

Report to the Communities Cabinet Advisory Committee

Council Void Properties

1. Introduction

1.1 For a number of years, there were high levels of voids which peaked at 1,201 in 2001 as the demand for social housing had decreased due to housing market conditions. However, in more recent years, demand has grown with most areas of the City & County having healthy waiting lists for most accommodation types. There are however inevitably small pockets where the accommodation type is not so popular or the location is not as sought after

1.2 A rationalisation of the stock was carried out some years ago due to a number of factors including a lack of demand, poor stock condition. In addition, most bedsits located in the high rise blocks were unpopular and they were effectively mothballed until demand increased a few years ago when they were repaired and let.

1.3 Following major changes and improvements to the way in which voids are managed over recent years, the level of voids has substantially reduced. A Homes Preparation Unit (HPU) was established in 2004 to co-ordinate all works to void properties. During 2004 the voids level stood at 823 and at quarter 3 this year they were 298. In recent years voids have shown a broad downward trend as follows

Table 1 – Void Levels at Year end

Year	No. Voids	As % of stock
2008/09	383	2.8%
2009/10	286	2.1%
2010/11	251	1.8%
2011/12	221	1.6%
2012/13	278	2%
2013/14	220	1.6%

2. Demand

2.1 Demand is currently outstripping supply for the majority of accommodation. A major review of the Housing Register has very recently been carried out and following this review there are still 1,700 people waiting for Council accommodation in Swansea plus 1,390 waiting for a transfer within the stock. The annual turnover of stock has remained fairly constant in recent years fluctuating between 10.5% and 12.6%.

2.2 Staff are proactive when dealing with the more difficult to let properties, for example, advertisements are displayed at our DHO's; Housing Options; via the internet at Swansea.housing and from time to time on the Council's website. Low

demand properties tend to be some 2 and 3 bedroom houses at some of the less popular, hilly parts of Townhill; OAP bedsits at West Cross and 3 bedroom maisonettes/flats at some locations. These however are sporadic rather than in large numbers.

2.3 As stated, there is demand for most accommodation, but principally due to the Spare Room Subsidy, demand for 3 bedroom flats has decreased, however, 55 units were let during 2013/14. With regard to 3 bedroom flats in the high rise blocks at Clyne Court, Sketty and Jeffreys Court, Penlan, when the refurbishment works are underway during 2015, any 3 bedroom flats that have not been let, will be reconfigured into 2 bedroom flats.

2.4 Weekly monitoring of voids is carried out at senior management level to assess performance against targets. Clearly it is important that targets are met since rental income has an impact on meeting the WHQS. Demolition of stock is an action of last resort since it results in less income, which in turn affects Housing's Business Plan.

3. Turnover of Stock

3.1 As stated in sec. 2.1, stock turnover in recent years has fluctuated between 10.5% and 12.6%. In terms of numbers, the table below serves to illustrate:

Table 3 – The Number of End of Tenancies received per annum

Year	Number received	Ave. p/w	Stock % turnover
2008/09	1,562	30	11.4%
2009/10	1,636	31.5	12%
2010/11	1,433	27.6	10.5%
2011/12	1,497	28.8	11%
2012/13*	1,713*	32.9	12.6%
2013/14 (53 week year)	1,630	30.8	12%
Total	9,471	30.3	11.6%

*A higher number received during 2012/13 due to 65 properties returned to the stock during the course of the year for re-letting due to the end of the Asylum Seekers contract with the Home Office

(This year's figure is projected to be 11.6% turnover)

4. Improvements carried out to the Voids Process

4.1 When an end of tenancy notice is received, this triggers a sequence of events which each void progresses through to ensure that the property is brought up to the minimum letting standard and is ready for occupation. These stages are to meet legislative requirements and to ensure that all health & safety regulations are met.

4.2 Over recent years, many changes to working practices have taken place in order to make the process as streamlined and effective as possible. A Systems Thinking Review was also carried during the past couple of years which has seen further positive changes implemented such as the introduction of a multi-task clearance, cleaning and garden cutting service; the use of key safes which allows a number of different functions to be carried out simultaneously and viewings taking place by prospective tenants when works are ongoing.

4.3 Wherever possible, repairs of a minor nature are carried out after the new tenant has moved in. However, where there are more extensive repairs or where there are a substantial number of minor repairs, these are carried out prior to the property being let. The extent of repairs and the associated works can vary considerably depending on the property condition.

4.4 The Homes Preparation Unit moved to Heol y Gors some years ago to establish a closer working relationship with Corporate Building & Property Services staff. This has improved communication with close liaison taking place on a daily basis. This is essential with around 200 or so properties being worked on at any one time.