets Redevelopment Update Social Housing Regulation Act: update on Housing Services preparedness
19 March 2024	Tenant Scrutiny Review and Action Plan - Voids Tenant Communications Update

Items to be scheduled:

TBC – to be suggested as a topic for the new municipal year	School Road Safety
TBC – to be suggested as a topic for the new municipal year	Anti-social behaviour workshop
TBC	Allotments Annual Update – Will be brought back to the commission as and when an update is available.