

Preparing Void Properties for re-letting Scrutiny Commission – 09 May 2023



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Introduction

- Each year NNC receives on average 550 sets of keys from out going tenants who are vacating their Council home.
- Without void properties NNC would not be able to house those applicants to whom the Council owes a Housing duty via Keyways.
- The reasons for a property becoming void are varied from tenants transferring to larger or smaller homes, to those that move into residential care or pass away.
- The condition in which the property is returned to NNC, ultimately dictates how long it takes for the property to be made available for reletting.
- Preparing void properties for re-letting is therefore a multiteam responsibility within Housing.

The key in, to out journey

- The **Tenancy Services Team** receive the Notice to Quit and visit the outgoing tenant to check the condition of the property.
- The **Housing Property Services Team** survey the property to establish if the property requires standard or major void repairs.
- The **Keyways Allocations Team** advertise the property once an estimated completion date for the repair works is provided by the Housing Property Services Team and the advert details have been provided by the Tenancy Services Team.
- The **Housing Property Services Team** undertake the clearance and repair works to the property in line with the NNC Lettable Standard.
- The **Keyways Allocations Team** allocate the property to the successful bidder once their circumstances are verified.
- The **Tenancy Services team** carry out further verification of the applicant's circumstances and are responsible for viewing and letting the property.



TIMELINE

Pre-void

Week 1

Week 2

Week 3

Week 4

Week 5

Week 6

Week 7

Week 8

PROPERTY

Pre void inspections

-

Keys received from Tenancy and property inspected

Safety checks completed

Trades Work

Trades Work

Trades Work

Clean, post inspect and keys to Tenancy

-

TENANCY

End of tenancy visit and advertise sheltered accom

Keys received from tenant

Add General Needs advert

-

-When nomination received – verify nomination

Accompanied Viewing when safe to do so

Welcome Meeting

-

Ready to Let and sign up

ALLOCATIONS

Approve Advert (sheltered)

Keyways cycle

Approve Advert (General Needs)

Keyways cycle

Shortlisting & Nomination to Landlord

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Stock Profile

- The two property services teams are responsible for the Council's 8,084 homes (4,572 within the former Corby area and 3,512 within the former Kettering area)
- There are some major differences between the stock of the two former Councils (note the figures below are based on 2021 data), as shown below:

Corby

Property Type	No of beds	Total
Bedsit	0	124
Bungalow	1	309
	2	179
	3	42
Flat	1	654
	2	478
	3	43
	4	10
House	1	1
	2	672
	3	1682
	4	210
	5	37
Maisonette		183
	Total	4624

Year	Total
Pre 1945	516
1945-1964	1983
1965-1974	1130
Post 1974	995
Total	4624

Kettering

Property Type	No of beds	Total
Bedsit	0	40
Bungalow	1	197
	2	276
	3	3
Flat	1	930
	2	586
	3	4
House	1	28
	2	502
	3	1040
	4	39
	5	1
Maisonette		10
	Total	3656

Year	Total
Pre 1945	973
1945-1964	1368
1965-1974	494
Post 1974	815
Unknown	6
Total	3656



LAHS data – vacant properties

Total vacant HRA dwellings	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23*
Corby area	29	40	52	51	85
Kettering area	103	83	73	59	58
North Northants	132	123	125	110	143

** Please note 22/23 is a provisional figure and is still to be validated and submitted*

- The data provided is the number of HRA owned council properties vacant on 31st March each year as published in the Local Authority Housing Statistics data return (LAHS) which is published on www.gov.uk and is a mandatory return that the Council completes on an annual basis.

LAHS data – council lets

Total LA dwellings let	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23*
Corby area	403	294	260	281	206
Kettering area	267	262	303	249	247
North Northants Council	670	556	563	530	453

** Please note 22/23 is a provisional figure and is still to be validated and submitted*

- The data in the table shows the number of HRA council properties let each year as published in the Local Authority Housing Statistics data return (LAHS).
- This data includes all council lettings across North Northamptonshire at social or affordable rent levels on secure or introductory tenancies so does not include properties being used for temporary accommodation.



LAHS data – average re-let time in days

Average re-let time	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23*
Corby area	18 days	22 days	24.6 days	65.35 days	TBC
Kettering area	98 days	81 days	110 days	90.05 days	TBC
North Northants	N/A	N/A	N/A	75.3 days	TBC

- The data provided within the Local Authority Housing Statistics data return (LAHS) records the average re-let time in days from when the tenancy is terminated up to and including the date the new tenancy agreement starts, so the whole period the property is void. This does not include properties undergoing major works.



Void performance measures

- For 2023/24 the following performance measures will be reported in the Corporate Performance Report that is taken to Executive:

STP37a	Average time taken to re-let NNC <u>standard</u> void properties
STP37b	Average time taken to re-let NNC <u>major</u> void properties

- Work has been undertaken to implement a process to enable data to be provided on an NNC footprint broken down by major and standard void properties.
- This will help ensure the data provides a clearer picture of how long standard properties are being taken to let.



New void performance target

- For 2023/24 a target for the length of time taken to re-let a standard void property is **56 days** which is the equivalent of 8 weeks
- This is based on an average re-let time taken from a peer group of 52 Local Authorities provided by HouseMark which is 51.6 days
- The performance range within this peer group is from 13.9 days up to 151.9 days



Income Loss due to Voids

	Number of Voids Let	Cumulative days void (working days)	Average Weekly rent 2022/23	Void loss
Kettering	210	20,248	£85.54	£346,400
Corby	272	25,483	£81.07	£413,180
Total				£759,580

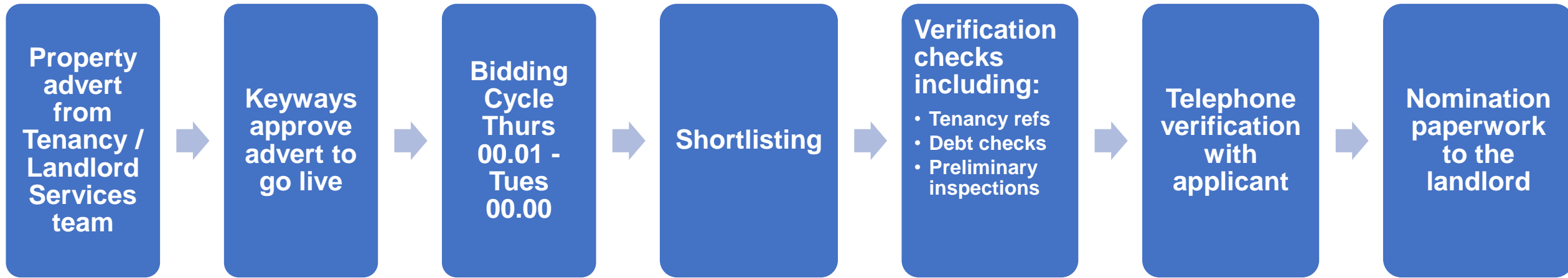
Annual Debit of £35,159,000 **Void loss of 2.16%**

Note: We only know the length of time a property is void when property is re-let. The snapshot of number of voids at end of month March 2023 (Kettering 58, Corby 85) gives approx weekly rent losses of (Kett 58 x £85.54 = £4,961.32) (Corby 85 x £81.07 = £6,890.95) £11,852.27 per week.



The role of the Allocations Team

- Attendance and rotating chair at NNC weekly voids meeting



Allocations Data

- In 2022/2023 an average of 556 new housing applications per month (rising to 745pcm in Q4)
- 1183 lettings in 2022/23, of which
 - 438 NNC
 - 745 Registered Provider stock
- 307 refusals since August 2022, of which 118 are NNC council properties (27% refusals as a proportion of lettings)
- Current outstanding nominations is 70 (50% are council properties) reduced from a peak of ~120 in October 2022
- There is current one outstanding nomination for a council property that is ready to let (RTL)
- 15.5 FTE staff in the Keyways team of which 45% are temporary staff.

Allocations – achievements

- NN Keyways Housing Allocation Scheme and software launched on Day 1
- Enabling projects since vesting day include harmonising and streamlining customer contact routes into the team
- Backlog of 2,200 housing applications cleared July-Dec 2022
- Suspended applications reduced from over 700 to 322 currently
- Housing and Community Occupational Health meetings;
 - 8 households with complex needs supported to secure housing solutions in NNC council stock via this multi-disciplinary approach using the NNC voids process
 - Includes one family waiting for suitable accommodation since 2019

Ensuring best use of stock: Adapting homes to those on Keyways with complex needs



Allocations – challenges and priorities

Current challenges

- Staff resources
- Increasing demand – current active register is 5,143 household, compared to 4,000 combined total pre-vesting day (includes households with no housing need in Corby and East Northants)
- Receiving 26 high level enquiries per month in 22/23 (Councillor and MP enquiries, complaints, reviews)

Current priorities

- To restructure the Allocations Team and increase staff resource
- To clear backlogs in customer contact and nominations workstreams:
 - Aim to respond to customers within adopted service standards
 - Aim to nominate within 3 working days of advert cycle closing or refusal

The role of the Tenancy Services Team

- Attendance and rotating chair at NNC weekly voids meeting

Carry out end of tenancy visit. Advice and inspection.

Prepare advert for Keyways

Verify Nomination. Includes affordability assessment and home visit

Accompanied Viewing

Welcome Meeting

Prepare sign-up pack and sign up new tenant.



The Tenancy Services Team also...

- Are actively involved in preparing, chairing and attending weekly voids meetings – and respond urgently to actions arising from the meeting.
- **Manage current tenancies:**
 - Provide advice and support throughout the lifetime of a tenancy (starting pre-tenancy)
 - Periodic Tenancy Visits – on a 5-yearly cycle
 - Manage requests for improvements or alterations to properties
 - Promote Mutual Exchanges
 - Work with multi-disciplinary team to provide Aids & Adaptations where possible to keep people in homes that are suitable for their household needs
 - Property inspections for all Keyways applicants before applicants can bid or proceed with nomination to new property
 - **Support Tenancy Sustainment**



Challenges for the Tenancy Services Team in the voids process

Issue	Mitigation / current process	Further work in progress
Items left within the property at the end of a tenancy.	Housing Officers visit tenants within notice period to provide help and advice on how to return property.	Review working practices of all staff to ensure consistency – as part of the end-to-end voids review.
Eviction – duty to take reasonable care of belongings while tracking tenant.	We store belongings for 28 days within property to reduce costs of removal and storage.	Cost and review removal and storage options.
Probate matters - when tenant dies intestate or challenge to will.	To end tenancy, notice served on Office of the Public Trustee. (cost and time) Regularly promote the benefit of having a will.	Consider partnership to provide free or low-cost will writing.

The role of the Voids Repairs Team

- The team are responsible for renovating, repairing and cleaning our void properties ready for reletting.
- Voids are categorised as standard or major depending on the type of work that is required in line with the NNC Lettable Standard.
- Standard voids don't require a key component to be replaced, such as a kitchen or wiring, whereas majors do.
- The majority of repairs are completed by our in-house Operatives. With specialist contractors only used where we don't have in house skills.
- A Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR), an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR), an Asbestos report and an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) is completed for each property prior to it being let.

Before



After



Challenges faced by the Voids Repairs Team

Properties returned containing belongings by outgoing tenants



- Properties that are returned with belongings left in them cause a significant delay to the process of completing the void works.
- The amount of belongings varies by property.
- Until a property is clear of belongings it is not possible to start the repair works.
- In cases of abandonment and probate, the Council has a legal duty to store the belongings for a set period of time.
- The Council incurs significant costs each year to dispose of belongings.



Challenges faced by the Voids Repairs Team

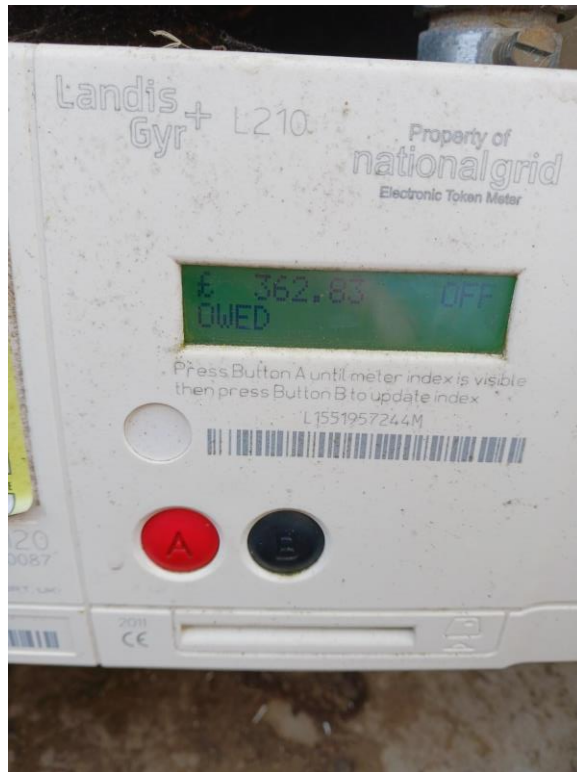
Properties returned containing poor quality DIY



- Properties that are returned with unauthorised and poor quality DIY add to the void time.
- The alterations have to either be made safe or removed and replaced.
- This ranges from replacement kitchens to conservatories.
- Where DIY is authorised and of a good standard then this is left in situ with the tenant being made responsible for replacement of non standard items, such as fitted ovens.

Challenges faced by the Voids Repairs Team

Properties returned with meter debts



- Properties that are returned with meter debts delay the letting of the property, as until they are in credit we are not able to complete the gas and electric safety checks.
- We have a contract with a company to replace the meters with debts and provide a small amount of credit, however, during the recent energy price crisis, it has been nearly impossible to get companies to take on new customers.
- A corporate credit card has been sourced for the team to help clear debts, but we still require the card key to be able to top up debts.



Challenges faced by the Voids Repairs Team

Properties returned with gardens in a poor condition

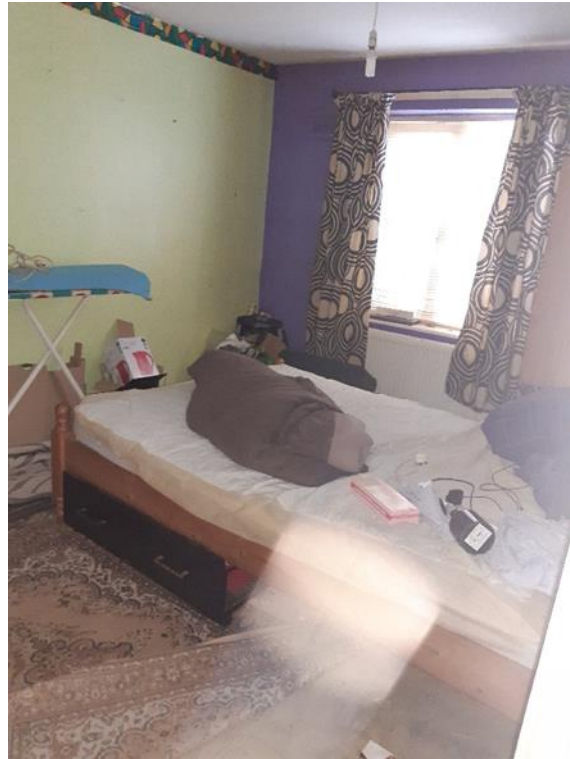
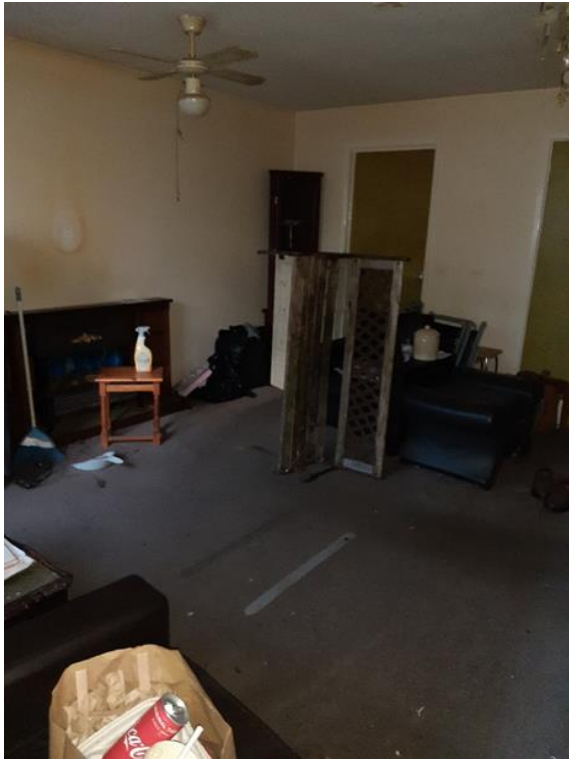


- Properties that are returned with gardens in a poor condition need to be cleared to a manageable level for incoming tenants.
- Often, sheds are found to be in an unsafe condition and therefore need to be removed.
- Overgrown trees that can cause structural damage to our properties need to be pruned, often at high cost, by tree surgeons.



Case Study of a Major Void

Before



- The property required a new kitchen and Level Access Shower, in addition to the standard void works.
- Some minor adaptations were also required for the incoming tenant (ramping to the property and widening of internal doorways).
- A large amount of replastering and decoration was also needed.
- The works were completed by the DLO team.



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Case Study of a Major Void

After



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Successes to date and ongoing challenges for the Voids Repairs Team

Successes

- Successfully joined up our two neighbourhood area Void Repairs Teams into one NNC team.
- Developed a number of new procedures for the team to work to based on the new NNC Lettable standard.
- Created a Major Voids team working across Neighbourhood areas.
- Procured a contract for Meter changes to facilitate swift action on meter debts.

Ongoing challenges

- Making better use of the notice period to identify remedial works that tenants should put right.
- Exploring options for outgoing tenants to leave their property in a clean and tidy condition.
- Greater planned investment in our stock to reduce the amount of major voids received.



Conclusions

- Wider end to end review of voids processes to ensure minimum delays
- Cross team oversight and responsibility for voids is essential to a successful voids service
- Weekly oversight of operational voids management at Strategic Lead level
- Do we have the right resource levels across all teams in the process to deliver the service that we want to?

Any questions?



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