

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE Housing and Environment DATE 16th February 2009
CORPORATE DIRECTOR Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT Properties Off Charge
REPORT NUMBER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

At the Housing and Environment Committee on the 11th January 2010 Officers were requested to provide a detailed report, including firm completion dates, on all of the properties which have been off charge for six months or longer. The purpose of the report is to update Elected Members on all properties held off charge as either “Unable to be Relet – (UTBR) or Not to be Relet – (NTBR)”.

The reporting format has now changed to reflect and define more accurately the categories instead of the previous Area format. The change being a direct result of concerns raised by Members at the Housing and Environment Committee dated the 11th January 2010 at the number of properties that remain void.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Committee is requested to;

- Approve the new format on the UTBR and NTBR off charge list and note the information provided.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Council has made an allowance for rent loss due to unoccupied properties in its budget process. Properties removed from charge would be factored into those calculations during any period that they are off charge or unoccupied. This would be the same for properties returned to charge until the properties are actually let.

The repairs and improvement works proposed from these properties, under the classification of NTBR / UTBR, are funded from both the Housing Capital and Revenue budget headings respectively.

Under the Housing Capital budget heading; 6.10 Housing for Varying Needs – Sheltered / Adaptation the sum of £100,000 was set aside to upgrade all Ex-Warden properties during the financial 2009/10. There is a predicted under spend in the Housing Capital Programme for 2009/10 which will allow us to make more funding available to carry out additional works on this project. The funding will be increased to complete conversion of as many of the ex-warden properties as can be managed by Building Services by the end of the financial year. An estimated

cost is currently being prepared for the additional work and will be verbally reported to Committee.

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

Aberdeen's City Vision, to be "a city which is vibrant, dynamic, forward looking - an even better place to live and work, where people can expect high-quality services that meet their needs", and the City Council's Vision that "we will be recognised within the city and more widely, as being a leading Council in Northern Europe by 2010". The content of this report links with the following priorities identified within Vibrant, Dynamic and Forward Looking 2007 to 2011.

- Housing

1. Increase the provision of sheltered housing for communities across the City
2. Speed up letting and repairs in Council homes
3. Enhance the total environment in social housing area

The contents of the report contribute to the achievement of National Outcome 10 as outlined in the Single Outcome Agreement 2008 to 2011;

1. We live in well designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need.

Policies and Procedures have been developed by the Voids Service Working group, The Void Management Team and The Estate Management Service Working Group. These are;

- Policy Objective - To reduce void rent loss by ensuring:

1. All necessary repairs on void properties are completed within target timescales.
2. All necessary repairs on void properties are completed in accordance with the Council's current Re-let Repairs Standard.
3. Prioritisation of repair of voids where an applicant has accepted an offer of the tenancy.
4. Negotiation of the scale and nature of repairs with new tenants at the void viewing stage.
5. To carry out Health and Safety repairs only prior to a tenant taking occupation in predetermined letting areas. All other non-essential repairs to be completed after occupation.
6. Voids subject to major works are identified as UTBR and removed from charge as early as possible.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The document detailing all properties held as "off charge", is only an accurate representation at the time, of the specified update.

To reduce the exposure of each of empty property from factors such as malicious and willful damage or physical deterioration while unoccupied, emphasis must be placed on the "target dates" to be achieved.

The Council is required to manage its housing stock in the most efficient and effective manner and this may result in properties being under major repair or improvements. By maintaining safe and secure environments in which to live this can only increase and enhance peoples living experience within the city.

Due to the lack of factoring arrangements in place Aberdeen City Council (as landlord) has been frustrated where their flat / property is contained within a mixed tenure block when providing its tenants with management, maintenance and improvement services.

The Council's Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) Standard Delivery Plan was approved by the former Communities Scotland in August 2006. This outlines our strategy for meeting SHQS by 2015. If the Council cannot achieve the targets set within the Delivery Plan and within reasonable rent increases this could lead to direct intervention by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

6. REPORT

The reporting process on properties off charge will be included in each cycle of the Housing and Environment Committee.

The list of UTBR / NTBR off charge properties makes available information and details on the reasons why a "void" property has been removed from charge. A void being identified as a property held on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) with no tenant and for a period of time.

The Accounts Commission is a statutory, independent body which, through the audit process assists Local Authorities in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of resources. The following criteria must be met in conjunction with the necessary level of approval.

- Empty properties subject to a Housing Committee decision that they are not to be let because they are surplus to long-term requirements, or to be transferred, disposed of or demolished.
- Empty properties where an insurance claim was raised due to fire or flood damage.
- Empty properties awaiting or undergoing major structural works (e.g. modernisation) during which period it would be unsafe for them to be occupied.
- Houses held for decanting tenants.
- Lock-ups and garages

7. AUTHORISED SIGNATURE

Pete Leonard

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Commserve/admin/committee formats/new report template

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8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Statutory Performance Indicators Guide 2009/10
(Local Government Act 1992)