

# Cornwall Housing's Tenant Led Scrutiny Panel Report

**With the housing crisis in Cornwall, why are Cornwall Housing voids taking so long'**

December 2023

Version 2



**CORNWALL  
HOUSING**

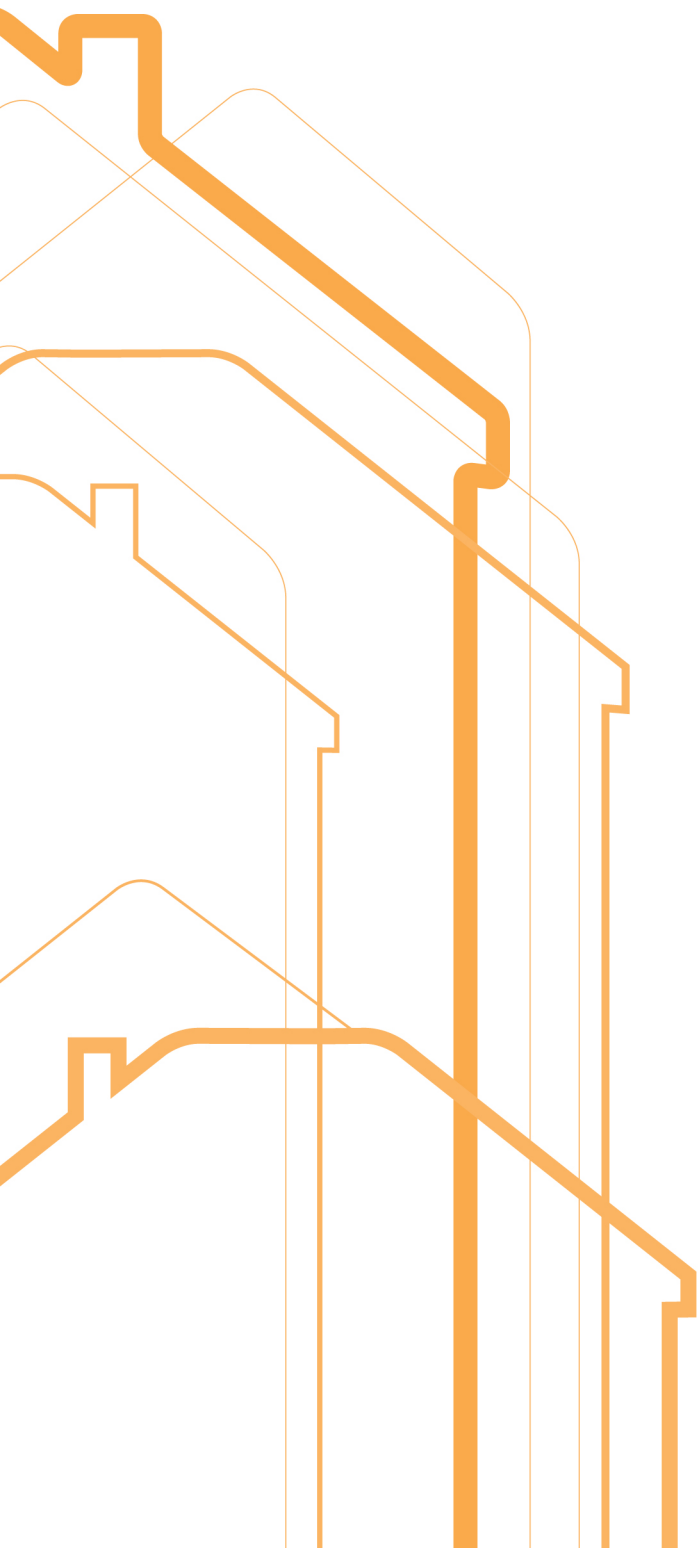


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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tenant Led Scrutiny Panel ('the Panel') decided to look at the void process, as this stood out to the Panel as a declining service area over the past 12 months and was also evident in the KPI results over this period of time. This was also a good opportunity to revisit this service area, as a Scrutiny investigation was completed in 2012.

During their investigation the Panel met with officers and managers. They also completed a telephone and online surveys with Cornwall Housing Ltd (CHL) customers who had moved into their homes this financial year.

When the Executive Director of Housing Operations started at CHL, the voids team had been disbanded and some of this service area had been put out to housing officers. She has now reinstated the voids team.

During their initial conversations with senior managers, the Panel were told that they had chosen a good service area to look at. They were also told that CHL needed to make improvements in this area, as this sets up the relationship with CHL customers. At that meeting there was still a vacancy for the Voids & Lettings Manager, which had added pressure to this service area. The Panel were pleased to hear that this post was filled by an experienced officer from CHL at the end of October'23.

The Panel were informed that the Voids Team were planning to help new tenants, by leaving flooring and white goods that are in good condition at the property. After observing the voids inspections with two surveyors, it was demonstrated that this may be difficult to implement in respect of the need to check and treat flooring for asbestos. The Panel also became aware that asbestos testing causes time delays.

Whilst visiting a couple of void properties with surveyors, the Panel were told about the high volume of properties left in a bad condition, full of rubbish and personal belonging. This caused further delays in the void process and high clearance charges and need to be recharged.

The customer survey also identified delays in resolving problems after they had moved into the property.

## In summary, their findings –

The Panel found that it is taking a longer time than the average for sector and peers to relet voids, because of delays due to:

- cleaning and clearance
- getting compliance checks completed (not having an inhouse team for compliance checks)
- incomplete information stored for CHL housing stock
- holding void information on excel spreadsheets
- contacting next of kin, and
- clearing debt on meters

## The Panel found that:

Improvements are needed for stored property details, including asbestos reporting – IT system upgrades are required

More time is needed for the new team to embed the new procedures

CHL need to look at ways to reduce high clearance costs – and suggest they look to the Council for solutions

It is important that outgoing tenants know how to leave a property and avoid personal belongings being left – CHL must make sure the check list is talked through and completed from the document 'Ending your Tenancy' and Pre-void Inspection List

A consistent process should be put in place to leave flooring/ curtain poles etc, if in good condition, for incoming tenant or given to charities – therefore possible storage facilities would be required

There is a need for a cost-benefit analysis for having an internal compliance team, including asbestos



The evidence collected over the period of this investigation underpins the Scrutiny Panel's judgements and the Panel would ask that the CHL Executive Team consider and respond to their report.

The Panel have included 13 recommendations at the back of this report and would like to discuss these with senior managers about how they will respond.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The Tenant Led Scrutiny Panel ('the Panel') decided to look at the void process, as this had consistently showed high failing figures in KPIs, and which was raised by the Tenants' Forum at their meetings.



This report presents the findings from the Panel who reviewed CHL's policies and documents made available to them, to understand the customer experience and pressures for the Void Team.

The Panel designed a work plan for this exercise so that a number of different activities could be undertaken to test key lines of enquiry.

This included meeting with service area managers and officers, and asking customers who had moved into their new homes during this financial year to complete a short survey.

The Panel also researched other housing providers, to compare their approach to voids, and identify any good practice.

The Panel would like to express their thanks to all CHL customers and officers who supported and assisted them during this investigation, helping them shape their findings.

## 3 - SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The Panel chose the question "With the housing crisis in Cornwall, why are CHL voids taking so long?"

The Panel designed a scrutiny plan so that a number of different lines of enquiries could be undertaken. These included:

- Information request, looking through the following documents –
  - KPI results for QTR1 and QTR2
  - Void Re-let Standard – 2022

- Our commitment to you 'your new home' – 2022
  - Cornwall Homechoice Scheme – 2016. Reviewing 5.4 Application & 5.5 Formal offer
  - Lettable Standard 'Our commitment to you' – 2022
  - Ending your tenancy 'a how-to guide'
  - The last newly let home satisfaction survey – Nov'22
- Q & A sessions CHL officers, interviews were with -
    - Housing Operations Executive Director, Head of Income Management, voids & Lettings, and Voids & Lettings Manager
    - Voids Surveyor
    - Housing Officers
- Short surveys sent to tenants - newly let homes
  - Onsite visits to voids – start of the process and sign off
  - Benchmarking – researched other housing providers' policies for best practice

## 4 – FINDINGS

The Panel used different methods to collect their findings. This included reviewing all current documents for voids, arranging Q&A sessions with staff members, being out on site at the start and end of a void's journey. They also sent out a short survey through 'Let's Talk', to customers that had recently moved into their new homes.

The Panel's Terms of Reference was being reviewed, so no Lead was identified at the beginning of this investigation. Their supporting officer secured all the information needed to complete the investigation.

### 4.1 – Desk top review

The purpose of the desk top review was to enable the Panel members to gain an understanding of the relevant documents and procedures to which the Voids' Team were working with. This provided the Panel members with the background necessary for them to effectively conduct the scrutiny and create a work plan.

CHL policies – do they cover what is required by officers and customers to complete a standard void in the target timeframe given in CHL KPIs? The target for a standard void is 22 days, but all the months for Qtr. 1 and 2 have exceeded that time, and the average is 68 days over a 6-month period, with June rising to 96 days.

The Panel thought the documentations presented were comprehensive. They questioned how it all works in practice and what implications there are on the timeframes being met.

The Panel questioned whether the tenants received the 'Ending your tenancy' document and if the check list in the document was explained to them by Housing Officers, to make sure the property was left to the right standard. They felt this should be a mandatory part of the process to avoid high clearance costs.

## 4.2 – Q & A Sessions with Executive Director of Housing Operations and Head of Income Management, Voids & Lettings

Under the previous directorship it was decided that CHL didn't need a dedicated voids team and the bulk of the work was given to housing management. The new Executive Director of Housing Operations said that this wasn't working and was reflected in the KPI results, and made changes to get a team back in place.

The Panel met managers responsible for the voids on 3 occasions during their exercise, to ask questions to help them to better understand the process. **Appendix 1 for full Q&A**

The Head of Income took over this area in May'23 and examined the processes in place, and how CHL managed the contract. She wanted to appoint a new Voids and Lettings Manager and once in place, they would be tasked to sort out the performance.

During this exercise this post was filled, and the new manager was an experienced CHL housing officer who wanted to focus on five priorities going forward –

- data cleansing – looking at the stats and reporting tools
- review the 5 void co-ordinators – looking at their patches to make a consistent approach
- decants and direct lets (complex cases) – reinstating monthly meetings, looking at spreadsheet information
- compliance issues – how quickly they get electric certificates, asbestos etc back
- audit – have CHL collected all the information, and are they being stored in the right places

The Panel were keen to find out how the void process is managed by the Team and received a detailed breakdown – **Appendix 2**

A flowchart is being developed by management to capture this information.

## Definitions explained –

Start & end of a void period → keys handed back, to the day we let the property = working days to work out average

Standard → day to day, easy to let, no capital works

Major → requires 2 capital elements, for example kitchen/bathroom

The Panel were also keen to see a programme put in place for gifting items. They talked through with the managers about developing a process whereby belongings left behind by the previous tenant, in a good condition, could be gifted to the incoming tenant, if needed. For example, carpets, curtain poles - if not needed, look to formalise relationships with charities for donations.

The Panel were informed that the Voids and Lettings Manager is working with the Communication Team to update the 'Ending your Tenancy Guide', and this will include a section to complete for flooring being left, etc.

The Panel also asked if the budget for voids was sufficient to complete to a good standard. Head of Income Management, Void & Lettings is responsible for the revenue budget and major works goes through Assets. She predicted an overspend for the year 23/24 of approx. £600K.

At these meetings the Panel discussed what causes all the delays and what changes can be made to quicken them. It was explained that the main reason for standard voids taking longer, is the need for asbestos reports and compliance certificates. The Team is looking at ways to tighten up these areas and this includes getting into the property before terminations.

The Panel were also told things were better when CHL had their own energy advisors, and the need for a cost-benefit analysis for having internal compliance teams, including asbestos.

Other reasons for properties taking longer to let included: being returned in a bad condition with time taken to clear, deep cleans and clearing meter debts.

They said that refusals cause delays as well and this needs to be reviewed.

The Team is asking for more control over the letting process, and for a more realistic timeframe for voids.

The void operatives are doing more decorating during the void process, putting all rooms back to white. This makes the property



look cleaner and demonstrated how it should be left. If something has been missed, they give out vouchers.

The Managers confirmed that the Housing Officer's role was to visit the property to complete a pre-void visit, looking for damage or changes that the tenant will need to put right before they leave. For example light fittings and asking them to change décor to a neutral colour if walls are dark. They will go through the pre-void inspection check list, and this should be explained to the tenants at the beginning of the process. They will also complete a property log and take photos for the Homechoice advert.

The Panel would like to recommend that the Tenancy Agreement would need to be reviewed to reflect the request to put décor back to neutral colours, as they felt this would be open to challenges.

The Panel were given a demo on the new reporting tool for Voids (Power BI), and this gave the Panel encouragement that delays would reduce with the new data systems in place -

Major Works Over 8 Weeks Void		Standard Void Over 4 Weeks Void		Newly Voided Over 2 We	
ADDRESS	Weeks Void	ADDRESS	Weeks Void	ADDRESS	
38 Trelander South	47.4	29 CLEAVELAND	73.4	10 NEWMAN ROAD	
7 SUNRISING BUNGALOWS	39.4	61 FURZE HILL	39.4	19 St Thomas Close	
17 Bonython Close	38.4	24 TRETHEYVY CLOSE	38.4	5 Polwhele Road	
2 CAMELOT VIEW	32.4	7 BERRYCOMBE VALE	38.4	79 KINSMAN ESTATE	
7 Church Close	32.4	12 RHIND STREET	37.4	9 ST GEORGES CRESCENT	
8 Fair Park View	30.4	23 SALAMANCA STREET	34.4	12 MOORLAND VIEW	

The Team was aiming to have a voids module added to the management system and this will help to monitor properties. This would detail all checks at the property. They were also creating a Sharepoint planner for allocating tasks and to stop using excel spreadsheets in the future.

It was explained by the Voids Team that they now have a good working relationship with Assets and Corserv and meet on a regular basis to monitor progress.

### 4.3 – Q & A Session with Void Surveyor

The Panel met with a surveyor who covered the Northeast & West Cornwall, and asked questions around their role in the void process –

#### **Appendix 3**

In summary –

- the same surveyor inspects a void property at the beginning and the end of the process
- they will get any issues resolved before returning the property back
- they determine a property is a major work if over 80 hours work needed, for example new kitchen/bathroom, structural defaults
- if bathroom/kitchen is liveable, they recommend getting tenants moved in and do a refit at a later date
- they felt delays are due to compliance and clearance

#### 4.4 – Q & A session with Housing Officers

The Panel invited a housing officer from the Mid area and one from the East area to explain their role in the void process. Full Q&A in **Appendix 4**

In summary they -

- arrange pre-void inspection and complete the log for Homechoice – this is not always completed or rigorously checked
- inform the tenant on what they need to complete before tenancy end – they will explain costs for items left, but this is not checked at the end of notice period
- ask outgoing tenants about leaving flooring or white goods, but these may not be appropriate for incoming tenants
- always find time for voids, but housing officers in general struggle with workloads and have missed some pre-void inspections
- contact public protection if a tenant dies and there is no next of kin
- look through nominations from Homechoice for verifications
- complete direct lets verifications
- they also said that hold ups after the contractors have finish are around compliance, so they have voids for a longer period of time. And also
- there is no cut off point for the number of voids they handle

Both housing officers explained that dealing with tenants next of kin can be complicated and have experienced delays when a tenant has gone into a home.

During these meetings it was suggested by one of the housing officers, to bring back visiting nominations in their current homes. They could check their circumstances, and this would avoid the need for adaptation at a later date.

After their meetings the Panel were sent a copy of the Property Log for Cornwall Homechoice and Pre-void Inspection Sheet, completed when the housing officer visit the outgoing tenants.

#### 4.5 – Short survey to customers that had moved into their new home between April and October

The Panel's support officer downloaded the data needed on OpenHousing to contact new tenants who had recently been through the void process. An email was sent out inviting them to complete a short survey online or alternatively they could receive a phone call from a member of the Panel.

##### Online Customer survey -

There were 124 emails sent out to invite tenants that had recently moved into their homes to complete an online survey, or by telephone if preferred.

We received 22 returns, which was 18%, results detailed below. Not all questions were answered.



The results for both questions were more positive than negative, with the condition of the property being more positive.

After speaking to one tenant on the phone it was evident that the overall satisfaction for getting their new home was about the whole process, starting with Homechoice.



The next question was, 'Were there any problems with the property when you moved in?'

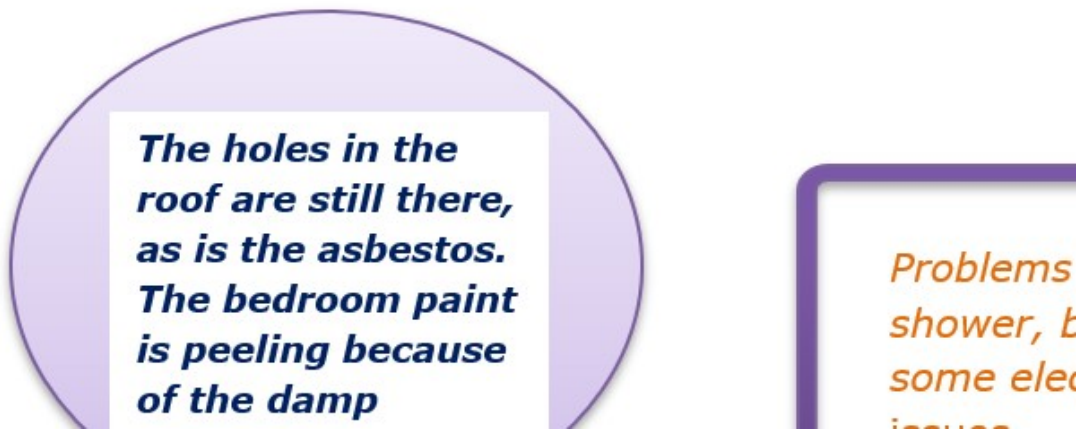


The results for this question were 50/50 split.

Some comments made, if the answer to this question was yes –

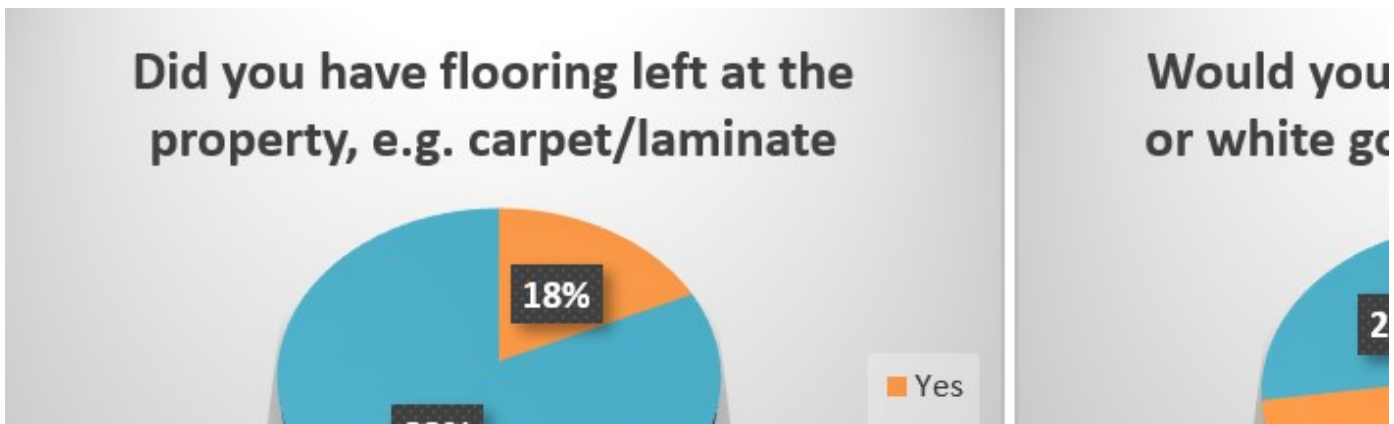
***Very minor aesthetic problems***

***The gas and I could not get hot water for 4 days and I did not wait for the gas to be fixed.***



Full responses in **appendix 5**

The Panel also asked if flooring had been left in the property and whether the incoming tenants would have benefitted from this action.



These results demonstrate the importance of putting in place a scheme to help with the moving in experience for incoming tenants and expenses incurred. For example good flooring and curtain poles left in void properties.

## 4.6 – Site visits to void properties

A member of the Panel shadowed a Void Surveyor in the East and Mid areas during their first inspection. The following describes the main points which emerged during the shadowing exercise.

### **Void property in Saltash 1<sup>st</sup> visit -**

A Panel member met the surveyor at the property, who was writing up his report on what was required – classed as a standard void. He said what he would be recommending –

- Firstly, asbestos report on flooring
- Flooring needed to be replaced
- Kitchen cupboards may be replaced or left for a later date for the Asset Team. Cupboards doors were worn, but he would make a decision during the void process
- Bathroom and other living areas in good condition
- Carpet had been left in lounge, but not sure if it would be still there at the end of the process, after asbestos checks

Another property was viewed on the same Close that had just been released to the team, this would be classed a major void and in a dire condition. The previous tenant was a hoarder. This photo shows the entrance hall, which we were not able to access and with an overpowering smell.

There was a cleaning contractor looking at the property to see what clearance was needed and told the Panel member that they are seeing at least 2 properties like this per month.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> visit

During this visit the Panel members completed the new 'Lettable Standard checklist', this will be left for the new tenant to complete at the start of their tenancy.

The only part of the property that didn't pass the expected standard by the Panel, was the garden.

Failing on

- Being free from rubbish
- Grass cut
- Footpaths are safe



The Panel members were overall very satisfied with the void standard and would happily move in. They asked that the section offering decorating voucher is removed from Lettable Standard, to avoid confusion.



Some comparative photos



An example above of where a good carpet had to be removed because of asbestos checks



Above - kitchen floor sealed, and new flooring laid



Above - not much change in the bathroom, floor sealed, and shelving removed. Not the best paint job where the shelves were removed



### Completion details

The Panel asked for a KPI calculation for this void property. The Panel were informed that the keys were handed back on the 12/9/23 by the previous tenants and a Panel member met the surveyor at the property on 20/9/23, making his report. The contractor was instructed on 26/9/23 and completed 3/11/23. The calculation had to start from 8/10/23, as this was a live tenancy until that date. The Panel was also told this would be a direct let, so the Panel were unsure on the final KPI figure. Good example of calculation complications.

### Void property in Truro 1<sup>st</sup> visit -

Two Panel members viewed a property in Truro that had already been cleared and saw photos taken before. This property still had a strong smell of animal waste, but the surveyor was confident after the works were completed the smell would have gone for the new tenants.

- Kitchen & bathroom floors needed to be tested for asbestos and then sealed
- New bathroom
- New kitchen sink and worktops, cupboards ok
- Generally, property in good condition



The members were also shown another major void property on the Close and the cleaning contractors were present to start work on this property. This again was a very cluttered property with strong smells. The clearance team explained the large costs for disposing of household items and the fact that outgoing tenants/relatives leave belongings as a result. For example soft furnishing that doesn't meet new regulations

## 2<sup>nd</sup> visit

A member of the Panel met the surveyor at the property and straight away noticed the smells had gone.

The property was very inviting and all back to a whitewash finish. All the areas highlighted to the members at the start of the process had been put back to the void standard. Again the member viewing this property would happily move in.



Above - kitchen looking fabulous with replacement sink, worktops, cupboard doors and colourful tiles removed and fresh paint on walls. The floor had been sealed and new flooring laid



Good example of how the floors have been treated and made safe.



Above - bathroom has been given a fresh look with replacement items including new shower and flooring

### **Completion details**

The Panel were informed that the keys were handed back on the 4/9/23 by the previous tenants and a Panel member met the surveyor at the property on 12/10/23, making his report after clearance. The second visit was on 29/11/23 when the contractors had finished. The property was returned to let after compliance check on 12/12/23, this void took 14 weeks, 70 working days.

Both these properties were delayed by compliance sign off.

## **4.7 – Benchmarking – making comparisons against other housing providers and noting best practice**

The Panel researched other housing providers to compare procedures and note best practice for the void processes. CHL documents were as comprehensive as their peers, but the Panel felt it was more about the implementation and getting timely results.

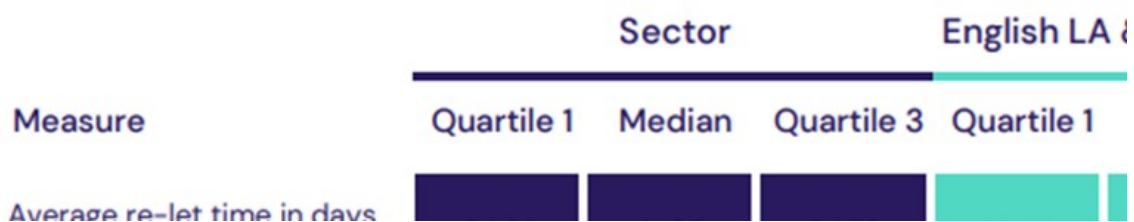
- **Southside Housing Assoc**
- **Coastline Housing**
- **Derby Homes**
- **English Rural Housing Assoc**
- **East Devon District Council**
- **First Choice Homes Oldham**
- **Northgate Housing Management**
- **Plymouth Community Homes**
- **Solihull Community Housing**
- **Homes in Sedgemoor**
- **Mid Devon Housing**
- **Warrington Housing Assoc**

Best practices identified by the Panel below.

Housing Provider	Good practice identified
East Devon District Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a forwarding address – especially around paying off utility meters and not leaving debt</li> <li>• Put in place a postal redirection service</li> </ul>
Plymouth Community Homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More comprehensive tick list for before and after moving in date</li> </ul>
Homes in Sedgemoor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Void process shown in accompanying chart</li> </ul>

Below is the quarter two performance benchmarking for the sector (in dark blue), and for a comparative peer group for CHL – English councils and ALMO’s that manage more than 10,000 homes (in light blue). CHL’s average re-let of 64 days for a standard re-let is below average for the peer group in the ‘third quartile’ – the average being 48.97 days and the best performing being 33.49 days and above.

## Performance Summary



The Panel understand why these results are bad but feel confident that with the new Team in place and their plans for this service area, these figures will improve for 2024/25.



## 5. CONCLUSION

The Scrutiny Panel would like to express their thanks to all CHL customers and officers who supported and assisted them during this investigation and helped to shape their report.

The Scrutiny Panel's question was:

**“With the housing crisis in Cornwall, why are CHL voids taking so long?”**

Throughout this investigation the Panel have gained an insight into the barriers for completing a void –

- cleaning and clearance
- getting compliance checks completed
- not having an inhouse team for compliance checks
- incomplete information stored for CHL housing stock
- contacting next of kin
- clearing debt on meters
- currently holding void information on Excel spreadsheets



It also highlighted the need to invest and improve CHL IT systems, that store property information. During their investigation they were shown a new Power BI system that will give managers a good oversight on the progress being made with voids.

The Panel also identified that pre-void inspections are not always completed, due to work commitments or non-access by outgoing tenants. They feel this should be a mandatory element of the void process and an appointment made as soon as notice given. Ideally, the Housing Officer should go through the pre-void inspection check list with the outgoing tenant at the start and end of the notice period.

The Void's Team said they would rate the current service area satisfactory and are aiming for good in the New Year. The Panel feel positive that this will be achieved after seeing examples of the progress being made.

The Panel welcome the opportunity to talk through their findings and recommendations with management. They have seen improvements made during their investigation and look forward to seeing this continue and reflected in the KPI results for 2024/25.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS – for CHL to discuss & consider, not in any particular order

**The Panel have acknowledged that the Void's Team are working hard to make improvements but have set out below where they would like to see the main focus, to achieve success in this service area.**

<b>1</b>	Complete a cost-benefit analysis for having internal teams – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asbestos</li> <li>• Energy advisors</li> <li>• Compliance checks</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	Develop the voids team further to cover all areas of administration, keeping full control. This includes pre-void inspections, currently completed by housing officers
<b>3</b>	Look to negotiate with Cornwall Council about refuse disposal costs – mates rates
<b>4</b>	Improve IT systems – the Panel know this is work in progress but feel it is important to list in their recommendations, to make sure the investments are made. Also, to make sure tasks are carried out and planned in the right order
<b>5</b>	Making redirection and forwarding address for outgoing tenant part of the notice requirement
<b>6</b>	Complete inhouse checks on contractors for consistent approach for all void works
<b>7</b>	Look at ways to utilise all departments to flag up potential problems at a property. For example, poor condition/neglect or hoarding
<b>8</b>	Remove decorating vouchers, always let properties decorated
<b>9</b>	A mandatory requirement that housing officers complete pre-void inspections and check again at the end of the notice period
<b>10</b>	Research better ways to manage debt left on meters
<b>11</b>	Develop a programme for gifting items in good condition and working in partnership with local charities
<b>12</b>	Reintroduce void tenant inspectors, checking standard before re-let
<b>13</b>	Review the tenancy agreement to emphasis how a property should be left, including décor and pre-void inspections

## Appendix 1

### Q& A with Hayley and Lisa – 18<sup>th</sup> September

Context for this exercise from Hayley –

Good service area to look at, looking at timing and works. Every Company she's been with, they have struggled in this area, and this sets up the relationship with their customers.

No voids and lettings team when she arrived, put out to Housing Officers.

Set up a voids team and looked at the process. Lisa managed voids from May with Income and busy picking it apart, looking at KPI and how we manage the contract.

No Voids and lettings manager at the moment and recruiting on Friday.

Bit up in the air, but still wanted the SP to complete the exercise.

We'll give you an overview for each question, but we may need to go away and look at reports and come back

She will give them a written summary to all questions and who will action them.

1	<p>Please explain how the Void KPI figures are calculated</p> <p>Run off spreadsheet of all the details from the time tenant going out and new tenant arrive. Looking at safety and any repairs and inspections, e.g. electric &amp; gas Date key come in, to the date property is let Will add more to written response on the calculations</p>
2	<p>Please explained the process to complete a void in 35 days</p> <p>Average for standard is currently 56 Request EPC rating and asbestos before works Keys in key box – first inspection complete and surveyed for works that are needed to complete – standard or major? Identify what contractor to use, currently CFL Go back to voids and letting co-ordinator Works orders into Open Housing and then off to contractor Meet regularly to monitor works and ready to let date Compliance check completed earlier to avoid delays –</p>

	<p>certificates Contractor confirms all works complete Housing Officer informed No set time for advertising on Homechoice, some during the works They will put together a timeline, including advertising the property Working closing with CC colleagues to organise a direct match which can prolong the void time, e.g. families in B&amp;B</p>
<b>3</b>	<p>How are major works defined?</p> <p>They discount the time to get in new kitchen or bathroom How do we accurately take off the days for the relet time Wil send through the definition for both voids</p>
<b>4</b>	<p>How do you manage notifications about tenants no longer needing their homes, because they have gone into a nursing home. The Forum have highlighted properties left empty for many months</p> <p>One of the issues we do have, get different reasons for going into the home. Housing benefit will pay up to 13 weeks and in some circumstances 32 weeks. We will encourage the family to end the tenancy but can go on for some time until the tenant has a permanent position in the home. Difficulty as we can't end the tenancy until a responsible person can act on the tenant's behalf, if they haven't got the capacity. We would like to look at the risk of reclaiming the property. Needs to be improved.</p>
<b>5</b>	<p>'Ending your Tenancy Guide' is very comprehensive, but how is it followed through. When are the checks made, does this cause additional delays?</p> <p>Since Lisa took over, she is getting pre void inspections with HO, within the first couple of weeks. So the tenant understands what is expected of them and they can see what is needed at void stage. This doesn't always happen, different excuses, too busy. But if these do happen the HO can explain what might be charged. Personal possessions left in the house will delay things, as inspections can't be completed until empty. Different works orders have to be raised. At this visit the HO can explained what their role and</p>



	<p>responsibilities are, e.g. clearing out the loft and the shed. Also, have they got any questions about leaving the property. Good opportunity to feed into the void process, if minimal works they can get the property advertised quickly. Can't hand on heart say that the going out tenant receives the checklist, and this is handed out by the HO</p>
<b>6</b>	<p>In this guide there is a list of what needs to be removed, which includes carpets, laminate, curtains and blinds. For outside furniture it is listed as negotiable with the housing officer, could this not be extended for inside furnishing, e.g. helping the homeless and tenants in their first homes</p> <p>Need to update the leaflet, now looking at void process to see what flooring can be left with cost-of-living crisis. At pre-void visit asking the HO to look at the condition of the flooring and what is being left. Looking at hygienically cleaning. Looking at better process for white goods to gift and make sure it is known that it is their responsibility</p>
<b>7</b>	<p>If this is possible, when would be the best time to do this?</p> <p>When notice is given, and the HO go to complete pre-visit. Also, might look to offer a price for good flooring that can be left and that will help with access. Could be having more conversation about this and doing more. We will investigate when we can have these conversations</p> <p>Shane – some tenants might not want them but could be passed on to charities. HA yes, they will be doing more and having conversations with charities to re-use, re-cycle</p>
<b>8</b>	<p>In the Lettable Standard under decoration, it mentions vouchers where necessary – when does this apply?</p> <p>Doing more decoration at voids currently, to leave in a good condition. Putting back to white, a good lettable standard. It's makes it clearer on how they need to leave the property as well. Lots of properties have needed to be replastered and then painted. If something has been missed, they will give out decorating vouchers – Johnson's paints. Will provide the Panel with details on the decorating scheme.</p>

<b>9</b>	<p>During the 35 day process how is the timescale calculated between the different operatives – do they use a schedule of works (ghantt chart). Could we have a copy?</p> <p>CDM rules, can't have two different companies working on the same property. Should give contractors a time to complete the work circa 12-15 days, but we need to manage that, currently 18 days from the information on the spreadsheets. 35 days, time keys in and keys out. The data is poor, just details on spreadsheet. We need data for how long the contractor is in the property on OpenHousing. Plan to improve the Voids model on OH, seen how this is achieved in other authorities.</p>
<b>10</b>	<p>Do you have a set budget for scheduled 35-day voids. Who holds the budget?</p> <p>We've been asking Finance to see our budget and just starting to see some details. Still looking at what it was last year, but many variables. Should it come from voids or capital. We'll send you details from last year and share the budget details we have and give you information about different classification. 3 – 4 years ago circa £4,000 Can also give you some details from HouseMark</p>
<b>11</b>	<p>What sort of problems cause the delays?</p> <p>We've had to put in extra tests to make sure we're compliant, electrical checks and gas, smoke alarms, asbestos EPC. We have a new asbestos report at the start of the void time and then works passed to contractor. If not passed there is more remedial works. State of the properties. Contractors' performance. Large volume of works – currently higher volume of properties and same teams to complete, so taking longer. Still getting processes in place at CH and making sure all departments talking together. We have a recovery plan, new processes, new surveyor (3 surveyors), training staff, now performances, improving.</p> <p>Looking at what has been the barriers and what are CH doing to improve.</p>

<b>12</b>	<p>Do you have designated operatives for Voids and are there enough operatives to complete a Void, e.g. electricians?</p> <p>CFL have the operatives, they have dedicated voids team, electrician and gas operatives. Good relationship with void manager.</p> <p>Lisa feels there are enough, and they are very flexible. Major works may be different, can take a month to complete one property and we need to manage this better.</p> <p>Lisa has reviewed the contractors involved and may pass to an alternative contractor not CFL, who can complete in a quicker time.</p>
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Is it possible for the Panel to see the KPI's for July and August? – will give the whole financial year so far

The Panel would like to shadow a void from the start to the finish, possibly 2-3 visits during this time. One in the West and one in the East if possible.

Lisa – will arrange with her surveyors, Truro and Saltash

They would like a meeting with one of the Void Inspectors, could you recommend someone please.

They will take you out to visit the property

Hayley will arrange a meeting with the contractor

Follow on meeting in a month's time

### **Follow up Q&A with Hayley, Lisa and Ruth on 6<sup>th</sup> November**

Hayley said that they would have to excuse them for not sending through this information before now. They have been without their Lettings manager over the last 3 months and the difficulties that this has caused. We need to sort out our process and performance, but they now have Ruth, and she will make things better

Ruth – housing officer since 2009 in the North area, good idea of housing officer side and void and will make it work.

Top five priorities -

- Getting grip of the stats and look at the reporting tools – data cleansing
- Review the 5 void co-ordinators, look at their patches to make a consistent approach
- Decants and direct lets (complex cases) – reinstating monthly meetings, looking at spreadsheet information

- Appliance issues – how quickly we get elect certs, asbestos etc back – working with outside contractors, doing this in a timelier way
- Audit – where we should be at the end of a void process (paperwork correct and stored correctly)

Hayley – data, what stage are we at in the voids process, empty properties have different meanings – major work voids can be held by the Council or Assets. No real effective means to let us know what stage various properties are at.

5 voids co-ordinators - do they have the right training and the same workloads and patches. Ruth's housing knowledge can find areas of duplication etc, to make things easier.

Decants – looking at their housing needs

Audit – have we collected all the information that we should and are they being stored in the right places.

Hands up, the aim was to give JW a shared folder with all the information below, but this hasn't happened. Look to arrange another meeting to discuss further.

1	<p>Please explain how the Void KPI figures are calculated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define start and end of period. (LH)</li> <li>• Explain how this is calculated and provide examples of the reports used to calculate this (LH)</li> </ul> <p>Keys handed back to the day we let the property again, working days to work out average. Coming down but a lot of work to do. QTR2 KPIs sent to JW</p> <p>Shane, a few more major voids on new figures. Lisa extended void times because of the condition that properties have been returned, spending money on clearances for standard voids. Something that the Company needs to work on as a whole.</p> <p>Shane, hopefully the stock condition surveys will help. Ruth, it's the condition of the properties, work that we need to do and what the tenants should be dealing through their tenancy conditions but having the decent home should help with both of those. Highlight what works they need to do, but also highlight the condition of the property before it comes to us.</p>
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	<p>Hayley – they are higher than we wanted, I would like to identify the delays, is this from voids or lettings. How is it broken down in that period of time, what is taking the longest time.</p> <p>KPI figures, what is the scheme telling us on OH. Need assurance in the new financial year on how long it takes us to turn it around. New homes are not relet.</p> <p>Shane – should have included in stock condition inspection about asbestos to avoid longer time during the void time. Looking to have the asbestos register up to date.</p> <p>Lisa – agreed, we need that data, so we understand the wide asset range. It can also be difficult to get in properties to do checks before a void. Working hard to build up that data.</p> <p>Hayley – do we capture the pre-void inspection process on OH. Lisa, not before the property has become void.</p> <p>We encourage HOs to look at this and how it will impact the process – 100% pre void inspections if possible. Ruth this should be a KPI for HOs, but only recorded on spreadsheet at the moment.</p>
2	<p>Please explained the process to complete a void in 35 days</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a flow chart of process with timeline for void works and allocations process (LH)</li> </ul> <p>Lisa – not quite there yet, done some work and working with co-ordinators and will share soon – work in progress.</p>
3	<p>How are major works defined?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain difference between major vs standard void (HA)</li> <li>• Explain how this is calculated as part of the Void KPI (HA)</li> </ul> <p>Hayley -Standard is day to day – easy lettable straight forward, no capital works necessary.</p> <p>Looking at the way we define these and what is actually a major works. Not an effective definition for major and for other providers it's only major works when it requires 2 capital elements.</p> <p>Also, how is this calculated with out KPIs, if a property is empty for a month this is part of the calculation, even though we haven't been able to put back in the re-let process because of what work is needed. Other places she has worked haven't done this and would actually take those 30 days off.</p> <p>Is it when a kitchen is required or 2 major elements in the</p>

	<p>property. Don't think we are currently doing this properly and will be working with the assets team to define a major and standard void, between now and Christmas. This will enable us to get the KPI calculations right, currently doing ourselves a disservice.</p> <p>Lisa – disrepair are also calculated in these figures. Maybe being too honest and not looking good with our peers.</p>
4	<p>How do you manage notifications about tenants no longer needing their homes, because they have gone into a nursing home. The Forum have highlighted properties left empty for many months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain how we receive notice from tenants in these circumstances and what challenges this may bring (HA)</li> <li>• Investigate the example given of 16 Oaklands Green (LH)</li> </ul> <p>Ruth – never had notice on this property and tenant went into residential care. Time is given before they need to give up their home and rent is still paid. This can take several weeks (8 weeks or more) before a decision is made, but still a live tenancy. The tenant is now back in the property.</p> <p>Difficult just to go in and remove possessions. We are looking to see if the process is working and look at the void co-ordinators role in chasing and getting the keys back, to recover the property as soon as possible after notice given. Working with SS or NOK to improve the process.</p> <p>Cowdray Close completed – Lisa will send through a checklist to go through the property.</p> <p>Hayley – look to recommend if a property has electric, asking operatives to flag up problems within a property. Many properties do not have a visit in years.</p>
5	<p>'Ending your Tenancy Guide' is very comprehensive, but how is it followed through. When are the checks made, does this cause additional delays?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the pre-void inspection process (LH)</li> <li>• What paperwork do we send to confirm the notice received (LH)</li> <li>• Confirm how the "Ending Your Tenancy Guide" could be used and the role of the CSC (LH)</li> </ul> <p>Lisa – working on ending tenancy articles with the comms team and work in progress, giving examples of good and bad conditions. A lot of time tenants are directed to the website.</p> <p>Ruth – HO would make an appointment as early as they can and fill out a property log for the advert (looking at mobility</p>

	<p>issues and amenities). Pre-void inspections, HO to go round the property with the tenant, looking at damage or changes, what they need to put back to avoid recharges. Example - different light fittings to put back to standard and neutral colour if dark. Look at flooring if in a good condition for a new tenant, to help them out and make a decision if it can be left and other items like sheds. Take photos of the property outside for advert.</p> <p>Sometimes HOs can't get in and this is monitored by their managers.</p> <p>Hayley - this needs to be explained to tenants at the beginning of the process, that it is a requirement that the HO visits during their notice period.</p> <p>Hayley - do we actually send out a letter to confirm and the date keys need to come back. Ruth this is confirmed by the voids and letting co-ordinator.</p> <p>Lisa - need to look at OpenHousing to make sure all the information is up to date, termination information.</p>
6	<p>In this guide there is a list of what needs to be removed, which includes carpets, laminate, curtains, and blinds. For outside furniture it is listed as negotiable with the housing officer, could this not be extended for inside furnishing, e.g. helping the homeless and tenants in their first homes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the steps we would take at CHL for items to be left (LH)</li> <li>• Explain how we issue disclaimers and gift items (LH)</li> </ul> <p>Hayley, Ruth has already covered this.</p> <p>Ruth - this is a difficult one on what people think should be left. She a big believer on leaving goods in good conditions. She encourages that carpets are left, as this is a big expense and an area difficult to get help with. Sometime white goods are offered and these need to be PAT tested and then they might change their mind and have their own. More difficult to manage, so they encourage that they are donated to charities, and we can signpost to these if needed.</p> <p>Gifted to new tenants and they sign to say they are taking on the responsibility, e.g. shed, if in bad condition at a later date, they would need to remove or at end of the tenancy, not CH.</p> <p>Hayley - need to firm up this process on what should remain and having these discussions as part of the pre-void inspection. She would rather take carpets out at the last minutes rather than take them out at the start of a void. Agree about white goods, people can be more particular on what they</p>

	<p>need, but we could ask outgoing tenants to leave white goods and we can arrange for them to go to charities.</p>
<b>7</b>	<p>If this is possible, when would be the best time to do this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain how we can incentivise this (HA)</li> </ul> <p>See above</p>
<b>8</b>	<p>In the Lettable Standard under decoration, it mentions vouchers where necessary – when does this apply?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a copy of the lettable standard (LH)</li> <li>• Provide details of the dec voucher scheme (LH)</li> <li>• Investigate the example given of 8 Fernside Way? (LH)</li> </ul> <p>Ready to go in Oct for direct match and lady passed away and didn't get that information for a while, couldn't make contact. Looking at another internal direct match, not suitable. Now going out to advert – not a straightforward void with the Council</p> <p>Lisa not offering as many vouchers as before, painting properties white. Still have the scheme and look at how many rooms need decorating. Better to give the property out in a clean condition and they understand more on how the property should be left. This changed during the new technical spec – interim managers. When they looked at refusal and compared with other housing providers.</p> <p>Ruth - Also, taking into consideration with tenants coming from temporary accommodation, they have to move into the property when they have the keys.</p> <p>Another reason to leave in a standard white condition, if they are going to another CH property, they would know it would be left in that same standard. Hard to tell them to do something to put right and not doing it with the new property.</p>
<b>9</b>	<p>During the 35-day process how is the timescale calculated between the different operatives – do they use a schedule of works (ghantt chart). Could we have a copy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the limitations of our current data and how we are working to improve this (HA)</li> <li>• Confirm expected contractor turnaround times (HA)</li> </ul> <p>Hayley – we need to work on to capture this information. Look at the time property void and actually let.</p> <p>Talked through above, needs to be worked on how we capture this.</p>



<p><b>10</b></p>	<p>Do you have a set budget for scheduled 35-day voids. Who holds the budget?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm budget for 2023/24 and last year's spend (HA / LH)</li> <li>• Confirm which teams' budget at this sits in (HA / LH)</li> <li>• Confirm cost per void / bench against other providers (HA / LH)</li> </ul> <p>Lisa - last year 1.9 million on capital and revenue – Hayley will get a breakdown for these figures. Money spent on kitchens &amp; bathrooms and decorating.</p> <p>Difficulty getting the figures for this year. Hayley has asked for void spent for quarter 2 and confirm cost per void.</p> <p>Will send through the details.</p>
<p><b>11</b></p>	<p>What sort of problems cause the delays?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following discussion on potential issues that can cause delays, CHL to provide more details on the following and potential solutions: (HA / LH) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Compliance</li> <li>➢ Condition of property</li> <li>➢ Process – voids and lettings side</li> <li>➢ Volume</li> <li>➢ Contractor management / performance</li> <li>➢ Staffing</li> <li>➢ Technology</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Hayley – Lisa will send through a summary on the above.</p>
<p><b>12</b></p>	<p>Do you have designated operatives for Voids and are their enough operatives to complete a Void, e.g. electricians?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirm who our contractors are and how they are structured to deliver voids work (LH)</li> <li>• Explain if this approach differs between a standard void and a major void. (LH)</li> </ul> <p>Does the Panel need to speak to CFL, how do they use their team to look at standard and major.</p> <p>Lisa – CFL and TSA are our main contractors and Lisa could organise a meeting with Wayne, manager of CFL. They have a good working relationship, and they will pick up what is asked.</p> <p>Hayley asked Ruth for her experience in voids, as a housing officer.</p> <p>Ruth – some voids were difficult if they came back in a bad condition and difficult to turn these around. When letting the</p>

	<p>property you stay positive on what the property has to offer, not always as good as private rent but have a secure tenancy. Most are happy to get the tenure, if they need to do a bit more work to get to their decorating standard, they are happy to that. Happy to have a Council property and know they will be looked after, so that's kind of the riding factor and not many complaints.</p>
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Hayley – will update the notes and send out. JW to evidence when information has been sent through.

Ruth shared new reporting tool (current) – shows properties ready to let. Void exceptions and Ruth will focus on red areas, taking out properties that shouldn't be in there.

Meet in first or 2<sup>nd</sup> week in December – face to face?

Is it possible for the Panel to see the KPI's for July and August?

- Yes – will provide for the YTD (LH)

The Panel would like to shadow a void from the start to the finish, possibly 2-3 visits during this time. One in the West and one in the East if possible.

- Yes – will facilitate (JW / LH)

They would like a meeting with one of the Void Inspectors, could you recommend someone please.

- Yes – will facilitate. Also happy to arrange a meeting with CFL to gain contractors viewpoint (JW / LH)

## Appendix 2

### Tenancy Termination & Pre-Void Process.

On receipt of notice by the Voids & Lettings Co-ordinator for the following reasons:

- Tenant moving to own accommodation, moving in with other or moving back with family.
- Tenant moving into residential care.
- Tenant moving to another Registered Social Landlord – External transfer.
- Death of the tenant where there is no likely succession.

The following steps will be undertaken.

#### **Voids & Lettings Co-ordinator.**

- Contact the tenant or NOK to discuss the procedure for vacating their home and obtain information about the property.
- Explain the tenancy end date and return of the keys to key box.
- Check the contact numbers and NOK address.
- Email link to the termination process to the tenant / NOK.
- Explain that a pre void inspection will be carried out by an AHO and that an Asbestos surveyor will need to carry out a survey during notice period.
- Commence the tenancy termination process on Open Housing – set to terminate.
- Send an acknowledgement letter and update contact details.
- Add void to spreadsheet.
- Create Property folder.
- Create works order for EPC if applicable.
- Create works order for Asbestos survey if applicable.
- Add to TSM portal.
- Add to South West Water portal.
- Cross reference against the direct let list to see if the property is suitable for any applicants.
- Send email notifying of the termination to the following teams – rent, income, former rents, benefits, ILS and Council tax.

#### **AHO – on receipt of notification email;**

- Highlight any known concerns with the address.
- Undertake a pre void inspection to ascertain the condition of the property and whether it will be a major or standard void – send form to V&L.
- Fill out a property log to provide marketing information about the area to be included in the advert – send form to V&L.

- Take photograph of the property and send to V&L.
- Inform V&L of any specific labelling information needed for the advert such as local connection or local lettings plan.
- Run through the key return process, recharges and repairs which may be needed by the outgoing tenant during the inspection.

#### **ATO**

- To fit key box and to leave information re key-box number and telephone number to inform V&L's once keys returned.

#### **Voids & Lettings Co-ordinators**

- Save photograph, pre void form and property log into property folder.
- Update this information onto the spreadsheet.
- Chase keys the Wednesday before the tenancy ends to make sure keys will still be returned on Monday.
- Chase keys on Monday for ending tenancies if no notification has been received that keys have been left in the key box.

#### **Rents**

- Rent team to make separate contact with the tenant / NOK to discuss their rent account.

#### **Exceptions to the above:**

**Possible Successions** – death of the sole tenant and where there are other occupants left in the property:-

- Tenancy will be terminated to end on the Monday – 28 days following the receipt of the notification. No acknowledgement letter will be sent to the occupier in situ.
- Email will be sent to the relevant teams (as above) advising that this may be a possible succession and that they will be notified if the property is to become a void. At this stage it is advised not to change the utility supplier.
- Form will be sent out to the family to apply for the succession which the AHO will then investigate and give a response within 28 days of receiving all information.
- Pre-void inspection not to be completed until decision from AHO.

**Internal transfers** – When the AHO received notification from Homechoice that a tenant has been nominated for a transfer into a property managed by CHL:-

- AHO to contact the tenant and undertake a verification with the tenant to confirm they meet the criteria.

- AHO to arrange a home visit to carry out a pre void inspection.
- Transfer only to be agreed if rent account is clear and the property is in an acceptable condition with no costs for works being incurred by the voids budget.
- When a tenant has an A band for an Urgent welfare need to move this will over-ride the process around the condition of tenancy and rent account.
- When a tenant has a B band for a High welfare need to move this will be looked at on a case by case basis and agreed between the AHO and V&L's.

### **Keys received**

#### **Voids & Lettings Co-ordinators**

- Send R2.1 email to the ATO's
- Update Open Housing with keys received.
- Update spreadsheet with keys received.
- Update SSW portal with tenancy end date.
- Update TSM portal with tenancy end date.
- Advise keys received and key-box number to Asbestos company.
- Advise keys received and key-box number to EPC company.

#### **ATO's**

- Carry out survey on the property.
- Arrange any clearance if needed.
- Arrange any pre clean if needed.
- Raise relevant works orders.
- Raise any recharges against the out-going tenant.
- Meter debts – arrange clearance of debt or meter installs.
- Inform V&LC of the type of void – major / standard and contractor they have instructed.

#### **Voids & Lettings Co-ordinators**

- Chase asbestos report if not received.
- Chase EPC if not received.
- Update spreadsheet with void type and instructed contractor.
- Update Open Housing with void type and instructed contractor.

## Adverts

### Voids & Lettings Co-ordinators

- Before advertising check against the direct let list and match if possible.
- Send property details template to the Direct Match team on a Monday.
- Add updates to the Direct Match folder.
- Create advert on Open Housing.
- If not needed by the Direct Match team consider flipping HRA to TA.
- Once these options have been exhausted look to advertise the property.
- If standard void process the advert and give to Homechoice.
- If major void consider suitable date to advertise – this needs to allow for a two week lead in time.

### Receiving Nominations.

**Voids & Lettings Co-ordinators** – Upon receiving a nomination from the Homechoice team.

- V&LC to email the verification from to the AHO.
- Update the spreadsheet with the applicant details.
- Create a folder for the nomination under verification received.
- Save income team email in the property/ verification folder.
- If the applicant is refused update the spreadsheet with the refusal reason.
- If the applicant is refused save the refusal letter in the property/verification folder.
- Repeat the process for the second nomination.
- If the nomination's are exhausted re-advertise, consider again for flipping and ask AHO's if they have anyone suitable.

### Compliance.

**Voids & Lettings Co-ordinators** – when the RTL has been received back from the contractor.

- Amend the spreadsheet to compliance.
- Send the gas certificates to Morgan & Lambert.
- Send the electrical certificates to be validated by building safety.

**Voids & Lettings Co-ordinators** – On receipt of all compliant certificates.

- Send RTL email to the AHO – this must include the following:
  - RTL from contractor certificates for the gas, electric, asbestos, EPC, fire safety and building regs if applicable.

- Rent
- Utility provider
- Key box number
- Any works after let

### **Sign up paperwork.**

**Voids & Lettings Co-ordinators** – chase the AHO if sign up paperwork is not received within the week. Once the sign-up paperwork is received.

- When notification is received by AHO within 24 hours update the tenant details onto Open Housing.
- Inform SSW of new tenant via the portal.
- Inform TSM of new tenant via the portal.
- Update the spreadsheet.
- Update the attributes onto Open Housing when received full paperwork from the AHO within 48 hours of the sign up.
- Update CORE statistics via the portal.
- Scan the sign up documentation onto Docuware once the new tenant has been uploaded onto the system.

## Appendix 3

### Q&A with Void Surveyor – 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023

<b>1</b>	<p>Do you know how long the property has been empty before your 1<sup>st</sup> void inspection is completed?</p> <p>Depends on communication - if communicating with the outgoing tenant's next of kin, this can cause delays, especially if not local. Notice to quit comes in and that is normally a month's notice, but sometime that can be sooner if they clear the property earlier.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p>Do you complete the inspection on the same property at the beginning and end of the void?</p> <p>Yes, initial survey and then a post inspection. If he picks up any issues, he will get them resolved.</p>
<b>3</b>	<p>How do you determine a major works void?</p> <p>Up to 80 hours work, or structural defaults, or kitchen and bathroom replacements. In the North mainly need rewiring, which means stripping the whole property.</p>
<b>4/5</b>	<p>If the bathroom/kitchen is useable but dated, do you get the tenants in and look to replace at a later date through Asset budget?</p> <p>Depends on tenants' perception on whether it is liveable. Mainly looks to do it before, but some are just keen to get in. Look to replace in 3 months' time, but communication hasn't been great as it is passed to plans.</p>
<b>5/4</b>	<p>Can you explain the void process from start to finish?</p> <p>Notification for notice to quit, fit a key box and outgoing tenant put keys in there – usually around 12 O'clock for first survey. He plans his visits (many at the moment) and goes to the standard voids first to get them done quickly. Write survey report, sent to voids landlord and then to contractors, prioritise who can do it quicker, depending on the contractors' other commitments. Will pop in to check progress and access any other works that</p>



	<p>need doing or they will phone him to agree additional works. Post inspection and pick up any snags that can be resolved in a day.</p> <p>All issues identified to complete during the visit. Some ongoing maintenance work is passed on, e.g. finlock guttering.</p>
<b>6</b>	<p>Do you use external contractors to do the safety inspections, e.g. asbestos/electricals or do you use CFL?</p> <p>Yes, Shield, Allium and Gwella for asbestos</p>
<b>7</b>	<p>Do you have any difficulty getting contractors in to complete different elements of the Void?</p> <p>Not really, some of the contractors have been working with us for years and easy to contact and understand the process.</p>
<b>8</b>	<p>What is your experience on what causes delays?</p> <p>Was communication, but that has improved. Clearing the meter at the property, which has been left in debt. Not sure how you can enforce the tenants to pay the debts. Some can abandon a property and the pre-paid meters will build up Asbestos reports, but that has improved lately, around 5 days.</p>
<b>9</b>	<p>During the void process, how does the relationship between the different departments work or do you only deal with one person?</p> <p>Deal with one person. Void Team and they deal with different areas. Have a weekly meeting to say where we are and look at the progress being made. The back-office deals with rents and other departments for voids.</p>
<b>10</b>	<p>What is the average time for voids?</p> <p>Monthly calculation by Lisa, about 59 days but not sure.</p>
<b>11</b>	<p>Do you feel when the property is re-let it meets the voids standard?</p> <p>a. Do you have a check list to the end to sign off?</p> <p>Yes, he takes the original survey to check and if something doesn't look right, he will get the team back to correct. Wants tenants to walk in and not able to pick up faults.</p>

	<p>It's somebodies home, would you be happy to live there. Wants operatives to pick up things that aren't always on the ticket, by using their common sense.</p>
<b>12</b>	<p>Do you work with a set budget and is that enough?</p> <p>Doesn't deal with budgets. Goes through everything and gives the worse scenario to get them fixed, but they may come back to say they can't afford that.</p> <p>To put things right and decorating helps to let the property. They decorate white so the outgoing tenant knows how to leave the property.</p>
<b>13</b>	<p>We want to see flooring and other items left in voids if in good condition, do you think this is possible with the asbestos checks carried out?</p> <p>A grey area, if laminate fitted well, he would leave it. Carpets can be ruined after works completed, paint etc.</p> <p>Housing officer would ask these questions.</p> <p>He has asked on the survey to leave carpets/curtain poles if in good condition.</p>
<b>14</b>	<p>Finally, going back to the void in Cowdray Close, do you have a rough finishing time for this property</p> <p>Waiting on an asbestos report before they start, there is a backlog with starting the voids.</p>

## Appendix 4

### Q& A with Housing Officer in the East area – 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023

1. Can you explain your role in the void process?

Receive notice and arrange a pre property inspection and log. She lets the tenant know what they have to do with the property. Termination of the property goes to voids and then get a nomination for the next person to verify. Surveyor gets a rough idea of what he is going into. Not a long process, compliance certs take a long time and hold things up.

2. Have you got a check list when attending a void and can you send us a copy?

Yes, pre void inspection and property log. Look around the property with the outgoing tenant and let them know what needs doing and complete log for advert.

3. We have seen the document 'Ending your tenancy' At what point during a void do you go through the checklist in that document –
  - a. Do you leave a copy with the tenant?
  - b. Do you go through the completed checklist at the end of the tenancy to make sure all areas addressed?

Outgoing – how we want the property left, ask about carpets and to leave if in a good condition

Copy left; she only takes back page where they sign to confirm details. And explain costs if they leave carpets etc and it's been arranged for them to be removed.

No, once the keys come back it goes to the surveyor. Copy of pre-void and recharges will be made if they have left items to be removed.

Richard – void process, what happens if someone has died and can't get hold of relatives.

If no NOK, we would change the locks and clear the place. If in care home, we have previously gone into the homes to get signed off, unless tenant with dementia. Always make sure what is happening to the individual in care, before the process takes place.

4. Do you ask the outgoing tenants about flooring in the property?  
Do you ask if they are leaving carpet or laminate that is in good condition or advise them to remove?

Yes, if in good condition it can stay and will be decided at pre-void inspection.

5. Do you explain to them about recharges?

Yes, do pre-void with them and let them know what will be recharged if things not completed before the end of the tenancy.

6. We are aware that housing officers cover different areas, have you got time to deal with void properties?

Always a strain, but she likes to do it as she knows the outgoing tenants and it's more a personal thing. Especially when dealing with relatives of a deceased tenant, more personal approach.

7. How many voids are you expected to deal with during a month?  
a. Is there a cut-off point, do you say when you have too many?

No never say too many, currently have 14 and a couple just come in and dealing with the families of deceased tenants. Some of these she has had for a long time because of waiting for compliance certs. Deal with voids in drips and drabs, not having to deal with all 14 at the same time.

Rita – in what circumstances wouldn't you want to deal with a void. Always deal with them, some not in a good condition when you go in. Didn't know about a death, no family to get in touch with, public protection gets involved and it goes straight to voids – Cowdray Close.

Rita talks about aggressive tenants. If unsure she would take the police with her, aggression doesn't normally happen with a void.

Shane talked about an aggressive void in Saltash. Donna, that was an eviction, and she was happy to get them out as it had been going on for years.

## Q&A Meeting with Housing Officer in the Mid area – 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023

1. Can you explain your role in the void process?

It starts once notified by Voids Landlord Services about termination. In that 4-week period we contact the tenant to do a pre-void inspection and property log.

Then being sent the Homechoice nominees and start to arrange viewing and then see the new tenant when they move in the property.

Direct Lets, involved in verification and whether property is suitable for incoming tenant and eligible and application circumstances are the same.

We need to be getting back to visiting people in their current accommodation and check their circumstances are what they say they are. Lots of homeless matches at the moment.

Tricky for us at the moment, having difficulties getting viewing times arranged – is it safe to take people around and getting notification that we can view.

More bidding for properties that need adaptations, should we refuse or does the Company want to accommodate.

Some will say anything to get a property and the property isn't suitable, some change their stories to get accepted.

Could do with surveyor at some viewings to say the adaptations are doable.

Need to explain that the adaptation will have to go through OT and this takes time.

Void hold times are more at the end after the contractor's work, more around compliance hold ups.

2. Have you got a check list when attending a void ~~and can you send us a copy?~~

Yes, as a above take this at the beginning of the void process.

3. We have seen the document 'Ending your tenancy' At what point during a void do you go through the checklist in that document –
  - a. Do you leave a copy with the tenant?
  - b. Do you go through the completed checklist at the end of the tenancy to make sure all areas addressed?

I leave the form after the inspection, tear off the signed section. Do not go through it rigorously. Go through room by room and say what needs to go, including lampshades etc. Ask about leaving white goods that are in good condition and gift to the new tenant.

Difficult to implement when you don't know who is coming in, Example - left gas oven and new tenant has dementia and not suitable.

The idea is that we may have a storage facility for white goods or sell on.

Terminations online and hope they have read it as well

Do not check to see if they have done what is expecting when they leave, just made aware that they will be recharged

It would be good to have on the system about asbestos checks, so we know that it's suitable to leave flooring.

4. Do you ask the outgoing tenants about flooring in the property?  
Do you ask if they are leaving carpet or laminate that is in good condition or advise them to remove?

AS above

5. Do you explain to them about recharges?

This is explained during the post inspection visits and told it's cheaper to remove themselves than paying the recharges, which includes VAT.

6. We are aware that housing officers cover different areas, have you got time to deal with void properties?

At the moment yes and no, struggling getting hold of people for pre-void inspections. Prioritise from the time we have the nominee. Difficult getting timing and workload right. HO struggling on the workloads in general and have missed some of the pre-voids, handed in keys already especially around tenants going into care homes.

7. How many voids are you expected to deal with during a month?
  - a. Is there a cut-off point, do you say when you have too many?

No cut off point, just expected to get on with it. The voids time is quite long and have properties on for a long time. Voids with her for

longer than used to be, turn over not as quick as it used to be. Probably because of compliance, need to give more realistic times for void.

We have to look at the safety aspects, failings before. Previously could judge the timing for re-let but no longer able to do this because of the compliance side.

13 voids currently – termination to re-let as of 26<sup>th</sup> Oct, a lot of major works and take more time.

15 on the go continually

#### 8. In what circumstances wouldn't you want to deal with the void?

Do you mean the condition of the property?

Week before last a tenancy was terminated and went to do pre-void and he wasn't in a good mood. She took a colleague and was told to F\*\*k off otherwise he would lose his s\*\*t and they didn't deal with it any further. He knew he would be recharged. Still ongoing issues in the community from this termination.

She gets approached about empty properties – 'don't put another difficult person in there' or 'can a member of my family have this'.

#### 9. During the void process, what happens if someone has died, and you can't get hold of the next of kin?

In contact with a lady from public protection and first point of call if not heard from anyone. They will contact her as well to have access to the property to find family contacts or Will.

Talk to neighbours for information. Some relatives get in touch to say they are estranged and don't want anything to do with clearing the property.

Look to serve a notice to quit against the property and giving 4 weeks' notice. Change locks and dispose of the items in the property. There are procedures to work through but not always straight forward.

## Appendix 5

### Customer Survey question No.

'Were there any problems with the property when you move in?'

Very minor aesthetic problem; ceiling needs paint touch up and the hallway walls and skirting was magnolia even though the doors and other skirting was white. Easily fixed so not that important.
I am registered as sick and was told property was ready. The gas was capped, and I could not have hot water or heating for 4 days- I was also not warned of this. It did make me ill with infection. No white goods, carpets or anything, this was very hard. I was also apparently charged for the day I moved out, due to not being out before 9am. This would have been impossible for me to do. Apart from this, we are grateful. But warning people about fundamental things like hot water and heating are important.
The holes in the roof are still there, as is the asbestos. The bedroom paint is peeling because of the damp. The doors won't close over the carpet, before this was down the doors wouldn't open when closed they stuck in the frame.
Problems with the shower, boiler and some electrical issues.
Walls were in a dirty state and needed re painting. We were given a paint voucher
The vent in the bathroom needs fixing. No it hasn't been resolved
Mould, Sink, Roof
Blocked drains from painters, leaking radiator and boiler valves, chain link fence not complete, all but fence fixed
The garden which comes with the flat is massively overgrown (neglected by the previous tenant) upon viewing the flat I raised my concerns and was told the garden would be cleared. Upon moving in, garden still overgrown have contacted my housing officer several times and the council myself to get it sorted and nothing has been done. It's absolutely disgusting. The guttering also have grass and roots growing in it. Of which I have complained about several times as well and nothing has been done.
No shower and electric meter not working. Meter was sorted but still no shower



## Alternative formats

### Furvasow Erel

**If you would like this information on audio CD, audio tape, Braille, large print, any other format or interpreted in a language other than English, please contact: -**

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