



## AGENDA ITEM: 11

### SUMMARY

<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Housing and Communities Overview &amp; Scrutiny</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup> November 2014</b>
<b>PART:</b>	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Allocations and Empty Homes Team Update</b>
Contact:	Cllr Margaret Griffiths, Portfolio Holder for Housing Julia Hedger, Strategic Housing Group Manager
Purpose of report:	To provide Members with an update of the improvement work the new Empty Homes Team have undertaken over the last six months; together with future plans to further improve the service.
Recommendations	1. For the Committee to note the report.
Corporate objectives:	Affordable Housing
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> Fast void turnaround time reduces rent lost to the Council.
'Value For Money Implications'	<u>Value for Money</u>
Risk Implications	Risk Assessment – Team assessment on-going
Equalities Implications	Equality Impact Assessment - Team assessment on-going
Health And Safety Implications	Need to ensure lettable standard is achieved for new Council lettings to ensure the properties are safe for new tenants to

	move into.
Consultees:	Elliott Brooks – Assistant Director of Housing Natasha Brathwaite – Strategic Housing Team Leader (Property) Lesley Jugoo – Lead Officer Empty Homes Gemma Goacher – Lead Officer Allocations
Background papers:	Quarter 2 Performance Report
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	GM – Group Manager PI – Performance Indicator CBL – Choice Based Lettings

## Background

- 1.1 Prior to April 2014 the responsibility for the key to key empty homes (void) process was split between three Group Managers and their teams (Housing Landlord, Property and Place, Strategic Housing). No one GM had the final responsibility for the team or the PI with performance not as good as it should have been.
- 1.2 In early 2014 the decision was taken by the Housing Senior Management Team (in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing) to merge the teams into one; a new Empty Homes Team.
- 1.3 The Team now reports to one Group Manager (Julia Hedger – Strategic Housing) and sits within the Property Team in Strategic Housing. Natasha Brathwaite is currently the team leader while Isabel Connolly is on maternity leave, until May 2015.  
Lesley Jugoo is the Lead Officer of the team with a performance officer (Pat Coles) and three Lettings Officers (Gemma Baker, Michelle Challis & Dominique Angelo).
- 1.4 Within the property team there is an Allocations Team – Lead Officer is Gemma Goacher with two allocations officers. (Karen O Leary and Ryan Glanville).  
The two lead officers within the Property team work very closely together, and have been focusing on improving performance together.
- 1.5 In July 2014 a new maintenance contract began with Osborne's. This enabled the team to develop new ways of working; however it also presented new challenges of working with a new organisation on such a key Council contract.

## 2.0 Performance Information

- 2.1 In April 2014 the empty homes performance indicator showed the average time taken to re-let all properties was **41** days (this includes general need, adapted and sheltered properties.)
- 2.2 For general needs properties only - the average time to re-let was **42.7** days.
- 2.3 At the end of September 2014 the average time taken to re-let all properties was **37.5** days.
- 2.4 For general needs properties only – the average time to re-let was down to **34.2** days.
- 2.5 Target for all properties to be let is **35** calendar days and general needs are **25** calendar days to be let. (Key to key – when keys are returned from previous tenants and tenancy is terminated to when new tenancy begins)
- 2.6 Further more detailed performance information is contained within the Housing performance report also to be discussed at this H&C OSC meeting and included within the meetings papers.

### **3.0 Improvement work to date**

#### **3.1 Procedural changes**

- Within the allocations team procedures relating to each process stream now have an associated target for action. These targets are clearly set out in a procedure document which provides clear guidance to staff on procedures to be followed with realistic target times to be achieved.
- Pre-void information is being used to advertise properties during the pre-void stage where possible.
- A new weekly 'work plan' spreadsheet for allocations has been developed and implemented within the team.
- No delay to tenancy commencement date for transfers under the 'Moving to a smaller home scheme' (saving around 14 days from each relevant letting)
- No delay to tenancy commencement date for transfer lettings where the sign up takes place on a Thurs / Fri (saving around 7 days from each relevant letting)
- Process mapping with clear procedures developed to ensure clarity for all staff within Osborne and DBC to ensure the responsibilities of both services are clear.

#### **3.2 Internal communication between teams**

- Development of lead officer relationship with more informal meetings each week and team building guidance.
- New mail groups set up to assist communication between all teams.
- Whiteboards in the office showing on-going performance which are updated daily.
- Real focus on general needs target of 25 days.
- Rationalisation of spreadsheet use; for example removed a spreadsheet duplicating information between allocations and lettings.

#### **3.3 External communications and messages to applicants**

- Letters have been developed and improved to make them clearer and provide more details to applicants.
- Websites have been updated (both DBC and Moving with Dacorum). Focus on providing relevant key information and updating websites regularly.
- Article in News and Views on promoting new team and clarifying the verification information needed at point of offer.

### **3.4 Staff training**

- Property inspections training (Empty Homes Performance Officer and 2 x Lettings Officers attended training) to provide a greater understanding of the Lettable Standard expected when properties are ready to be let.
- Joint team meeting with all housing staff whose role may impact on lettings.
- Staff workshops to discuss areas for improvements and to generate ideas of how improvements can be made – this will happen regularly to improve communication and identify achievable improvements more quickly.
- Staff work shadowing between teams to raise awareness of team roles.

### **3.5 Developed Partnership with Osborne**

- Weekly operational meetings set up and attended between the two teams.
- 'Work in progress' spreadsheet updated and sent daily.
- Joint pre-void and pre-transfer visits between teams.
- Pre-void information sharing (e.g. repairs category, future planned works) this enables the team to use this information to inform potential tenants at offer and/or viewing if a new kitchen or bathroom will be installed post-void.
- Void specification sharing (including confirmation of pre-void repairs category, recharges, and details of works to be completed)
- Joint audit inspections to improve quality of works and prevent unnecessary refusals where possible.

### **4.0 Future improvement work currently planned**

- Continuous bidding cycles on CBL – this will allow some popular properties to be advertised for shorter periods of time. It will also allow properties to be advertised on each day of the week rather than work to the cycle we currently have (Thursday morning to Monday night).
- Letting of adapted properties through CBL and improving our relationship with Occupational Therapists.
- Further work on pro-active verification visits (further analysis of transfer visits which are still being requested as urgent)
- Work on lettings procedures – further develop new procedures relating to each process stream with associated target for action (this work has begun)
- Tenancy commencement form to be sent directly from Lettings Officers to Debit Control to prevent delays to tenancy set up on Orchard
- Remove Turn On and Test potentially which currently causes delays to tenancy commencement and can cause difficulties for new tenants moving into their property.
- Only drain down heating systems between Nov – April when weather is colder.
- Review contract management of Sunrealm and ensure they are working well with Osbourne. This work will look at improving communication between Sunrealm and Osbourne to prevent delays with Sunrealm requiring a vacant

property after Osborne have completed their work. Ideally we would like to stop category 2 (non-emergency) installations being carried out during the void period also. This work can be scheduled once a tenancy has begun if non-urgent.