

Greatwell Homes Customer Scrutiny Panel Voids

This review is part of the Scrutiny programme 2018 as agreed with Customer Scrutiny Panel (CSP) and Customer Assembly (CA)

CSP for this report were Sharon Medlin, Mary Reeves and Janice Crompton, John Hook and Nana Ama (remote researchers).

This scrutiny will be relevant to:

Customers whose home went through the void process prior to moving.

New customers into Greatwell Homes

Greatwell Homes staff who manage the voids process including

- Repairs and Maintenance Manager
- Housing Services Manager
- Voids Planner
- Voids and Letting Co-Ordinator
- Voids Supervisor
- Neighbourhood Housing Officers

Scope - the Scrutiny Panel will look at specifically:

1. The experience of customers who have been offered a void Greatwell Homes property between 01 April 2019 and 01 January 2020
2. How Greatwell Homes can ensure that the processes we use to deliver voids delivers a safe and secure home for customers whilst providing value for money

Objectives

The purpose of this scrutiny is to review our process for managing void properties; to ensure that we provide 'Great Homes' as set out by our Customer Charter

Our recommendations are based on desktop research, interviews and internal evidence provided by Greatwell Homes staff and tenants.

External documents and evidence

EMPTF

NCH

Cairn Housing Association

NCHA

Rugby Borough Council

Birmingham C.C

Warwick D.C

Grand Union
LHA ASRA Group
Mercian
BPHA
Clarion T.B.C
Kettering B.C.
Future Housing.
Over 60 in all.

Greatwell Homes documents provided

- Lettable standards
- Policies and procedures – Allocations and Voids
- Flow chart / process map from keys handed in
- Step by step of voids
- List of customers recently moving into a void property

Determining questions

1. Is our current lettable standard fit for purpose? Does it minimise the amount of work required by the incoming customer to make the property their home?
2. Should the lettable standard be the same for everyone? Could it be different for different types of customer (those who are physically disabled, or those exiting care services or abusive relationships for example?)
3. Could we substitute 'paint packs' for other items of equivalent value? How do we know what the incoming customer needs?
4. How can we ensure a good customer experience throughout the voids process? Especially with regards to communication from Greatwell Homes to customers who have been accepted for a property and are waiting for the void works to be completed?
5. How should housing and voids work together to ensure customer satisfaction is high, and void times are kept to a minimum?

Methodology

John and Janice contacted housing providers by e-mail, phone calls or calling in to find out:

- How their void key to key time is kept to a minimum?
- Do they have 'tenant inspectors'?
- Do you offer help to new residents? (decorating vouchers, material discounts or white goods?)

Online research over 60 housing provides emailed

Questions asked

How void key to key time is kept to a minimum?

Do you have 'tenant inspectors'?

Do you offer help to new residents? (decorating vouchers, materials discounts or white goods?)

Mary compared other organisations Lettable Standards with ours

List of all companies/councils Lettable Standards downloaded on request.

Sharon, Mary, Janice and Nana Visited voids that were in varying states of repair some done by Greatwell Homes staff and some by contractors

83 Jubilee Crescent NN82PQ	125 Priory Road NN8 2JT
34 Valley Rd NN8 2PL	8 Knights Court NN8 4DD
60 Kestrel NN8 4UD	21 Ashfield Rd NN8 3JG

- We phoned 16 tenants (that had moved in since April 2019) on the 11th February at Sheep Street. A list of 16
- Greatwell Homes policies and procedures, and lettable standards
- Interviews and interaction with Greatwell Homes staff
- A workshop was arranged to be held with tenants who had move into their properties from April 2019. due to a lack of availability the workshop was cancelled.

Meeting 1

Louisa Campbell (Customer Relations Manager) Wayne Bryant (Voids Supervisor) James Norton (Repairs & Maintenance Manager) Chloe Winson (Voids Planner)

Meeting 2

Sarah Butler (NHO) Sarah Marriott (NHO) Kayleigh Sharp (NHO) Katie Brown (Housing Admin) Naomi Gabriel (Neighbourhood & housing Assistant)

We found that our Lettable Standard is comparable with other housing providers. Due to the loss of grants and other help being withdrawn some providers are now gifting carpets, window coverings and even white goods to the more vulnerable tenant. Nottingham County Council are also purchasing items for some tenants from charity shops and similar outlets such as Sofa Wise. This may be something we could look at. We could enquire if the outgoing tenants intend to leave carpets or window coverings etc. Providing the items are from a smoke free and pet free home these could be given to the incoming tenant if agreed with the Voids team that no re-charges are enforced on the outgoing tenant. We also give out tenant's paint packs where needed (this seems to be working well and we found no evidence to change this or suggest alternatives)

We have a team of 4 workmen who are being assessed for their skills sets so training can be given to fill any gaps. We have 1 inspector which is insufficient for the number of voids we handle. We currently employ two contractors to work on our void properties. Employing tradesmen is proving difficult as there are so many housing construction sites being built either in or around the Wellingborough area. We offer TOIL (time off in lieu) to our tradesmen. Because voids need a quick turnaround time to get the property earning an income. We are wasting resources offering TOIL to a tradesman who may work a few hours to complete a job and then have time off when there is so much work still to be done. At the time of writing we have 111 voids which amounts to a substantial loss of revenue.

Length of voids (Apr-Dec 19)

0-1 months	16
1-3 months	73
3-6 months	22
Grand total	111

	Value (cumulative)	% (period by period)	% (period by period) EXCLUDING temp. acc. and deliberate voids
Q1 2019/20	£59,841	1.18%	0.70%
Q2 2019/20	£132,009	1.29%	0.80%
Q3 2019/20	£237,146	1.54%	0.99%

Conclusions & summary of findings

All keys are to be handed in by 12 o'clock noon on Monday. The inspector can then plan inspections throughout his week.

Voids come in a wide range of repair needs ranging from a good clean to almost rebuilding the property.

We talked to 16 tenants about their experience on moving and all of them were happy with the communication from their housing officers which we were happy to hear and a great improvement on other reports we have done.

We found 1 of the 16 moved from privately rented accommodation this meant that they had to pay rent on 2 houses for 3 weeks. as this is not the first time the scrutiny panel has come across this we think some work needs to be done.

All of the tenants said they had a week's notices about moving into the house.

THANK YOU

The Scrutiny Panel would like to thank the members of staff at Greatwell Homes for their help and advice whilst creating this scrutiny.

RECOMMENDATIONS

	Recommendation	Benefit	Management Response	Date
1	We need to employ two, four-man teams for in-house void work. Preferably multi skilled tradesmen where possible. We also need 2 Inspectors so that voids with little work needed can be rented out quickly and not in a queue waiting for larger projects to be completed.	Employing our own tradesmen will be more economical than using contractors.	We are currently carrying out a review of Greatwell Works against the original business case presented to and approved by Board in relation to both in-house repairs and in-house voids. As part of this review, alongside the Voids Recovery Project, we will be considering the future delivery model for voids. The outcomes of this will determine any additional investment that may be required.	September 2020
2	We need to offer a competitive salary. There is a high demand for qualified tradespeople. We have to offer an attractive, comparable salary package.	We will not be reliant on contractors nor need to pay high rates.	A review of all salaries across Greatwell Homes was conducted in 2019/20 as part of the terms & conditions review and any adjustments made from April 2020. Salaries for trades are comparable with other Associations so this action is complete.	April 2020
3	Allow our tradespeople to work overtime and pay them for it.	Voids will be cleared and available for rent so much sooner.	This item has also been addressed during the Terms & conditions review. TOIL has now been stopped for operatives and replaced with paid overtime from April 2020. This was an issue already highlighted so we welcome the fact the Customer Scrutiny Panel also identified it.	April 2020

			This action is now completed.	
4	Create a policy that will ease the burden of vulnerable tenants of both paying rent and purchasing essential items for their new home. This would apply to those coming from temporary accommodation, privately rented property and women's' refuges. We could consider spreading the first few weeks rent over a longer period.	Not putting financial strain on tenants having to pay two rents. Some tenants have to give 4 weeks' notice and Housing Benefit will only pay one property rent. Giving someone a property that they cannot afford to make into their home and may get them into arrears attempting to furnish it. For a relatively small amount it would cost GWH the results will far outweigh the social impact this would have.	We will create a Tenancy Sustainment Policy and subsequent procedure that directs officers to supportive interventions (such as where to apply for furniture grants) to support vulnerable customers.	September 2020