

Date: 17 January 2014
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To: Members of the Void Standard Task and Finish Forum:
(Mike Berridge, Victor Kemp, Jim Knight, Peter Sullivan, Pauline Stott)

Dennis Boobier - Housing Needs and Strategy Manager
Emma Charlton – Housing Projects Officer
Mark Dale – Senior Technical Officer - Day to Day Repairs
John Golding – Head of Housing
Laurence Hughes – SW Operations Manager, MD Building Services

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Councillor Jill Elson – Portfolio Holder, Sustainable Homes and Communities
Councillor Stephanie Jones – Deputy Portfolio Holder, Sustainable Homes and Communities

Meeting of the Void Standard Task and Finish Forum

Friday 24 January 2014 at 10am

Committee Room, Knowle, Sidmouth

Councillors and members of the public are reminded to switch off mobile phones during the meeting. If this is not practical due to particular circumstances, please advise the Chairman in advance of the meeting.

AGENDA

Page/s

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| 1. | To receive any apologies for absence. | |
| 2. | To receive the notes of the meeting of the Void Standard Task and Finish Forum held on 10 January 2014. | 4 - 9 |
| 3. | To receive any declarations of interest relating to items on the agenda. | |
| 5. | To consider the draft void standard leaflet. | To follow |
| 6. | To discuss the contents of the final report from the TaFF to the Housing Review Board. | |

Decision making and equality duties

- The Council will give due regard under the Equality Act 2010 to the equality impact of its decisions.
- An appropriate level of analysis of equality issues, assessment of equalities impact and any mitigation and/or monitoring of impact will be addressed in committee reports.
- Consultation on major policy changes will take place in line with any legal requirements and with what is appropriate and fair for the decisions being taken.
- Members will be expected to give reasons for decisions which demonstrate they have addressed equality issues.

Members and co-opted members remember!

- You must declare the nature of any disclosable pecuniary interests. [Under the Localism Act 2011, this means the interests of your spouse, or civil partner, a person with whom you are living with as husband and wife or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners]. You must also disclose any personal interest.
- You must disclose your interest in an item whenever it becomes apparent that you have an interest in the business being considered.
Make sure you say what your interest is as this has to be included in the minutes. [For example, 'I have a disclosable pecuniary interest because this planning application is made by my husband's employer'.]
- If your interest is a disclosable pecuniary interest you cannot participate in the discussion, cannot vote and must leave the room unless you have obtained a dispensation from the Council's Monitoring Officer or Standards Committee.

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From Exeter – 52A, 52B; From Honiton – 52B;

From Seaton – 52A; From Ottery St Mary – 379, 387

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For a copy of this agenda in large print, please contact the Democratic Services Team on 01395 517546

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Notes of a meeting of the Void/Lettable Standard Task and Finish Forum held at Knowle, Sidmouth on 10 January 2014

Present:

Councillors:

Jim Knight
Peter Sullivan
Pauline Stott

Tenants:

Mike Berridge
Victor Kemp

Officers:

Dennis Boobier – Housing Needs and Strategy Manager
Emma Charlton – Housing Projects Officer
Mark Dale – Senior Technical Officer – day to day repairs
John Golding – Head of Housing
Alethea Thompson – Democratic Services Officer

Laurence Hughes – SW Operations Manager, MD Building Services

The meeting started at 10.05am and ended at 12.30pm.

***1 Election of Chairman and opening remarks**

Councillor Jim Knight was elected as Chairman. He welcomed all the members of the Forum and invited everybody to introduce themselves.

***2 Appointment of Vice Chairman**

Councillor Peter Sullivan was appointed as Vice Chairman of the Forum.

***3 Declarations of interest**

Board Member	Minute number	Type of interest	Nature of interest
Jim Knight		Personal	Daughter lives in a Council owned property.
Mike Berridge		Personal	Family member lives in a Council owned property.
Peter Sullivan		Personal	Sheltered housing tenant.

***4 Scope**

The Forum considered the scope of work for the Task and Finish Forum (TaFF), which was presented at the meeting. Those present agreed the scoping document and the need to be clear in what the TaFF was trying to achieve. One amendment was made, which was a review of the tenant's welcome pack to be added to the desired outcomes.

Review of the welcome pack

The Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP) report presented to the housing review board on 5 September 2013 recommended a review of the welcome pack. The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager had considered the TSP recommendations and these were then discussed by the TaFF. The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager reported that he was happy to implement all of the changes suggested by the TSP to the welcome pack. These included:

- To reinstate the welcome letter to new tenants.
- To include a local information sheet for each area in the pack.
- To provide an easy reference card for repairs and maintenance, containing key phone numbers. After discussion by the forum it was agreed to provide this information on a small fridge magnet.
- A list of useful contact numbers, including the out of hour's number, would be included in the pack.
- To include a refuse and recycling leaflet. This already existed and would be easy to provide.

All of the other recommendations required no changes to be made. It was noted that a 'goody bag' was produced by the Tenant Representative Group (TRG) for new tenants, with funding provided from Skinners and MD Building Services Limited (MD). It was suggested that the contractors could include a welcome note in the pack informing tenants of who they were and what they did. The SW Operations Manager, MD Building Services agreed to investigate what was currently provided.

RESOLVED: that a review of the tenant welcome pack be added to the scope of the TaFF and that subject to this, the scope be agreed as set out in the agenda.

***5 Void management report to the Housing Review Board**

Members noted the report of the Housing Needs and Strategy which had previously been considered by the Housing Review Board on 7 November 2013. The report set out an officer response to a report presented to the board on 5 September 2013 by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel (TSP). The TSP had undertaken a review of the void process and made a number of recommendations. Board members had then asked for a further report with a revised void procedure to be presented.

*5 **Void management report to the Housing Review Board (cont'd)****Proposed cleaning standard**

The TSP had requested some clarity (both for tenants and contractors) around the cleaning standard of void properties and for written details to be provided in the void lettable standard. In advance of the meeting the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager had prepared some proposed standards based on current practice and examples from other housing authorities. These were discussed at length and the following was agreed with regard to cleaning:

- There will be no rubbish inside or outside the property or within sheds, cupboards, the garden and loft space.
- We will sweep, mop and dry all tiled, concrete and hard floors to remove dirt and scuff marks.
- We will wash the inside and outside of kitchen cupboards and drawers and wash sinks, taps, worktops, wall tiles, grouting and sealant with a recognised cleaning product.
- If grouting or sealant is excessively stained we will renew them.
- All cobwebs will be removed.
- There will be no graffiti or excessive staining.
- We will remove blu-tak, sellotape, drawing pins, etc.
- We will wash the fixtures and fittings in the bathroom.
- All woodwork will be washed down and dried.
- Any plastic doors and windows will be washed.
- Any carpets that are left will be hoovered.
- Note: All 'washing' or mopping' or 'cleaning' should be done with clean water and an appropriate cleaning product, such as a disinfectant.

Proposed garden standard

The Forum then went on to consider some proposed garden standards to be included. After further detailed discussion the following was agreed:

- We will clear all rubbish from the garden and clear excessive vegetation before you move in. The maintenance and upkeep of the garden will then be the incoming tenant's responsibility.
- We will remove items such as ponds, ornaments, sheds, greenhouses, lean-to, conservatories, etc unless they are in good condition, serviceable and safe. At the time of the accompanied viewing, these items will be offered to the incoming tenant. If the incoming tenant wishes to keep any of these items, we will ask them to sign a form taking responsibility for these items, their maintenance and disposal.
- We will ensure that any post and rail fencing to any boundaries that are our responsibility are in good order. All wooden or other types of fencing are the incoming tenant's responsibility to maintain and repair.
- We will ensure that paths leading to front and rear entrance doors are free from trip hazards and excessive moss.
- All above ground floor flat balconies will be clear and free from trip hazards and excessive moss.
- All entrance gates will be serviceable.

*5 **Void management report to the Housing Review Board (cont'd)**

Proposed fixtures and fittings (left by the outgoing tenant) standard

Another issue considered by the TaFF was the specification/standard for non standard fixtures and fittings left by an outgoing tenant, such as built in cookers, built in wardrobes and electric showers. Some concern was expressed over what items were identified as standard and those identified as non-standard. The following was agreed:

- We will assess the condition of the non standard fixtures and fittings such as built in cookers and wardrobes; electric showers and other improvements (DIY) such as kitchen units, bath or conservatory carried out by outgoing tenant, together with the health and safety requirements and maintenance issues.

Where we consider it appropriate the non standard fixture and fitting or improvement will remain in the property. Although we 'gift' the items to the incoming tenant, we will not carry out any repairs or servicing to it. The upkeep and maintenance will be the incoming tenant responsibility. We will ask the incoming tenant to sign a form taking responsibility for these items, their maintenance and disposal.

- We will take responsibility for non standard doors and windows installed by the outgoing tenant.
- We will replace the kitchen, bath, door, window etc when these items have reached the end of their lifecycle in accordance with our programmed works timetable.

Furniture and other items left by the outgoing tenant standard

At present, other items which were serviceable and in good condition, such as carpets or stand alone furniture such as wardrobes or settees would be left in the property for the incoming tenant to decide whether to keep or not. The forum agreed that the following standard should be adopted:

- We will assess the condition of all items such as carpets, wardrobes, curtains, chairs, etc left by the outgoing tenant. If we consider they are in reasonable condition, safe and clean, then we will offer these items to the incoming tenant at the time of the accompanied viewing. If the incoming tenant wishes to keep any of these items, we will ask the incoming tenant to sign a form taking responsibility for these items, their maintenance and disposal.
- These items will be protected during repair work or will be stored safely as it may be necessary to remove these items because of the extent of work to be done. The incoming tenant will be required to pay for the storage cost.

5 Void management report to the Housing Review Board (cont'd)*Proposed inclusions in the void standard**

The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager suggested three proposals for inclusion in the void standard, subject to available funding and these were discussed in detail. The proposals were:

1. Sure-stop alternative to the stopcock, which would cost an estimated £50 each (£30 materials and £20 labour) – total cost £12,500 per year. The forum agreed to install these in all void properties.
2. Moving of electrical fuse boxes to help older or disabled tenants would cost an estimated £400 each – assume work only in sheltered housing and tenants with disability -100 units per year – total cost will be £40,000 per year. It was agreed to undertake this work in sheltered housing properties when they were:
 - a. Void
 - b. In a kitchen replacement programme, and
 - c. Where any major electrical work is undertaken.
3. The internal decoration of general needs void property was estimated to cost an average of £3,000 per property. Assuming an average of 150 properties the cost would be around £450,000. A number of general needs void properties were decorated internally at present. It was estimated that to decorate all general needs void properties would cost an additional £350,000 per year. Redecorating all void properties would also impact upon the void timescale. The forum felt that void properties should not be fully redecorated as standard, but that extremes should be dealt with and that further consideration should be given to incentives to encourage able bodied tenants to undertake the decorating themselves.

RESOLVED: that standards discussed and agreed by the forum in respect of cleaning, gardens, fixtures and fittings, furniture and other items left by the outgoing tenant, installing the sure-stop alternative to the stopcock and moving of electrical fuse boxes be included in the void standard.

***6 Current East Devon District Council void leaflet and examples from other housing providers**

The TaFF considered the current void leaflet produced by EDDC, and some examples from the following housing authorities:

- East Devon District Council
- Exeter City Council
- London Borough of Hillingdon
- North West Leicestershire District Council
- ARK Housing
- Stevenage Homes
- Oxford City Homes
- South Essex Homes

*6 **Current East Devon District Council void leaflet and examples from other housing providers (cont'd)**

The forum agreed that the Exeter City Council and Oxford City Homes leaflets were good examples. They covered all the basics and were clear, understandable and user friendly.

Two of the key recommendations from the TSP on voids were that the void standard should be clarified and made more specific, and that tenants should be given clear information on the work to be done on their new home and the standard they could expect the property to be in at the start of their tenancy.

It was felt that EDDC already had a void standard that had been tested on many occasions and was legally compliant. However, the current document was too wordy and technical. What was needed was a document for a tenant that was simple and easily understandable. The forum felt that a void standard leaflet should be produced for tenants and more detailed specification be provided to the contractors.

It was noted that the TSP had made specific recommendations regarding standards for contractors. The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager would need to consider these, decide if they were reasonable to include in the specification and whether the proposed standards would have any additional cost implications. The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager suggested that he consider these with the Senior Technical Officer – day to day repairs and the SW Operations Manager, MD Building Services.

The Housing Needs and Strategy Manager would then produce a generic draft leaflet which was short, clear and understandable and told tenants the work that was being done on a void property. It would include all the standards discussed and agreed by the forum during the meeting. It was noted that this document would be considered by the Tenants Reader Panel

It was reported that the TSP had asked to meet with the Head of Housing and the Housing Needs and Strategy Manager as they had not been satisfied with the response of the HRB to their report. This meeting would be held on 11 February 2014 and it was suggested that the chairman and vice chairman of the TaFF also be invited to attend this meeting. If possible the draft void standard leaflet would be brought to this meeting for the TSP's information.

RESOLVED: that Housing Needs and Strategy Manager prepare a draft void standard leaflet for consideration at the next TaFF meeting.

*7 **Programme of future meetings**

It was agreed that the next meeting would consider a draft void standard leaflet.

The Chairman thanked all those present for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED: that the next meeting of the Void Task and Finish Forum be held at 10am on Friday 24 January 2014.

East Devon Homes VOID PROPERTY STANDARD

General Standards

All East Devon Home empty properties are inspected to ensure the following overall standards.

We will:

- Test all the standard gas appliances fitted in our homes and repair or replace as required. Carry out a gas pipework tightness test to ensure that the system is safe. A copy of the gas certificate will be left for the incoming tenant.
- Test the electrical circuitry to comply with latest regulations. Ensure all switches, light fittings and sockets are securely fixed and safe. If the property requires rewiring then a decision will be made at the time of the inspection whether that must be done while property is empty or can wait and include as part of our future programmed works. A copy of the electrical certificate will be left for the incoming tenant.
- Ensure the water supply to the property is functioning properly
- Ensure a suitable means of heating your home.
- Ensure all rubbish is cleared and the property is clean – see cleaning standard below
- Ensure all internal doors are in good working order
- Change the front and rear door locks
- Check all windows to ensure glazing is sound and open and close properly. Any opening restrictors are also checked.
- Ensure all floors are in good condition and level to receive floor covering.
- Ensure all plasterwork is sound.
- Undertake the work recommended dealing with any asbestos found by our Survey that we have undertaken in accordance with the regulations.
- Remove any hazardous materials found at the property.

- Move the electrical fuse box to a lower level to give ease of access to older and disabled tenants (*sheltered housing only*).
- Provide a copy of the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)
- Check safety glass in all doors and windows and bring up to standard where necessary
- Ensure hand rails and banisters are complete
- Check existing external grab rails to entrance doors are safe and secure
- Remove fire places and block up and vent where necessary
- Provide a key safe for sheltered housing tenants

Kitchen Standard

We will:

- Ensure the kitchen is clean and functional and make best use of available space to provide storage and work surfaces. If it is identified that the kitchen requires replacement, we will do the required work while the property is empty.
- Check pipework and taps are free of leaks and ensure that waste pipes are not blocked.
- Fit connecting taps and drain point for washing machine.
- Ensure that there is a gas (if gas supply available) or electric cooker point for a cooker.
- Clean and overhaul all East Devon Homes fitted ventilation system
- Ensure floor coverings are sound, clean and moisture resistant
- Install a Sure-stop alternative to the stopcock

Bathroom Standard

We will:

- Check pipework and taps are free from leaks. If necessary, replace the plug and chain to the bath and basin. Ensure waste pipes are not blocked.
- Ensure bath, WC and basin are sound, clean and functional.
- Replace the toilet seat. Check pipework for leaks and ensure that the toilet cistern is flushing properly
- Clean and overhaul any East Devon Homes fitted ventilation system
- Overhaul an electric shower if fitted by East Devon Homes
- Ensure floor coverings to bathroom is sound, clean and moisture resistant

Cleaning Standard

We will:

- Ensure there is no rubbish inside or outside the property or within sheds, cupboards, the garden and loft space
- Sweep, mop and dry all tiled, concrete and hard floors to remove dirt and scuff marks
- Wash the inside and outside of kitchen cupboards and drawers and wash sinks, taps, worktops, wall tiles, grouting and sealant with a recognised cleaning product. If grouting or sealant is excessively stained we will renew them
- All cobwebs will be removed as well as blu tak, sellotape and drawing pins
- There will be no graffiti or excessive staining
- We will wash the fixtures and fittings in the bathroom
- All woodwork will be washed down and dried
- Any plastic doors and windows will be washed
- Any carpets that are left will be hoovered.

Please note: All 'washing' or mopping' or "cleaning" should be done with clean water and an appropriate cleaning product, such as a disinfectant.

Garden Standard

We will:

- Clear all rubbish from the garden and clear excessive vegetation before you move in. The maintenance and upkeep of the garden will then be the incoming tenant's responsibility
- Remove items such as ponds, ornaments, sheds, greenhouses, lean-to, conservatories, etc unless they are in good condition, serviceable and safe. At the time of the accompanied viewing, these items will be offered to the incoming tenant. If the incoming tenant wishes to keep any of these items, we will ask them to sign a form taking responsibility for these items, their maintenance and disposal.
- Ensure that any post and wire fencing to any boundaries that are our responsibility are in good order. All wooden or other types of fencing are the incoming tenant's responsibility to maintain and repair.
- Ensure that paths and steps leading to front and rear entrance doors are free from trip hazards and excessive moss and all entrance gates will be serviceable
- All flat balconies will be clear and free from trip hazards and excessive moss

Loft Standard

We will:

- Provide new loft insulation to approved standard where the insulation is lacking or substandard.

Hard Wire Alarm/Safety Standard

We will:

- Check that the pull cord equipment in sheltered is in full working order
- Ensure heat detectors and smoke detectors are fitted as required by regulation
- Fit a CO detector where necessary.

Internal decoration Standard

We will:

- Fully decorate all void sheltered housing properties if required.
- Ensure existing decoration is intact and clean although it may not be to the incoming tenants taste.
- All wallpaper should be attached to the wall, peeling paper will be removed.
- In extreme circumstances the Maintenance Surveyor will arrange for some non sheltered housing properties to be redecorated during the void period.

Non Fixtures and Fittings Standard

Some tenants carry out improvements to their homes and some are not standard East Devon Homes fittings. Our Maintenance Surveyor will assess the condition of the non standard fixtures and fittings such as built in cookers and wardrobes; electric showers and other improvements (DIY) such as kitchen units, bath or conservatory carried out by outgoing tenant, together with the health and safety requirements and maintenance issues.

Where we consider it appropriate the non standard fixture and fitting or improvement will remain in the property. Although we 'gift' the items to the incoming tenant, we will not carry out any repairs or servicing to it. The upkeep and maintenance will be the incoming tenant responsibility. We will ask the incoming tenant to sign a form taking responsibility for these items, their maintenance and disposal.

We will:

- take responsibility for non standard doors and windows installed by the outgoing tenant
- We will replace the non standard kitchens, baths, entrance doors, and windows when these items have reached the end of their lifecycle in accordance with our programmed works timetable.

Serviceable items left by outgoing tenant Standard

We will:

- We will assess the condition of all items such as carpets, wardrobes, curtains, furniture, etc left by the outgoing tenant. If we consider they are in reasonable condition, safe and clean, then we will offer these items to the incoming tenant at the time of the accompanied viewing. If the incoming tenant wishes to keep any of these items, we will ask the incoming tenant to sign a form taking

responsibility for these items, their maintenance and disposal.

- These items will be protected during repair work or will be stored safely as it may be necessary to remove these items because of the extent of work to be done. The incoming tenant will be required to pay for the storage cost.