

# Resident Scrutiny Panel Report Lettable Standard & Quality of Works (Empty Properties)

LB Redbridge

December 2016

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# 1 Scrutiny Scoping

Scrutiny Area	Voids Management
<b>Scrutiny Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To investigate the lettable standard of empty properties and the quality of works undertaken.</li> </ul>
<b>Independent Mentor &amp; Chairperson</b>	<b>Richard Tomkinson, Why Not Consultancy Services Ltd.</b>
<b>LB Redbridge Lead Officers</b>	<b>Stewart Grant, Area Housing Manager Carmel Grant, Resident Engagement Officer</b>
<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Housing Revenue Account</b>

Milestone	Date
<b>Scoping &amp; Request for Information</b>	<b>8 July 2016</b>
<b>Desktop Review</b>	<b>30 September 2016</b>
<b>Start on site (Reality Checking)</b>	<b>4 November 2016</b>
<b>Finish on site</b>	<b>18 November 2016</b>
<b>Evidence Collation</b>	<b>16 December 2016</b>
<b>Draft report issued</b>	<b>9 February 2017</b>
<b>Clarification Meeting</b>	<b>17 February 2017</b>
<b>Management responses provided</b>	
<b>Final report issued</b>	
<b>Board meeting</b>	

## 2 Scrutiny Findings: One Page Summary

### Assurance on effectiveness of service

The Resident Scrutiny Panel are assured that the voids service is generally good and delivered to a high standard.

Priority	Number of recommendations
HIGH	0
MEDIUM	1
LOW	7
TOTAL	8

## **Risk management**

**The Resident Scrutiny Panel has made one recommendation for improvement to partnership working and communications, which could impact on reputational risk management, though these are outweighed by strengths (Recommendation no. 4 on page 13.)**

## **Value for money**

**No specific value for money benchmarking was undertaken as part of this review.**

**The Resident Scrutiny Panel has made one recommendation which could impact on service performance and deliver efficiencies in terms of financial savings. (Recommendation no. 5 on page 14).**

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Background

Resident-led scrutiny is a key aspect of modern co-regulation of the national housing standards framework consumer standards (the services that residents receive). Benefits include:

- Continuous monitoring and scrutiny of performance, allowing residents and LB Redbridge to improve the services residents receive.
- Residents being empowered to play an active role in assessing the quality and effectiveness of landlord performance, challenging to improve and holding to account if they fail to do so.
- Residents offering a valuable perspective on their actual customer experience, and landlords using this insight to help shape and improve services.

This is the third review undertaken by the Resident Scrutiny Panel.

The team for this review were:

- **Carol Ellison, Glaston Alexander, Syed Haque, Keith Barrett and Jim Brennan**

The Team is supported by an independent mentor, Richard Tomkinson (Why Not Consultancy Services Limited), with Stewart Grant and Carmel Grant providing internal liaison and supporting the team to achieve its' aims.

Independent Resident-Led Scrutiny at LB Redbridge aims to:

- Scrutinise the performance of the Council's housing services working as a resident-led group under the national regulatory framework.

It's role is to:

- Be the body by which elected tenant and leaseholder representatives of groups within the wider structure can communicate their opinions and make recommendations to the Resident Housing Panel on policy and service delivery improvement based upon scrutiny of housing information.
- Determine which areas of service are to be scrutinised and identify an annual work plan.

- Receive the views of the Resident Housing Panel regarding areas of scrutiny and incorporate these into the annual work plan.

The Resident Scrutiny Panel considered a range of information including:

- Performance information including some local performance indicators
- Housemark benchmarking report
- Suggestions from senior management

From which a 'long list' of potential topics for review were developed.

Panel members then undertook a 3-2-1 priorities setting exercise, which determined a consensus as follows:

- Lettable Standard and quality of works: 7 Points
- Antisocial Behaviour: 4 Points
- Appearance of estates (grounds maintenance): 6 Points
- Complaints: 2 Points

The Resident Scrutiny Panel therefore concluded that the topic for the next review should be the Lettable Standard and Quality of Works (Empty Properties).

### 3.2 Methodology

Throughout the review, the Panel were very much aware of the unique opportunity to achieve a shared vision of cooperation and were keen to ensure they were seen to be transparent and accountable whilst maintaining independence in conducting a rigorous and challenging review.

Having established what fell within and outside of the scope of the review, a request for information was made to enable the panel to undertake a desk top review to inform its key lines of questioning.

On receipt of requested information, members undertook a desktop review which highlighted some initial findings which were tested during the reality checking phase of the review, along with a number of key lines of questioning. These initial findings included:

- The pre-void approach looks quite strong but the procedure is weak in respect of the works phase, with lots of ambiguity around service commitments.
- Whilst there is a void management procedure, there is no policy setting out what LB Redbridge are aiming to achieve through voids management and there are no details of target timescales for each stage.
- Many of the examples of voids provided bear significant costs, with cleaning costs being significantly high.

Recharge costs appear to be so high that it is unlikely that they would ever be recoverable.

- The 'golden goodbye' incentive for ending tenancies appears to be a strength.
- The proactive approach to aids & adaptations requirements of prospective tenants appears to be a strength.

Once the key questions and tests were developed, the Panel agreed the methodology (detailed below) which would provide the most efficient means of gathering the required evidence, in order to highlight areas that are working well and to inform recommendations for improvement.

The methods used by the Resident Scrutiny Committee in conducting this review were:

### **Staff interviews**

Staff interviews were conducted with:

- Stewart Grant, Area Housing Manager
- Nicole Fresco, Empty Homes Co-ordinator
- Mick Mardon, Repairs Manager
- Bob Jolly, Morrison Voids Manager

### **Visits to void properties**

Two visits were planned, one to a newly void property and one to a ready to let property. However, due to the timing of the review, this reality check was unable to be completed.



#### 4. Detailed Findings & Recommendations

Recommendation Priority	Definition
<b>HIGH</b>	High Priority recommendations represent significant weaknesses, which expose LB Redbridge residents to particularly poor service and/or value for money and require immediate action.
<b>MEDIUM</b>	Medium Priority recommendations represent weaknesses which expose LB Redbridge residents to a moderate degree of unnecessarily reduced quality of service and/or value for money and require actions to improve within 3-6 months of submission of this report.
<b>LOW</b>	Low Priority recommendations show areas where we have highlighted good practise and/or opportunities to implement better practice, to improve efficiency or further improve services to residents. Actions to be implemented as resources allow.

## 4.1 Strengths

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
1. Communication between the teams and the contractor works well. All staff understand their roles and what is required from them.			N/A
2. Contrary to the performance information provided as part of the formal request for information, the turnaround time is a strength. Target times are 20 days (turnaround) and 8 days (works) and performance is consistently ahead of these target times, suggesting improvements have been made over the past 12 months and the RSP were delighted to learn that as a result of strong performance the overall target turnaround time is set to be reduced to 17 days.			N/A

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>3. The current decorations scheme is considered by the RSP to be good, with generous allowances and a colour-match service affording full colour choice for residents. Additionally, the RSP learnt that LB Redbridge is happy to assist vulnerable or less mobile residents to complete decorating if required. The RSP do, however, feel that this area needs to be clarified within the overall voids management procedure.</p>	<p>1. Include clarity within the procedure detailing the specific/different offer for more vulnerable/less mobile residents.</p>		
<p>4. Standards achieved prior to relet were generally perceived by the RSP to be good, though there was a sense that the lettable standard could be more aspirational.</p>	<p>2. Review the lettable standard and compare with other similar providers to consider whether a more aspirational standard could be delivered.</p>		
<p>5. The gifting of carpets and fixtures and fittings that are in good condition and could be of benefit to incoming tenants was considered a strength, though the RSP noted a lack of detail within current procedures about how LB Redbridge indemnifies itself from liability for the on-going maintenance of such items.</p>	<p>3. Tighten up the current procedure to include clarity on indemnification.</p>		



## 4.2 Areas for Improvement

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>1. Whilst there is a voids procedure document, there is currently no policy or technical specification to support delivery of the service and set out the way in which LB Redbridge will control and manage voids and improve performance. The procedure was reviewed in 2015 but already it fails to reflect current working practise (e.g. target times). There was some support for the development of a policy &amp; procedure which both reflects current practise and sets the aims of the service.</p>	<p>4. Undertake a review of the voids procedure to include clear performance indicators and target timescales for completion, developing an associated policy and technical specification. The policy could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview &amp; Aims</li> <li>• Ending a tenancy/pre-void</li> <li>• Data collection requirements at tenancy termination</li> <li>• Tenancy termination incentive scheme</li> <li>• Right to improve</li> <li>• Repairs (inspection, ordering and works)</li> <li>• Hard to let properties</li> <li>• Decorating policy (including offer variance for vulnerable residents)</li> <li>• Creating new tenancies (viewings, sign-up, visits)</li> <li>• Lettable standard</li> <li>• Monitoring, review and resident involvement.</li> </ul>		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>2. There was contradictory evidence in respect of the financial threshold at which works should be referred to LB Redbridge prior to ordering. Staff on the client (housing management) side told us that the level was £1350-£1500, whilst those on the asset management and contractor side told us that the threshold for referral was £3,500. This need clarifying within the procedure and regular monitoring.</p>	<p>5. Clarify the financial limit at which works orders need referring.</p> <p>NB: The RSP are of the view that this should be set at the current target level of £1587.</p>		
<p>3. The RSP learnt that works are identified via a specification form containing the current schedule of rates for key works. Morrison's complete the spec form and then order the works directly once they return to the office. The RSP are of the view that this process could be improved and simplified.</p>	<p>6. Pilot the use of iPad's, pre-loaded with the SoR on a room by room basis with the capability to order directly from the inspection (reducing the need to return to the office to reenter the order).</p>		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>4. The RSP learnt that all works requirements are currently specified and ordered by Morrison's (subject to the financial threshold's detailed above). Whilst the RSP feel that the trust between client and contractor is a notable strength, we are concerned that the only assurance as to work required for LB Redbridge is through pre-void inspections. That said, we do not wish to impact negatively on either the trust that has developed or the turnaround times being achieved – we do, though feel that some additional checks could be worked into the procedure.</p>	<p>7. Consider piloting mystery shopping of a percentage of works specifications.</p>		

Findings	Recommendation/Priority	Management Response	Timescale / responsibility
<p>5. Whilst the RSP learnt that LB Redbridge doesn't have an issue with refusals, we remain of the view that it is important to gather information on the reasons for refusals should they happen. Currently no satisfaction data is gathered at the viewing stage.</p> <p>Additionally, the RSP recommend updating the sign-up form in light of recent changes in Government policies e.g. there is no longer the requirement to gather financial information in respect of 'pay to stay'.</p>	<p>8. Gather customer insight following accompanied viewing and update sign-up forms to reflect Government policy changes.</p>		



## 5. Next Steps and Chair's Comments

### 5.1 Next Steps

The RSP would welcome the opportunity to have a meeting with senior staff to clarify our findings and recommendations prior to the development of their formal response.

The RSP anticipate that this response will include a clear plan of action detailing:

- What actions will be taken
- When the actions should be completed
- Who has responsibility for each action

Once the RSP have approved the plan of action, this report, along with the plan of action will be presented to the Resident Housing Panel on 27.03.17.

Ongoing monitoring will be through quarterly updates of progress to the RHP.

The Resident Scrutiny Panel (RSP) are keen to see the outputs and outcomes of this review shared with those involved and the wider resident population. We request that a full copy of the report and plan of action be placed on the LB Redbridge website (and be emailed to those involved in the review) and that staff work with the RSP to develop a summary of

recommendations and actions for circulation to all residents through Housing News.

### 5.2 Chair's Comments

The Resident Scrutiny Panel members for this review have learnt many lessons and have worked well together as a team to deliver a timely review which is robust and challenging.

We hope that we have contributed to increasing organisational awareness of Resident-Led Scrutiny and that we have demonstrated effective partnership working and enhanced our reputation as a critical friend to LB Redbridge.

We have a new awareness and appreciation of the difficulties faced by staff and the diminishing resources available. We believe that LB Redbridge has an opportunity to not only manage its reputational risk but to enhance its reputation by supporting resident-led scrutiny to deliver further reviews, and we are committed to improving our approaches to deliver outcome focussed reviews which make a real difference to residents and LB Redbridge.