

## **Meeting:** Housing Sub Committee

**Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019

## **Title:** Empty Homes Standard Review

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**Service:** Environment, Housing and Leisure

**Wards affected:** All

### **1. Purpose of Report**

To inform Members of the recent Empty Homes Standards review carried out by Elected Members and Involved tenants during 2017.

Officers will attend the Committee and take Members through a presentation to provide additional context to this report.

### **2. Recommendation**

To note the information provided and support the recommendations made by the group

### **3. Details**

#### **3.1 Background**

In terms of context approximately 1,200 properties become vacant and are advertised, repaired and re-let each year. The annual repair costs are approximately £3.3m

In order to deliver the year on year improvements the team have carried out a number of reviews the most recent one completed over the last six months.

Further in the report we have provided some detail on the key areas undertaken and the improvements identified.

#### **3.2 Challenges along the way**

Since 2009 North Tyneside Council has had to change its processes and procedures in order to adhere to both changes in Government legislation and Political change.

These challenges have had a direct impact on the time taken to re-let a property and have included:-

- Sept 2009 – Introduction of the new Joint Venture Company
- Jan 2010 – Introduction of choice based lettings
- May 2012 – Introduction of sub regional choice based lettings

- April 2013 – Introduction of the Welfare Reform Act (Bedroom Tax)
- April 2015 – Introduction of the new Sustainable Tenancy Project

The most recent challenge has been the introduction of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 that brought with it a 1% annual rent reduction policy for four years (through to 2020). This continues to present a real challenge in maintaining resources needed to achieve our aspirations. 2017/18 saw the second year of the Government's 4-year 1% per annum rent reduction policy introduced in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, resulting in the repairs budget reducing by £134k

### 3.3 Service Review

A group of tenants and Members was created to review the current empty homes standards and the repairs phase of the Empty Homes Process and make recommendations for:

- A- revised Moving In standard
- A revised Moving Out standard
- The best balance between cost, time and quality
- How the Empty Homes moving out standard should be implemented to reduce the cost of repairs for transferring tenants
- Recharges which are fair and practical

### 3.4 What the group did

Our tenants and Members undertook a thorough review of the service that:

- Heard presentations from Service Managers and engaged with key staff from both NTC and Kier Team.
- Undertook a detailed financial audit of all costs associated with Empty Home repairs to identify efficiencies
- Fully understood the context of the Moving in and Moving Out Standards and identified areas for change.
- Scrutinised Kiers performance in relation to Empty Home repairs
- Looked at complaints and researched how other providers delivered the service.
- Visited empty properties at different stages of the empty homes repair process
- Reviewed in details the customer satisfaction information gathered over a 12 month period and identified areas of improvement
- Consulted with tenants who had moved into their new home to obtain feedback

### 3.5 What they found

The group identified a number of observations and improvements which included:-

- The amount of redecoration materials being provided to tenants was generous and could be reduced
- The welcome pack did not provide Value For Money

- Replacing every lock did not provide Value For Money
- The costs associated with cleaning empty properties was excessive
- The costs associated with removing tenants belongings was excessive
- The costs associated with grass cutting was excessive
- The costs associated with replacing WC seats and shower curtains was too high
- The Moving In and Moving out standards were still fit for purpose but required some minor changes
- The number of tenants being allowed to transfer withfrom homes in a poor condition were too high.
- The number of terminations were increasing

#### **4. Background Information**

The following documents have been used in the compilation of this report:

- Revised Moving In Standard
- Revised Moving Out Standard
- Customer Satisfaction survey data