

Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED:
North Braunstone
Saffron, Rowley Fields
Eyres Monsell

CABINET

11th February 2002

VOIDS PILOT SCHEME – EXTENSION

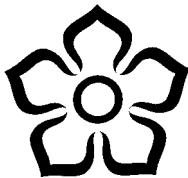
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF HOUSING

1. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 A Voids Pilot Scheme for Council Housing was set up following concerns about the time it takes to let properties. Humberstone was chosen because of the range of properties, differing age of the stock and different levels of housing demand.
- 1.2 The Pilot has led to void times being reduced from 6 to 3 weeks. Also tenant satisfaction has increased from 78% to 90%.
- 1.3 It is RECOMMENDED that:**
- a) the Voids Pilot be extended to Saffron, Eyres Monsell and Braunstone and staff recruited forthwith.
 - b) Housing Scrutiny Committee consider this report and advise any further changes that may help reduce re-let times and the Director, in consultation with the Cabinet Lead for Housing and Neighbourhood Renewal, be given delegated authority to determine any so arising.

2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 The cost of employing two more Voids Officers will be £50,000 per annum. However, offset against this is the savings made by turning around void properties in a quicker time and it is estimated that this and reduced repair costs will more than offset the staff costs.



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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1. BACKGROUND DETAILS

- 1.1 The Voids Initiative Scheme was developed following concerns about the increasing void turn around times. Particular concerns were raised, as the National Best Value Performance Indicator set by the Government is 4 weeks.
- 1.2 It was agreed that a temporary Voids Initiative Officer would be employed for a period of 6-12 months to explore void reduction measures and marketing techniques and would be focused on the Humberstone area, working from the Depot, but managed by the Project Manager (Housing Management Service).
- 1.3 The scheme started on the 14th May 2001 and during the past 8 months several initiatives have been adopted which have proved to be highly successful. These include:
- a) The Voids Officer collects the keys from the Neighbourhood Housing Office on a daily basis and carries out an initial inspection. This inspection determines if the property needs to be cleaned and whether the Voids Officer can complete the repair specification.
 - b) If only a small amount of repairs are required, the Voids Officer will complete the survey specification report and progress the work through the repairs system. They will also ensure that previous tenant's alterations are not removed, if in good condition and safe. Properties requiring extensive repairs are passed to the Technical Officer for inspection.
 - c) If the property is vulnerable and may attract vandalism, then security measures will be arranged, including the use of net curtains or security screens.
 - d) The Void Officer also arranges for the property to be cleaned out, before the trades people start the repairs.

- e) During the repair period accompanied viewings are undertaken. This allows the prospective tenant to raise any queries and for negotiations to take place if extra work is needed to let the property. There have been instances where a previous tenant has installed their own fixtures and fittings and although it may not be of a particular good quality, the new tenant has been prepared to accept future responsibility, thus reducing the overall void time and cost of installing new units. The new tenant also feels valued having been consulted about the property that will become their home.
- f) Marketing and information leaflets have been produced for the Humberstone Area that promotes the individual estates and local facilities etc. This information gives prospective tenants an insight into what local amenities the area offers, which is especially important with view to emerging communities.
- g) The Void Officer is able to prioritise and negotiate the completion dates with the Depot Re-let Supervisor. The enhanced working relationship ensures that problems can be resolved quickly and alterations to the schedule of works can be changed immediately. It also enables the Re-let Supervisor to spend more time supervising the work, which ensures quality repairs are completed.
- h) As voids are the only priority for the Voids Officer, the inspection, repair specification, bonus calculations and job allocation can be completed within 1 day, whereas properties dealt through the normal repair system can take longer.

2. GENERAL BENEFITS OF THE SCHEME

2.1 There are several benefits associated with this scheme which include:

- a) Escorted viewings enable queries to be addressed before the new tenant takes occupation.
- b) The applicant is given more information about the relet process which enhances our customer care approach, so new tenants are consulted from the start of their association with the Housing Service.
- c) The Voids Officer is able to reach agreement on previous tenant's alterations providing they are safe, thus reducing the overall void time and need for new fixtures and fittings.
- d) Extra work can also be negotiated at the time of viewing to facilitate a quicker void turnaround time especially in 'low demand areas'.
- e) Generally there is less use of security screens and the gardens of vacant properties suffer less fly tipping, as they are not obviously vacant. Again, this reduces the cost to the HRA.

3. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

3.1 The following table (1) shows the total number of days void with the Technical Section. Details relating to the total days with Management were not included, as we are measuring the effectiveness of the Voids Initiative Officer, in reducing

void times during the period that the property is with the Technical Section. However, on a random selection of 42 properties dealt with by the Voids Initiative Officer, the average void time with Management is 9.73 days. This is a reduction in the citywide figure of 15.33 days that was presented in the September 2001 Housing Management Service Quarterly Audit.

Table (1)

<u>AVERAGE DAYS VOID TIME PER MONTH</u>		
	2000	2001
JULY	40.0	15.4
AUGUST	43.2	25.9
SEPTEMBER	41.9	26.1
OCTOBER	47.8	27.0
QUARTERLY AVERAGE	43.9	23.6

3.2 Since the introduction of the Voids Pilot Scheme there has been an overall reduction of 53.8% in the average voids times for the studied time periods, indicates the success of the scheme.

3.3 In addition to identifying a reduction in the average void times per month, the average re-let times over four months were also examined to see if there was a similar trend, again using the period between 1st July to 31st October for 1999, 2000, 2001, which is detailed in table 2. This data was analysed to ensure comparable measurement and to minimise any underlying seasonable variations that may occur if measured against different time periods.

Average 4 Weekly Re-let Time over 4 Months – Humberstone Area

Table (2)

	1999		2000		2001	
	Normal Vacs	Inc Long Term Vacs	Normal Vacs	Inc Long Term Vacs	Normal Vacs	Inc Long Term Vacs
July	6.3	9.1	8.0	12.7	4.7	6.8
August	5.7	7.7	7.9	8.9	5.1	5.9
September	5.8	7.4	8.1	9.5	7.6	7.4
October	5.5	7.8	8.7	11.6	7.1	8.1

3.4 In all cases, whether the vacancy was a normal vacancy re-let or a long-term vacancy there has been a reduction in the average re-let time.

- 3.5 Table 3 shows the total average re-let period, again split between normal and long-term voids for both Technical and Management. This comparable information is included to determine the trend in the reduction in the re-let times in Humberstone and is reflective of an area of comparable size. The table shows an increase in the total void times for both categories for 200/2001 for the Control area.

Average 4 Weekly Relet Time Over 4 Months – Control Area

Table (3)

	1999		2000		2001	
	Normal Vacs	Inc Long Term Vacs	Normal Vacs	Inc Long Term Vacs	Normal Vacs	Inc Long Term Vacs
July	6.2	7.7	5.6	6.8	8.1	9.5
August	5.8	6.4	4.8	6.6	7.0	8.8
September	7.2	7.6	6.5	8.0	7.4	9.1
October	6.8	7.7	7.5	12.0	8.4	10.3

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Extending the pilot to two further areas in the City will enable the scheme to be monitored further, so any area variations can be assessed. If successful then consideration would be given to rolling the scheme out across the whole city.
- 4.2 The new areas are Saffron, Eyres Monsell and Braunstone, which have been chosen because of the diversity of type of stock and varying degrees of housing demand and current relet times.
- 4.3 New Tenants Satisfaction Surveys from applicants re-housed in the pilot area have highlighted an increase in the level of satisfaction of accommodation offered from 78% to 90%, whereas the level of reported outstanding repairs at the time the tenant takes occupation has reduced from 88% to 38.5%.
- 4.4 These benefits of the Pilot highlight the Departments commitment to improving customer care initiatives and improved delivery of services to tenants.

5. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Reduced void turn-around times will increase the opportunities for applicant waiting for secure accommodation if they can take occupation within a shorter time scale. This is particularly important for homeless applicants.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no direct policy implications associated with this report.

7. SUSTAINABLE & ENVIROMENTAL

- 7.1 High numbers of void properties can have a detrimental effect on the environment and communities.

8. CRIME AND DISORDER

8.1 Vacant dwellings on estates can be a target for vandals and cause a nuisance to neighbours.

9. HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

9.1 There are no Human Rights Implications associated with this report.

10. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph References within supporting information
Equal Opportunities	YES	5.1
Policy	NO	
Sustainable and Environmental	YES	7.1
Crime and Disorder	YES	8.1
Human Rights Act	NO	
Elderly People – People on low income	NO	

11. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE HOUSING DEPARTMENT

11.1 This report meets the aim of a decent home within the reach of every citizen of Leicester by reducing the level of void properties and sustaining communities.

12. LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT 1985)

12.1 3 months voids pilot report 2001
6 months voids pilot report 2001
Statistical Information LCC
Report of the Policy Action Team 7 on tackling low demand accommodation.
National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal 1999.

13. DETAILS OF CONSULTATION

13.1 Consultations have taken place within the Housing Department, the Elected Members for the Pilot area and the LFTA.

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are not direct Legal implications associated with this report.

15. AUTHOR OF REPORT

15.1 Tracie Rees Extension 6806