

## **Report to Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 11 March 2014**

**Portfolio: Housing – Councillor D. Stallan**

**Subject: Performance on re-letting Council Properties (KPI (41))**

**Officer contact for further information: Roger Wilson extension 4419**

**Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry extension 4246**

---



### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**1. The Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel are asked to consider the report on KPI 41 which sets out as requested by the Panel;**

- (a) Reasons for refusals of properties; and**
- (b) Why certain properties are difficult to let**

**2. That the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel considers other initiatives set out in the report to reduce Council property re-let times.**

### **Report:**

1. At its meeting on 12 November 2014 (Minute 30 refers), the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel, when considering Key Performance Indicators, were concerned that under KPI 41 (on average, how many days did it take us to re-let a Council property?) performance was well below target. The following table sets out the target and both the cumulative performance in the last 6 quarters (i.e. – from April to the end of the relevant quarter) and the performance for the quarter itself.

Quarter	Target (days)	Actual (days)	
		Quarter	Cumulative
Q3 2013/2014	33	37	41
Q2 2013/2014	33	45	44
Q1 2013/2014	33	40	40
Q4 2012/2013	30		33
Q3 2012/2013	30		31
Q2 2012/2013	30		29

2. As can be seen, neither the quarterly nor cumulative target has been achieved since Quarter 2 in 2012/2013. At its last meeting, officers explained to the Panel that one of the reasons for not meeting the target in Quarters 1 & 2 in 2013/2014 was because of the increased workload in the Housing Options Section due to the implementation of the most comprehensive review ever of the Housing Allocations Scheme which included:

- Removing 4,000 non-qualifying homeseekers from the Housing Register and dealing with huge numbers of enquiries by telephone, in writing and at the reception desk
- Introducing the new on-line registration process requiring all existing qualifying homeseekers to re-register on-line
- Assisting vulnerable homeseekers to re-register on line

3. As expected, as the workload has reduced, this has resulted in performance improving in the last quarter. Members are asked to note that although the cumulative figure has only reduced by 3 days, the actual reduction in this Quarter was 8 days.

4. The Finance and Performance Scrutiny Panel asked that a report be submitted to this meeting on the reasons for the refusals of vacant properties by applicants and, in particular, houses which normally prove popular with homeseekers. The Panel further asked that details be provided on why certain Council properties are difficult to let.

### **Reasons for Property Refusals**

5. The table attached as an Appendix to the report shows for each property refused by applicants the property type, the area, the number of bids made, number of refusals the reasons and refusals by applicants downsizing accommodation. The table covers the period between July and December 2013. Although the reasons for refusals vary, the most common reason is that the homeseeker "dislikes the neighbourhood or estate" (despite them knowing the area where the property is located when they bid). It would appear that properties are not being refused in any particular parts of the District.

## Difficult-to-let Properties

6. A breakdown of the number of refusals by property type for this 6 month period is set out in the following table:

Property Type	Refused Once	Refused Twice	Refused more than twice
1 Bedroom bungalow	5	2	3
1 Bedroom flat (general needs)	6	2	3
1 Bedroom flat (over 50s)	4	Nil	1
1 bedroom flat (sheltered)	6	7	8
Studio (corner bungalow)	1	Nil	1
2 bedroom flat	1	Nil	Nil
3 bedroom flat	1	Nil	Nil
2 bedroom maisonette	Nil	Nil	1
2 bedroom house	2	Nil	Nil
3 bedroom house	3	Nil	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>

7. As can be seen, properties which are refused the most are in sheltered accommodation which, therefore, are the most difficult-to-let. A number of initiatives are in place in order to address the problem including:

- Under the revised Housing Allocations Scheme, the Council now operates a Supplementary Waiting List for non-qualifying applicants over 60 years of age who do not meet with the Local Eligibility Criteria in terms of Local Connection or having a housing need as determined by one criterion of a priority band. There are currently 192 applicants on the Supplementary Waiting List. Those on the list are able to bid on properties in sheltered accommodation
- A new officer Major Capital Projects Team is being set up, chaired by the Assistant Director of Housing (Property). The Team will be identifying development and re-generation projects. As part of its remit, the Team will be considering the supply and demand for sheltered accommodation, and where there is over-provision, the future use of sites. In addition, consideration will be given to converting difficult-to-let bedsit accommodation to more lettable self-contained flats
- When difficult-to-let sheltered properties become available, the Housing Repairs Service undertakes additional work in order to make the property more attractive to homeseekers when viewing
- Scheme Managers are undertaking accompanied viewings with applicants explaining about all of the communal facilities available including social activities etc.

### **Further Initiatives**

8. As explained at the last meeting of the Panel, officers are planning a number of initiatives in order to improve performance, which are as follows:

#### ***Review of the Housing Allocations Scheme***

9. When the Housing Allocations Scheme is reviewed by the Housing Scrutiny Panel in October this year, the Panel will be asked to consider whether tougher penalties for refusals of offers of accommodation should be introduced to encourage homeseekers to only bid on properties they are likely to accept. The options for the Panel on this issue appear to be as follows:

- Enforcing a penalty for refusing one offer
- Extending the length of time that the penalty applies from 3 to 6 months
- As there are currently no penalties for those who are downsizing accommodation in order to assist with tackling under-occupation, consideration could be given to introducing a lighter penalty for those downsizing

10. The Panel will also be asked to consider if the number of bids made in each Choice Based Lettings Cycle should be reduced from the current level of a maximum of three bids. Allowing homeseekers to continue to place three bids may encourage them to make the third bid on a property they would never accept. If they are successful with such a third bid and reject the offer, then a number of void days are lost. If the number of bids were limited to two it could encourage homeseekers to bid on properties they are likely to accept if made an offer.

### ***Moving to a Weekly Choice Based Lettings Cycle***

11. Under the Council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme, homeseekers are able to place a maximum of three bids within any two-weekly bidding cycle. If the two-weekly cycle was reduced to one week, it could enable properties to be advertised sooner and shorten the void period. Officers are currently seeking a quotation from Locata Housing Services (LHA), who administers the Choice Based Lettings Scheme on behalf of the Council, for providing a weekly property cycle.

### ***In-depth Void Study***

12. Due to concerns about the performance on re-letting Council properties, the Director of Housing will be commissioning an in-depth Void Study in order to identify areas for improvement. As this work cannot be undertaken within existing resources, it is intended to appoint an external specialist to undertake the Study. The outcome of the Study will be reported to the Housing Scrutiny Panel in the first instance.

#### **Reason for decision:**

The report has been submitted at the request of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel in order to consider the reasons for refusals of properties, and why certain properties are difficult to let.

#### **Options considered and rejected:**

Not to submit a report to the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel to consider the reasons for refusals of properties, and why certain properties are difficult to let.

#### **Consultation undertaken:**

None

#### **Resource implications:**

Budget provision: None

Personnel: None

Land: None

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A

Relevant statutory powers: Housing Act 1996

Background papers: None

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: None

Key Decision reference: (if required) N/A