

# **Void Review Report**

**January 2006**

## Void Review – Contents

Page

Foreword .....	3
References .....	4
Introduction .....	5
Current Void Management Arrangements .....	6
1. <i>Void Management Policy</i>	
2. <i>Void Management Procedures</i>	
How are we currently doing? .....	8
1. <i>Housing Business Plan</i>	
2. <i>Targets/ Performance Indicators</i>	
3. <i>Current Performance</i>	
4. <i>Comparison with other Councils</i>	
5. <i>Highland Council Performance Survey</i>	
6. <i>Tenants Perspectives</i>	
Low demand issues .....	19
1. <i>Survey Area Housing Managers</i>	
How can we get better? .....	24
1. <i>Identification of Good Practice</i>	
2. <i>Initiatives to tackle low demand</i>	
3. <i>Community Warden Schemes</i>	
4. <i>Reward Schemes</i>	
Conclusions .....	27
Planning for Improvements .....	28
1. <i>Increase provision of more affordable housing</i>	
2. <i>HC Sheltered housing review</i>	
3. <i>Community Ownership</i>	
4. <i>Improvement Plan</i>	

## Foreword

The Director of Housing commissioned a review of empty homes management (Voids Review) in January 2005. Original intentions had been to undertake a full best value review of voids, however this was felt to be no longer necessary because performance had improved since the review was first proposed in April 2002. Since then there has been a long and continuing improvement trend, and therefore a best value review was not considered to be the best use of resources, especially when resources require to be concentrated on stock transfer. Instead a more focussed review of

- use of pre-void inspections, tenants' notice period issues, abandonment procedures etc
- key control while property is void / undergoing repair
- time taken to allocate voids – use of pre-allocations, refusal rates / low demand issues etc

was considered appropriate to demonstrate the Council's ongoing commitment to seek continuous improvement.

The review included the active participation of tenants who were nominated by the Tenants Consultative Group to join the review team. The involvement of tenants has given an important tenant/user perspective to strengths / weaknesses of the current service, and has also ensured that the review has been sufficiently challenging. Tenants have also helped to identify/develop the Improvement Plan.

Tracey Urry  
Area Housing Manager  
Ross & Cromarty / Skye & Lochalsh

### ***Void Review Group Members:***

*Tenants:* Brian Cain  
Margaret Greig  
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Nigel Slater  
Donnie Kerr  
George Henderson

*Officers:* Carol Elliot  
Tracey Urry

The Void Review Group has met on 8 occasions:

- 4<sup>th</sup> March 2005;
- 14<sup>th</sup> April 2005;
- 12<sup>th</sup> May 2005;
- 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2005;
- 19<sup>th</sup> July 2005;
- 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2005;
- 13 October 2005
- 25<sup>th</sup> November.

## References

1. “Managing Housing Voids – the impact of low demand properties”, July 2004, a joint report undertaken by Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland.
2. Housing & Social Work Performance Indicators 2003/04; Comparing the performance of Scottish councils, January 2005, Audit Scotland.
3. North Ayrshire Council – The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning, February 2005, Audit Scotland.
4. The Highland Council 2004 Performance Survey, Snedden Economics Ltd.
5. Chartered Institute of Housing, Housing Management Standards Manual, 2003.
6. Evaluation of Gold Service in Ardenglen, Gen? Oaks and Wellhouse Housing Associations, ODS Ltd, March 2005
7. Highland Council Sheltered Housing Review, Housing & Social Work Committee, 17 March 2004
8. Highland Council Sheltered Housing Review – Progress Update, Housing & Social Work Committee, 19 January 2005

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Managing empty properties or 'voids' can perhaps appear to be principally a process management / performance management issue. An effective void management policy, properly managed & adequately resourced, with good information systems, should do much to ensure empty properties are turned around quickly within target times, thereby keeping rent loss to a minimum. Certainly due attention is given to these factors in this review.
- 1.2 However these factors alone are only part of the story. Understanding why properties become void in the first place, and why properties can be difficult to let is also necessary to help complete the picture. The void review group has become increasingly of the view that managing empty homes is a very complicated business, and is inextricably linked as much to Estate Management and Housing Management issues, as it is to effective repairs and allocations processes.
- 1.3 A housing estate with a poor reputation can have a 'double whammy' impact on void performance. It can both discourage existing tenants to remain and thereby increase the number of voids and abandonment's, but it can also discourage people wanting to live there thereby contributing to low demand. All of this affects void 'performance', and therefore these factors have also been considered as part of this review.

## 2. Current Void Management Arrangements

### 2.1 Void Management Policy & Procedures

2.1.1 The Council's Void Management Policy and Procedures are readily available to all staff through Public Folders. A number of aims and objectives are expressed in the policy including:-

- Ensuring Rent Loss is minimised (Paragraph 1)
- Making most effective use of the housing stock in order to meet housing need (Paragraph 1)
- Meeting the overall goal of delivering the best possible service to the Highland Council tenants (Paragraph 2)
- Keeping tenants and prospective tenants informed during the void management process (Paragraph 3)

2.1.2 The Policy notes that a variety of Council staff are involved in the void management process and a range of different skills are demanded. It acknowledges that the management of voids is a complex process which links together a number of related actions. These include:

- Tenancy termination
- Property Inspections
- Raising Works Orders
- Identifying re-chargeable repairs
- Offering tenancies & arranging viewing
- Creating tenancies, signing lease etc.

2.1.3 The policy also gives guidance on minimum standards. The Council's minimum standards are as follows:

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The property will be wind and watertight</li><li>▪ The property will be in a clean condition</li><li>▪ The property will be secure</li><li>▪ Access to the property will be safe</li><li>▪ The garden will be cleared of rubbish and grass cut where it would be difficult to cut with domestic equipment</li><li>▪ Doors and windows will be checked and in working order</li><li>▪ Plumbing services will be checked and in working order</li><li>▪ Chimneys will be swept</li><li>▪ Internal glazing will be intact and comply with safety standards</li><li>▪ Floors will be stable and free from collapse or rot</li><li>▪ There will be no polystyrene tiles in the property</li><li>▪ There will be a functioning bath or shower, toilet and wash hand basin</li><li>▪ Kitchen units will be overhauled and repaired with a minimum standard being the provision of a sink, a double base unit and double wall unit where space allows</li><li>▪ Smoke alarms will be in working order</li><li>▪ Banisters and balustrades will be safe</li><li>▪ Plaster on ceilings and walls will be checked and repaired</li><li>▪ Installations by former tenants will be left if they are safe and the new tenant is prepared to accept responsibility for future maintenance.</li></ul> |
|---|

- 2.1.4 The Policy advises which repairs can be carried out after occupation as distinct from “essential” repairs which must be carried out before occupation. Essential repairs include:
- Repairs essential to make the property habitable for
  - health, safety and security;
  - Repairs considered essential to achieve a quick letting;
  - Repairs that are impractical to do in an occupied property; removal of substandard tenant alterations
- 2.1.5 The policy also gives target times for some of the various processes involved e.g.:
- A pre-termination inspection will be carried out wherever possible within two weeks of the tenant’s notice being received
  - A post termination inspection will be carried out wherever possible within two days of keys being received
  - Repairs will be ordered within two working days of the post termination inspection
- 2.1.6 In general the Policy is comprehensive, gives clear advice to staff involved in the void management process and is an effective tool for managing performance.
- 2.1.7 In Audit Scotland’s report\* re North Ayrshire Council, one of the ‘Performance highs’ listed was:

“New void policy & procedures were introduced in January 2003 and were developed jointly with building services with the aim of improving our re-let performance on void properties. At the core of these procedures were new challenging targets for Building Services to repair a void property and a new targeted approach to lettings. We now make maximum use of the notice period and ensure that pre-allocation is the norm. This has been a success. In 2001/02 we let less than 5% of houses in less than two weeks. In 2002/03 the figure was 23% and by the end of March 2004 56.3% of all void properties had been let in less than two weeks. We are now one of the top performing local authorities in Scotland”.

\*North Ayrshire Council – The Audit of Best Value and Community Planning, Audit Scotland, February 2005.

- 2.1.8 Highland Council’s policy has therefore been examined **by tenants** on the void review group, and compared with those of other landlords to assist in identifying possible improvements. The outcome of this is contained in section 5 of this report.

### 3. How are we currently doing?

3.1 There are a number of sources available to the Council to enable it to understand how well it is performing in the management of empty properties. These include user/residents surveys, management information, comparison with other providers, and comparison on whether or not our service meets national required standards.

#### 3.2 Housing Business Plan 2004 – 2008

3.2.1 The Highland Council produced a **Housing Business Plan for 2003 – 2008** which was approved, following consultation, in March 2003. The plan sets out service standards and targets to enable performance to be measured. In terms of re-letting empty homes, the service standard states:

“By making sure that empty houses are re-let as quickly as possible, we are meeting the housing needs of someone on the waiting list as quickly as possible and we are also maximising the rental income we can collect to pay for our services. Our objective is to ensure that vacant properties are prepared for re-let and that new tenancies are created as quickly as possible to minimise rent loss.”

#### 3.3 Targets/ Performance Indicators

3.3.1 The following service standards have been set for empty homes:

“We will;

Carry out/complete all repairs required to void houses within agreed timescales, according to the amount of work required:

- Minor repairs – 2 days
- Medium repairs – 2 weeks
- Major repairs – 4 weeks

Allow prospective tenants to view properties

Re-let 20% of empty homes within 2 weeks and 50% within 2-4 weeks by 2007/8”.

#### 3.4 National Performance Indicators

3.4.1 The Housing Service also has a number of statutory performance indicators which are used to demonstrate whether or not we are meeting national service standards.

#### 3.5 Current Performance

3.5.1 In respect of the Statutory Performance Indicators, **table 1** below demonstrates that the Council’s performance is improving both in terms of keeping rent loss to a minimum and the time taken to re-let empty homes. However the Council has not yet achieved the targets set within the Housing Business Plan.

3.5.2 Tables **2 & 3** are those produced for the Council’s quarterly performance reports and again show an improvement, particularly in rent loss.

Table 1

HOUSING STATUTORY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	99/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
<b>Managing Tenancy Changes</b>					
<b>Total rent loss due to voids (%)</b>	1.51	1.84	2.31	2.26	2.10
<b>Time taken to relet houses</b>					
<u>Total number of houses relet</u>	1543	1646	1637	1514	1349
Re-let in less than 2 weeks	272	210	209	182	251
Re-let in 2-4 weeks	389	434	438	403	278
Re-let in more than 4 weeks	882	1002	990	929	820
<u>Total number of houses relet</u>					
Re-let in less than 2 weeks	17.6%	12.8%	12.8%	12.0%	18.6%
Re-let in 2-4 weeks	25.2%	26.4%	26.8%	26.6%	20.6%
Re-let in more than 4 weeks	57.2%	60.8%	60.5%	61.4%	60.8%
<b>Average time to re-let houses (new indicator 2000/2001)</b>	n/a	58.3 days	64.2 days	74.1 days	65.0 days

Table 2

**SUMMARY  
TIME TAKEN TO RE-LET PROPERTIES  
PERIOD: 1st January 2002 to 30th September 2005**

	0-2 Weeks Void		2-4 Weeks Void		4 or More Weeks Void		Total No. Of Properties Re-Let
	No. of Properties	% of Properties Re-let in less than 2 wks	No. of Properties	% of Properties Re-let in 2-4 wks	No. of Properties	% of Properties Re-let in more than 4 wks	
<b>Badenoch &amp; Strathspey</b>	9	6.5%	47	33.3%	82	59.4%	138
<b>Caithness</b>	35	4.3%	269	34.3%	508	62.6%	812
<b>Inverness</b>	14	1.1%	29	2.4%	1187	96.5%	1230
<b>Nairn</b>	32	20.5%	46	28.0%	78	50.0%	156
<b>Lochaber</b>	26	8.1%	105	30.7%	191	59.3%	322
<b>Ross &amp; Cromarty</b>	141	14.2%	334	34.6%	516	52.0%	991
<b>Skye &amp; Lochalsh</b>	45	30.2%	70	47.5%	34	22.8%	149
<b>Sutherland</b>	126	37.3%	115	31.4%	97	28.7%	338
<b>Summary</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>11.2%</b>	<b>1015</b>	<b>24.5%</b>	<b>2693</b>	<b>65.1%</b>	<b>4136</b>

**Table 3**

**Highland Wide**

		Average Re-Let Time (Wks)	Current Voids	Void Loss as a % Of Gross Debt
01/02	<b>Apr</b>	10.3	335	2.23
	<b>May</b>	9.1	360	2.26
	<b>Jun</b>	7.2	373	2.19
	<b>Jul</b>	8.9	376	1.98
	<b>Aug</b>	9.0	391	2.03
	<b>Sep</b>	8.4	419	2.08
	<b>Oct</b>	9.3	419	2.14
	<b>Nov</b>	8.5	414	2.18
	<b>Dec</b>	9.6	397	2.22
	<b>Jan</b>	11.6	384	2.24
	<b>Feb</b>	11.5	378	2.26
	<b>Mar</b>	8.9	342	2.31
02/03	<b>Apr</b>	11.9	360	2.32
	<b>May</b>	11.6	363	2.34
	<b>Jun</b>	10.3	357	2.36
	<b>Jul</b>	9.3	341	2.36
	<b>Aug</b>	8.9	337	2.37
	<b>Sep</b>	11.3	347	2.37
	<b>Oct</b>	12.7	341	2.36
	<b>Nov</b>	9.1	321	2.35
	<b>Dec</b>	9.7	290	2.34
	<b>Jan</b>	12.7	282	2.32
	<b>Feb</b>	13.9	281	2.28
	<b>Mar</b>	8.2	290	2.26
03/04	<b>Apr</b>	13.0	250	2.25
	<b>May</b>	8.9	256	2.22
	<b>Jun</b>	9.2	279	2.20
	<b>Jul</b>	11.1	283	2.18
	<b>Aug</b>	12.3	272	2.16
	<b>Sep</b>	7.6	272	2.14
	<b>Oct</b>	9.4	223	2.11
	<b>Nov</b>	8.4	243	2.09
	<b>Dec</b>	10.4	237	2.08
	<b>Jan</b>	11.1	231	2.10
	<b>Feb</b>	11.6	212	2.10
	<b>Mar</b>	9.9	212	2.08
04/05	<b>Apr</b>	8.7	217	2.07
	<b>May</b>	9.1	213	2.07
	<b>Jun</b>	8.7	241	2.04
	<b>Jul</b>	7.8	277	1.98
	<b>Aug</b>	9.7	254	1.95
	<b>Sep</b>	11.0	243	1.88
	<b>Oct</b>	10.9	236	1.87
	<b>Nov</b>	8.4	268	1.84
	<b>Dec</b>	9.0	247	1.81
	<b>Jan</b>	11.3	229	1.77
	<b>Feb</b>	12.5	250	1.75

	<b>Mar</b>	7.7	255	1.76
05/06	<b>Apr</b>	10.7	259	1.77
	<b>May</b>	9.0	268	1.77
	<b>Jun</b>	9.5	295	1.79
	<b>Jul</b>	9.3	275	1.80
	<b>Aug</b>	9.0	302	1.83
	<b>Sep</b>	10.4	288	1.89

### 3.6 Comparison with other Councils

3.6.1 A recent Audit Scotland publication\* has provided useful information to enable the performance of Highland Council to be compared with all the other Scottish councils across a range of service areas.

3.6.2 Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000 under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. Together they ensure that the Scottish Executive and public sector bodies in Scotland are held to account for the proper, efficient and effective use of funds.

3.6.3 The publication contained information on seven indicators relating to councils' management of housing and social work. The two indicators of relevance to this review are:

- The total annual rent loss due to unoccupied houses as a percentage of the total rent due for the year, and
- The time taken to re-let council houses.

3.6.4 Table 4 shows the amount and percentage of rent loss due to unoccupied dwellings. As can be seen Highland Council's performance is ranked at joint 13<sup>th</sup> out of the 32 Councils.

3.6.5 Table 5 shows the time taken to re-let council houses 2003/04. Highland Council's performance is ranked as follows:

- Re-let in less than 2 weeks (%) – 13 out of 32.
- Re-let in 2-4 weeks (%) – joint 13<sup>th</sup>.
- Re-let in more than 4 weeks (%) – 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Table 4**

	Amount of rent lost (£)	Percentage rent lost	Percentage rent lost	Percentage rent lost
	2003/04	2003/04	2002/03	2001/02
Aberdeen City	2,905,326	5.5	5.2	5.0
Angus	342,381	2.1	1.8	2.6
Argyll & Bute	167,695	1.2	1.2	1.1
Clackmannanshire	486,239	4.1	3.1	2.0
Dundee City	1,241,059	3.2	3.6	3.2
East Ayrshire	958,539	3.1	3.9	3.7

East Dunbartonshire	133,732	1.1	1.0	0.6
East Lothian	233,928	1.4	0.9	1.2
East Renfrewshire	156,351	2.1	2.5	2.4
Edinburgh, City of	2,276,231	3.5	3.6	4.1
Eilean Siar	87,235	2.0	2.6	2.5
Falkirk	1,215,546	3.0	2.8	2.4
Fife	1,987,964	2.7	2.8	2.7
Highland	786,767	2.1	2.3	2.3
Inverclyde	1,794,770	7.1	9.6	4.1
Midlothian	66,166	0.6	0.7	0.7
Moray	72,717	0.6	0.6	0.5
North Ayrshire	380,329	1.3	1.7	2.1
North Lanarkshire	1,533,889	1.7	1.8	1.7
Orkney Islands *	22,244	1.4	2.0	1.3
Renfrewshire	855,398	2.3	2.7	3.7
Shetland Islands	312,885	6.0	6.7	6.4
South Ayrshire	543,190	2.7	2.8	2.7
South Lanarkshire	898,784	1.3	1.6	1.3
Stirling	278,630	2.0	1.6	1.5
West Dunbartonshire	1,910,551	7.2	6.6	5.5
West Lothian	136,669	0.4	0.4	0.5
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>21,785,215</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.6</b>
UNRELIABLE DATA				
Aberdeenshire	*558,178	1.9	1.9	1.5
Perth & Kinross	695,261	4.2	3.7	2.9

*The amount and percentage of rent loss due to unoccupied*

*Table 5*

	Total number of houses re-let	Re-let in less than 2 weeks (%)	Re-let in 2-4 weeks (%)	Re-let in more than 4 weeks (%)
Aberdeen City	2,460	2.8	1.2	96.0
Angus	966	40.0	20.1	40.0
Argyll & Bute	610	16.9	35.9	47.2
Clackmannanshire	494	8.1	20.2	71.7
East Ayrshire	1,751	8.8	41.6	49.6

East Dunbartonshire	356	7.6	27.5	64.9
East Lothian	440	3.2	25.0	71.8
East Renfrewshire	295	21.7	25.4	52.9
Eilean Siar	193	7.3	21.8	71.0
Falkirk	1,780	11.2	32.3	56.5
Fife	3,815	13.6	20.1	66.3
Highland	1,310	9.5	22.7	67.8
Inverclyde	1,063	7.4	5.5	87.1
Midlothian	311	1.3	11.9	86.8
Moray	451	33.9	32.6	33.5
North Ayrshire	1,380	56.3	29.9	13.8
North Lanarkshire	4,054	11.1	40.3	48.6
Orkney Islands	75	9.3	22.7	68.0
Renfrewshire	1,659	13.1	22.4	64.5
Shetland Islands	184	5.4	8.7	85.9
South Ayrshire	937	21.2	20.9	57.8
South Lanarkshire	2,712	5.7	30.4	63.9
Stirling	596	13.3	41.6	45.1
West Dunbartonshire	1,144	1.8	6.3	91.9
West Lothian	1,627	72.2	22.1	5.7
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>30,663</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>24.9</b>	<b>58.7</b>
UNRELIABLE DATA				
Aberdeenshire	1,533	14.2	33.6	52.2
Dundee City	2,701	29.1	21.1	49.8
FAILED TO REPORT				
Edinburgh, City of				
Perth & Kinross				

### *The time taken to re-let council houses 2003/04*

\*Housing & Social Work Performance Indicators 2003/04, Audit Scotland, January 2005.

### **3.7 Highland Council Performance Survey**

3.7.1 The 2004 Highland Council Performance Survey was conducted independently by Snedden Economics Ltd during June and July 2004. This report addresses key issues of relevance to The Highland Council's overall performance and compares the 2004 results with those from previous years where possible.

3.7.2 The 2004 survey questionnaire was issued by post to 5,000 named householders on the Register of Electors in proportion to the general population living in each of the eight

Highland Council areas. A further 2,000 households were selected from the Council Register of Housing Tenants. Pre-paid return envelopes were provided.

3.7.3 Of the overall sample of 7,000, approximately 300 were returned to sender, the addressee having moved or being unknown at that address. 1,004 completed questionnaires were received and analysed – an effective response rate of 15%. The response rate in 2003 was 20%.

3.7.4 236 respondents in the 2004 survey reported having had contact with the Council's Housing Service during the preceding 12 months. There were no specific questions posed in relation to empty homes management, but nevertheless it is useful to note related findings as follows:

1. Views on the Council's Housing Service :

	<i>Good (%)</i>	<i>Poor (%)</i>
Helpfulness of staff	68	10
How well the staff understood what was wanted	61	32
Ease of making the contact	57	10
Overall satisfaction with the service given	47	32

2 Overall satisfaction with Council Housing Services:

	<i>2004 (%)</i>	<i>2002 (%)</i>
Very satisfied	27	29
Fairly satisfied	51	52
Fairly dissatisfied	12	13
Very dissatisfied	10	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

3 Attitudes to statements regarding Housing Services:

	<i>2004 (%)</i>	<i>2002 (%)</i>
It is easy to contact	68	45
It is an efficient landlord	31	43
It keeps you informed	28	n/a
It cares about Council tenants	24	34
It maintains its homes in good condition	16	26
It is getting better	9	N/A
It listens to Council tenants	7	23
It has enough money to do a good job	-40	-46

4 Repairs to Council houses:

	<i>Agree (%)</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>	<i>Don't know (%)</i>
Workmen come when they say they will	60	26	15
Repairs are done quickly	58	31	12
Repairs are done in a single visit	59	26	15
It is easy to report a repair	86	6	8

Repairs only have to be reported once before they are done	48	41	11
You get good information about when the repair will be done	62	27	12
The Quality of repairs is good	64	17	18
Workmen clean up any mess they make	74	14	12

5 Satisfaction with Information on Housing and Tenancy Matters:

	<b>2004 (%)</b>	<b>2002 (%)</b>
Very Satisfied	29	35
Fairly satisfied	54	54
Fairly dissatisfied	13	8
Very dissatisfied	3	4

6 Attitudes towards the Local Neighbourhood / Community as a Place to Live:

	<b>2004 (%)</b>	<b>2002(%)</b>
A good place to live	49	46
A fairly good place to live	37	44
Not a very good place to live	11	7
A bad place to live	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

7 Satisfaction with a Council Home:

	<b>2004 (%)</b>	<b>2002 (%)</b>
Very satisfied	39	39
Fairly satisfied	47	49
Fairly dissatisfied	9	9
Very dissatisfied	5	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

### 3.8 Tenants Perspectives

3.8.1 The following concerns & comments were raised about void management and performance by tenants of the void review group:

#### 3.8.2 Tenants Notice Period

3.8.2.1 The Highland Council should promote more that tenants are able to vacate earlier and not be responsible for the rent.

3.8.2.2 Is there a need for a leaflet to be produced advising tenants of Notice period issues? Can we not accept a termination notice until the property is in a good state of repair? Consideration should be given to not terminating the tenancy on the date requested if the property is not left in a good condition. Tenancies should only be terminated when the property has been cleared of all effects etc. this would then ensure the tenant's remain responsible for the rent, rather than the Council. This could reduce the Council's rent loss due to voids performance which is a key statutory performance indicator (KPI).

3.8.2.3 Why do people give Notice to vacate? If the Council knew that, perhaps it would help to improve performance? Do people want to move because some council estates are run down? E.g. the Milnafua Estate in Alness. Void performance there has improved because anti-social behaviour issues have been tackled. Tenants have helped the Council achieve this.

### **3.8.3 Tenants Information**

3.8.3.1 The Council could do much better at communicating policies / procedures to tenants. The Highland Council does not produce a Tenants Handbook. The Chartered Institute of Housing\* recommends various service standards for landlords. One of their recommendations is:

“Landlords should provide customers with information about estate management services in the form of handbooks for tenants, leaseholders and shared owners respectively, which are regularly reviewed and up-dated in consultation with relevant customer groups. Landlords should provide tenants with a tenant’s handbook, which provides information about the landlord’s services and advice on matters of interest to tenants such as:

- A simple explanation of the terms of the tenancy
- Respective responsibilities of landlord and tenant, licensee and leaseholder”

\* Chartered Institute of Housing, Housing Management Service Standards, volume 2.

### **3.8.4 Pre-termination Inspections**

3.8.4.1 The Council needs to be more flexible on the appointments it offers outgoing tenants for pre-termination inspections to be successful. Are landlord non essential repairs identified /ordered at pre-termination inspections (they should be) or is it just to confirm the outgoing tenant’s responsibilities?

### **3.8.5 Estate Management / Gardens**

3.8.5.1 Why doesn’t the Council do an annual inspection of premises to ensure all tenancies are being maintained, rather than leave it to when a tenancy ends?

3.8.5.2 Untidy / unkempt gardens can give estates a neglected appearance which may induce a high turnover or even abandonment’s. How does the Council tackle untidy gardens? Two options are generally available. The Council could do the work themselves and re-charge the tenant, or the Council could take legal proceedings to enforce the conditions of tenancy, which some may view as an inappropriate response. The Council should tend gardens of void properties.

3.8.5.3 This view is echoed by Audit Scotland\*. “In some areas the physical environment of the property needs to be up-graded and protected to make it more acceptable to prospective tenants. Tidying gardens, fixing fencing or railings can make a big difference to the physical appearance of an estate. Some RSLs and councils have also added a warden service to maintain any improvements and to help tenants feel safe”.

\*Audit Scotland, Managing Housing Voids, July 2004

3.8.5.4 Tenants would like to see the Council offer a gardening service for tenants who would be charged for this service.

3.8.5.5 Other initiatives such as the garden tool club/estate handy-person initiative at Craigton Avenue, South Kessock and Meiklefield road, Dingwall, and Munro Crescent, Milton may help.

### **3.8.6 Abandonment**

3.8.6.1 Abandonment issues are also linked to Estate Management. The tenants' perspective was that if estates are properly managed, it can reduce the incidence of Abandonment's.

3.8.6.2 Debt may one of the reasons why some people abandon tenancies. Another thought was that some people may abandon tenancies simply because they don't know how to terminate their tenancy.

3.8.6.3 The Council should ask for National Insurance Numbers. This will enable councils to trace former tenants who abandon their tenancies.

### **3.8.7 Furniture**

3.8.7.1 Greater consistency/guidance is needed on what can/can't be left in the property. What is the policy on carpets? Can decent furniture be left? If tenants have put in their own kitchen units, can these be removed by the tenant at the end of the tenancy? The Council's policy was to dispose of items left. There ought to be a clause in the lease agreement which stated that 'Furniture left will be given to charity' or words to that effect.

### **3.8.9 Gas / Electricity Suppliers**

3.8.9.1 The Council should ensure tenants who leave tenancies confirm who is currently supplying gas/ electricity to that address. It was noted that it could sometimes be very difficult for new tenants to find this out.

### **3.8.10 Post Termination Inspections**

3.8.10.1 Should the Council do an inspection between pre and post termination inspections? Why doesn't the Council do an annual inspection of premises to ensure all tenancies are being maintained, rather than leave it to when a tenancy ends? Is the Council 'strong' enough on ensuring tenants do carry out the repairs identified at the pre-termination inspection?

### **3.8.11 Allocations**

3.8.11.1 If people are allocated homes in the areas they want to live, this would be a good start in promoting community cohesion. But people are frequently allocated their second or even third choice because of a lack of availability in 'first choice' areas.

3.8.11.2 It is the perception amongst tenants that some recent tenancies have contributed to increasing incidents of anti-social behaviour, thereby causing an estate to become unpopular, therefore a council's allocations policy can impact on void management too. Tenants' views on the Council's Allocations Policy are:

- Generally the Points award given for housing need factors were felt to be reasonable.
- It was felt that the Council was perhaps not strong enough on tackling under-occupation of properties and perhaps more could be done to redress this, including a higher point's award for those who do apply for a transfer.

- Suspension from the Housing Lists should be extended from 3 months to 12 months for anti-social behaviour evictions. In addition, people shouldn't be re-housed in the same area.
- Successions. Consideration should be given to allowing children of tenants to succeed to tenancies, if they don't fulfil the requirement of 6 months residency.
- 70/30 split re transfer/waiting list applications should be more flexible depending on the needs of an area.

### 3.8.12 Refusal rates

3.8.12.1 Highland Council only gives 2 working days to prospective tenants to accept or reject offers of accommodation. Tenants feel this is not enough. If effective use is made of pre-allocations, why not allow 5 or even 10 working days?

3.8.12.2 If applicants refuse 3 offers then they are 'suspended' from the list – should they also go to the bottom of the list after the expiry of the suspension, rather than go back to the top?

### 3.8.13 Policy Considerations

3.8.13.1 Tenants applying for transfers should be in credit for 'x' months **before** they get a transfer, rather than just being required to clear the arrears before they get a move. (*Section 9.3 of the Void Management Policy*). Should tenants not also be required to demonstrate adherence to other tenancy conditions e.g. no anti-social behaviour complaints, before being able to apply for a move? Perth Council ask for 3 previous addresses to check up on previous behaviour prior to allocating properties to prospective tenants. Tenants strongly believe that references should be obtained regardless of tenure.

3.8.13.2 The current void management policy does not provide for the Council being able to ask tenants to allow their properties to be viewed by prospective tenants during the notice period. (*Section 9.6 of the policy provides for accompanied viewings*). Do these take place whilst the property is still occupied? Tenants believe this to be a good idea and could speed up allocation process.

3.8.13.3 It was noted that when the Council sends out an offer of tenancy, no information is given at that stage re tenancy obligations – this was only given after the offer has been accepted.

## 4. Low Demand issues

- 4.1 There is some evidence that there is a lack of demand in some Areas, such as Caithness and Sutherland, which obviously leads to properties being unoccupied for longer periods. Reported performance shows that for both councils and RSLs low demand housing does skew overall performance in letting their stock. Both councils and RSLs take twice as long to let low demand properties as they take to let other properties\*.

\*Managing Housing Voids – the impact of low demand properties”, July 2004, a joint report undertaken by Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland.

- 4.2 Low demand properties are those which are frequently rejected or accepted only very reluctantly even by applicants in urgent housing need. They can be low demand for a number of reasons including their location, their state of repair or their size.
- 4.3 A low demand property is a property where one or more of the following symptoms are exhibited:
- A small or non-existent waiting list for the property
  - Tenancy offers on a property frequently refused for reasons other than personal reasons
  - Higher than normal rates of tenancy turnover for a property in an area.

### 4.4 Survey of Area Housing Managers

- 4.4.1 Area Housing Managers were asked to identify those properties for which there is Low Demand in their Areas and more importantly the reasons why, and what could possibly be done to make them more popular. They were also asked to indicate what the property type was (i.e. sheltered, bed-sit, flat or house) and indicate why they are in low demand as appropriate e.g.

1. poor location i.e. lack of facilities, no transport
2. Poor reputation i.e. high levels of anti-social behaviour
3. Outdated design and facilities
4. over-provision of accommodation locally
5. mis-match of property type to housing need
6. Other reason (please specify)

- 4.4.2 Area Housing Managers were also asked what, in their opinion, could be done to improve the desirability of the property e.g. improvements/repairs, general environmental improvements to area, demolition or conversion, or anything else.

- 4.4.3 The results of the survey were as follows:

- 4.4.3.1 The following areas were reported as having no low demand properties:

- Lochaber
- Skye & Lochalsh
- Badenoch & Strathspey
- Nairn

- 4.4.3.2 The following areas were reported as having some low demand properties:

- Sutherland

- Ross & Cromarty
- Inverness
- Caithness

4.4.3.3 Further information was provided regarding these areas as follows:

Address / location	Property type	Reason for Low demand	Possible improvement measures
<b>Caithness</b>			
Sea View, Lybster	Flats	Old Building and bedsits	Would require extensive renovation or demolition.
Shelligoe Road, Lybster	2/3 bed houses and 1 bed flats	Perceived as undesirable area	
Kennedy Terrace, Cairndhuna Terrace, Wick	2 bed 4in block flats	Perceived as undesirable area	Modernisation and environmental improvements have been carried out.
North Murchison St, Wick	1/2 bed 4 in block flats	As above	Currently looking to carry out alterations to the building
Wellington Street, Wick	2/3 bed maisonettes	People looking for own front and back door	Security and environmental improvements have been carried out.
67-72 Nicolson St, Wick	Flats	People don't want to live here because don't like other tenants	The properties in Wick are situated in part of the Pulteneytown area of Wick which has a reputation as being undesirable mainly because of some of the other tenants who live there. There is a fairly high incidence of drug abuse in the area. People also prefer traditional houses rather than flats.
Howe Cottages, Lyth	2 bed bungalows	Isolated area, not on bus route	
<b>Sutherland</b>			
Rosehall & Oykel Bridge	Mainstream 2 & 3 bedrooms	Very rural location, some distance from facilities.	
Caladh Sona Melness	Sheltered Housing	Mismatch of property type. Limited need for sheltered housing here.	(have let to incoming SWr on a temporary lease)
Flats at Victoria Crescent, Brora	4 in a block, 1 bedroom flats	Poor reputation. Despite a waiting list for 1 bedroom, they are only being accepted as no	Have modernised flats, painted & floored communal areas.  Providing some tenants with support would help reputation.

		better alternative available. Tends to have troublesome tenants.	
Flats at Fraser Street, Golspie	4 in a block, 1 bedroom flats	As above, but on a lesser scale.	Providing some tenants with support would help reputation
Muirfield, Brora	2 & 3 bedrooms	Lower demand than other parts of Brora. Reason not clear as little or no problems there and houses modernised.	Improve profile of area – formation of residents group perhaps.
<b>Ross &amp; Cromarty</b>			
Balintore	General	Isolated community with poor services, transport links etc Poor reputation due to perceived ASB and drug-related problems Limited range of house types High turnover of properties Poor community spirit	Achieve/be-seen-to-achieve success in managing asb etc. Conversion/new-build to increase choice of house types. Improve community spirit?
Townlands Park, Cromarty	Sheltered	Isolated community with poor services, transport links etc	Change of use for some/all units from sheltered to mainstream?
Allt-n-Chuirm (not Millbrae) Lochcarron	Sheltered	Access up/down steep hill difficult for people with mobility problems and no vehicular access to doors of properties	Previous Area Housing Manager investigated feasibility of technical solutions to this but without success.
Muir of Ord	Sheltered	Properties in need of upgrading/improvement (internal and external)	Improve/upgrade properties
Aultbea	General	Relatively large supply of Council and RSL housing in community Isolated community with poor services, transport links etc	Apply higher void repair/decor allowance standard?

<b>Inverness</b>			
Haugh Court (first floor), Inverness	Sheltered	Properties are on first floor; therefore tenants have to negotiate a flight of stairs.	Could redesignate as mainstream but ground floor properties are suitable for sheltered and not sure how manageable the scheme would be with mainstream tenants above sheltered tenants.

## 4.5 Main Findings of Low Demand Survey

**4.5.1 Location** is mentioned as a main factor contributing to a property becoming low demand e.g. Balintore & Altbea in Ross & Cromarty, and Rosehall & Oykel Bridge in Sutherland.

**4.5.2 Environmental** - the reputation of a property or estate can have a major impact on the demand for a property or properties. Reputation is one of the strongest factors in influencing the demand for a property and also one of the hardest to overcome e.g. flats at Victoria Crescent, Brora; Balintore in Ross-shire and Pulteneytown in Wick. An area of housing or even an individual property can be perceived as an undesirable place to stay due to factors such as high crime rates or high levels of anti-social behaviour.

**4.5.3 Sheltered accommodation** has been frequently mentioned as being in low demand, particularly when in rural settings, often some distance from amenities and services. Low demand sheltered accommodation has been an issue for a number of years. Despite a growing older population and a national policy to enable older people to live as independently as possible, low demand sheltered accommodation appears to be a problem in Highland. There are a number of factors which can cause sheltered accommodation to be low demand:

- Outdated design and facilities
- Poor location
- Over-provision of sheltered accommodation locally

**4.5.4** In line with accepted good practice in the management of low demand properties, Highland Council undertook a review of its sheltered housing provision in 2004\*. Part of the findings of this review in relation to vacancies showed that the Council experiences a slightly higher turnover rate within sheltered housing than for Council housing as a whole 912% 9.5%? compared to 9% for 2002/03). In terms of demand for sheltered housing, waiting lists vary across Areas. The Council's waiting list information showed an average of 4 applicants for each vacancy, however as many applications are made as a 'safety net' in case they are needed in future; it can be difficult to accurately gauge demand.

\* Highland Council Sheltered Housing Review, Housing & Social Work Committee, 17 March 2004

**4.5.5** The Sheltered Housing Review included consultation with Housing staff (mainly those who allocate sheltered housing) which highlighted the following issues:

1. Difficulties can be experienced allocating sheltered housing. This was felt to be due to:
  - Small space standards, and one bedroom housing becoming unpopular
  - The design and location of some sheltered housing schemes
  - Applications being made for sheltered housing as a safety net
  - Difficulties providing nominations to Housing Associations for sheltered housing vacancies, particularly first floor flats.

- 2 Recognition of the conflict that can arise when allocating sheltered housing to applicants who are not elderly – linked to the difficulties in letting sheltered housing in some areas.
- 3 Difficulties can sometimes be experienced when trying to provide equipment or adaptations for sheltered housing tenants, due to small space standards.

4.5.6 Information was also gathered on the views of older people themselves, by reviewing local and national research and consultation. The main themes emerging were:

- Accommodation must become more flexible, and adapt to increasing needs, so that people don't have to move when their needs change
- Some sheltered accommodation is now considered inadequate, especially that with only one bedroom.
- When older people think about moving, many want to move within a very small geographical area. This may be because it is the locality they are familiar with, or it has the support, transport and care services older people need close by.
- Older people in the future are likely to have higher expectations over service standards and will look for more choice of service options, particularly if there is a cost attached to these.

4.5.7 The review concluded that the best approach for taking forward the development of older people's services should include:

- Extending / converting existing sheltered housing schemes to make it more flexible
- Assess potential benefits of new technology such as community alarms
- Consider development of new purpose built housing.

## 5. How can we get better?

### 5.1 Identification of Good Practice

#### 5.1.1 Comparison of HC Void Management policy with that of Moray Council and Cairn HA

5.1.2 Tenants identified the following positive elements in Moray Council's procedures, which were not in the Highland's procedures:

- Section 4.2 - Notice of termination must be in writing. Moray Council provides a pro-forma requesting details of reason for termination and arrangements for pre-inspection visit.
- Section 4.3 - refers to Moray seeking cooperation of the tenant to allow the council reasonable access to show prospective tenants around the property.
- Section 4.4 – refers to HB entitlement ceasing on Monday following death of tenant, and keys being returned in 1 week (HC says rent liability will cease - should this be the case if keys aren't returned?)
- Section 5.2 - A pre-termination inspection will be carried out within 5 working days (no target given in HC procedures)
- Section 5.4 – A post-termination inspection will be carried out in 2 working days (HC gives up to 5 working days in rural areas)

5.1.3 Tenants identified the following positive elements in Cairn Housing Association's procedures:

- Stage 1 – Notification of void can be by letter, or phone call (HC only accept letter).
- Stage 2 – Short listing commences within 3 working days of start of notice (no target given in HC procedures)\*
- Stage 2 & 3 – Cairn HA undertake home visit of prospective applicant within 6 working days of start of notice period
- Stage 5 – Accompanied viewing takes place within 12 working days of start of Notice period. Considered to be good idea – are staff able to arrange these outside normal working hours or at week-ends if people cannot get time off work?)
- Stage 6 – New tenant pack provided to new tenants.
- Stage 7 – “Sign up target within 25 working days of notice start date”. If this is achieved it would mean the void period is kept to 1 week. Is this achievable?
- Stage 8 – “Settling in visit” required within 6 weeks of tenancy start date to check repairs undertaken and HB issues. Felt to be a very good idea.

### 5.2 Initiatives to reduce low demand

5.2.1 Many councils and RSLs use initiatives to let low demand properties to make the property more attractive to potential tenants. These include offering incentives such as a rent-free period if the tenancy is accepted; offering a decoration, furniture or white goods allowance, or offering a garden tidy.

5.2.2 Another popular method for encouraging the take up of tenancies on low demand properties is marketing them. Advertising can heighten awareness of renting as an option and bring available properties to the attention of wider audiences, thereby increasing the numbers of

potential tenants.

- 5.2.3 There is some evidence to suggest in some areas the physical environment of the property needs to be up-graded and protected to make it more acceptable to prospective tenants. Tidying gardens, fixing fencing or railings can make a big difference to the physical appearance of an estate.

### **5.3 Community Warden Scheme**

- 5.3.1 Many tenants believe the Council should do more to enforce the conditions of the lease re gardens and general up-keep of properties internally – perhaps this could be a role for community wardens.

### **5.4 Reward Schemes**

- 5.4.1 Some councils have introduced ‘Reward Schemes’ for good tenants. Tenants could be offered a reward for keeping their gardens tidy or returning properties in a good condition on vacation. This had proved to be a good incentive in other areas.

- 5.4.2 An example of this is the ‘Gold Service’ scheme operated by Glen Oaks Housing Association. The Association launched the scheme in June 2002. The scheme is aimed at rewarding those tenants who keep to the terms of their tenancy agreement and tenants receive faster repairs and up to £52.00 per year pay back via bonus bonds. 715 tenants (53%) have signed up to Gold.

- 5.4.3 In order to become a gold member, tenants must meet the following criteria:
- Be a tenant for two months and have paid rent on time
  - If in rent arrears, tenants must have made an arrangement to pay the arrears and kept to the agreement for 3 consecutive months
  - Have no serious breaches of tenancy conditions.

- 5.4.4 The scheme, and similar ones introduced by Ardenglen and Wellhouse Housing Associations, has been evaluated by ODS\* Ltd who found that quantifying the effects difficult due to the short life of the scheme to date. Key findings were:

There was a small improvement in the level of rent arrears and rent loss through voids but the picture is not consistent across the three organisations

Glen Oaks has experienced a 2.7% reduction in arrears between 2001/2002 and 2003/2004. In the same period, arrears in Ardenglen reduced by 0.16% but arrears in Wellhouse increased by nearly 3%.

There was a reduction in loss of rental income through voids over the period in Ardenglen but no decrease in the other two HAS.

\*Evaluation of Gold Service in Ardenglen, Glen Oaks and Wellhouse Housing Associations, ODS Ltd, March 2005

- 5.4.5 The Merits of a Gold Service scheme, as currently operated by Glen Oaks Housing Association was debated by tenants on the Void Review Group. Tenants felt that the principle of a gold service scheme was Ok, but didn’t agree with the idea of a faster repairs service – all tenants should receive the same service.

- 5.4.6 Aberdeen Council has a similar scheme known as ‘Good Apple Homes’. Some staff there however say that there are perceived to be inequalities with the scheme; the disadvantaged just get more disadvantaged; seemed to be regarded as ‘chucking money at problems, rather than tackling them’.

- 5.4.7 It was also felt that residents themselves also had a responsibility to promote 'Community'. Communities look after each other - where there is good community spirit people are happy to live there and take a pride in their properties.
- 5.4.8 After consideration of all the issues, on balance tenants do not support the introduction of a Gold Service scheme, or similar, in Highland.

## 6. Conclusions

- 6.1 Generally Highland Council performance is above average, according to Performance Indicator targets and comparison with other Local Authority Areas.
- 6.2 Improvements can be made to Void Management Policy and Procedures. Comparison with the policies and procedures of Cairn Housing Association and Moray Council has identified some useful elements such as accompanied viewings taking place before property is vacated, new tenant packs being provided to new tenants; and settling in visits.
- 6.3 More target times can be introduced to enable better performance management in the following areas:
- *Short listing of prospective applicants*
  - *Accompanied viewings*
  - *Pre-termination inspections*
  - *Settling in visit*
- 6.4 More pro-active estate management considered to be key. Impact on resources probable, but could be viewed as a 'spend to save initiative'.
- *Perhaps increased requirement for community wardens*
  - *Very important that housing management officers, tenant participation officers and community wardens don't get drawn away from their core pro-active activities.*
  - *Production of Tenants handbook*
- 6.5 Encouragement of Tenant & Residents Groups**
- It is acknowledged that groups can have a positive effect on the amount of voids in an area. Although this is an indirect affect of their main aims, groups can influence:
- *Community spirit – so people feel they belong to an area and may not want to leave and even encourage applicants to move there*
  - *Positive perception – of an area, which may have a had bad press before*
  - *Housing intelligence – groups are quick to report things like “moonlight flits” to Housing*
- 6.6 The effect having a resident's group and community partnership has had in Milnafua. In 2002 there were over 20 voids on this estate of just over 200 houses. Now there are none. The affect that the Westford Action Group and their Westford's Wonderful Place project has had on Voids in Westford. In 2002 there was an average of 3 voids per month in Westford. This has reduced to 1 per month in 2005.
- 6.7 The Council should take steps to tackle Low Demand properties, and in particular progress the recommendations of the Sheltered Housing Review including:
- Extending / converting existing sheltered housing schemes to make it more flexible
  - Assess potential benefits of new technology such as community alarms
  - Consider development of new purpose built housing and 'core' and 'cluster' units.

## 7. Planning for Improvements

### 7.1 Increase provision of more Affordable Rented Housing

7.1.1 More affordable housing would enable housing needs to be more effectively addressed and reduce incidence of future estate management problems. The Council has recently joined the Community Ownership Programme which has attracted an extra £50 million investment for new homes from the Scottish Executive.

### 7.2 Highland Council Sheltered Housing Review

7.2.1 In January 2005, the Housing & Social Work Committee received a progress up-date report\* on the Sheltered Housing Review. The Committee were asked to support the development of options for sheltered housing including:

- A pilot project to develop core & cluster accommodation
- Joint work with Housing Associations to look at opportunities for merging services, sharing resources and new developments, and to include
- Feasibility work into a sheltered housing scheme in Nairn to assess possible conversion to 'very sheltered' standard.

\* Highland Council Sheltered Housing Review – Progress Update, Housing & Social Work Committee, 19 January 2005

### 7.3 Community Ownership

7.3.1 Community Ownership could generate funding for improvements generally to the estates management service, and funding to implement the recommendations for the re-modelling of sheltered housing. In developing the Business Plan for the new landlord, account should be taken of the recommendations arising out of the voids review.

#### *Improvement Plan*

<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority</b> High Medium Low	<b>Timescale</b>
The Council should ask people why they are leaving when they give notice to terminate their tenancies. This information could then be used to identify improvements.	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
Amend Housing Application form to obtain National Insurance number	<b>High</b>	<b>6 weeks</b>
Encourage Tenants groups to establish Community Garden Tool Clubs	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
Tenancy termination dates should be extended if properties are not returned in acceptable condition	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
Tenants should be asked to provide details of electricity / gas supplier for benefit of incoming tenant on tenancy termination forms.	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
Offer more flexible appointments for pre-termination inspections including outside normal working hours.	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
Repairs to be identified at Pre-termination inspections	<b>High</b>	<b>6 weeks</b>

Amend Lease to enable council to dispose of furniture where items are left in the property at the termination date.	<b>High</b>	<b>6 weeks</b>
Void Management Policy should be amended to seek outgoing tenants cooperation in allowing prospective tenants to view properties during the notice period	<b>High</b>	<b>6 weeks</b>
A summary of lease conditions should be included when offers of tenancies are made.	<b>High</b>	<b>6 weeks</b>
The Council should do more to 'market' difficult to let properties	<b>High</b>	<b>6 weeks</b>
More information should be given to 'promote' properties when offers of tenancies are made e.g. information regarding proximity to schools, shops, transport, leisure facilities, Inverness etc.	<b>High</b>	<b>6 weeks</b>
Priority should be given to Housing Management Officers for routine estate management.	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
Employ more community wardens	<b>Low</b>	<b>6 months</b>
Re-introduce annual inspections of property	<b>High</b>	<b>6 weeks</b>
Target times should be given for pre-termination inspections	<b>High</b>	<b>6 weeks</b>
Target times should be given for commencing short-listing of prospective tenants when Termination notices are received	<b>High</b>	<b>6 weeks</b>
Policy should be changed to allow prospective tenants up to 5 working days to accept / reject offers of accommodation	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
Target times should be given for tenancy sign –ups.	<b>Low</b>	<b>6 months</b>
Settling in visits should be introduced for new tenancies within 2 months of tenancy start date.	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
Accompanied viewings should take place within Notice period rather than after tenancy termination.	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
Tenants seeking transfers should be required to demonstrate adherence to all conditions of tenancy for 6 months prior to submitting a transfer application (rather than just have a clear rent account)	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
References should be obtained for all prospective tenants, including existing tenant transfer applicants.	<b>Low</b>	<b>6 months</b>
Offer incentives for tenants to return their properties in good condition.	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
Progress the recommendations of the Sheltered Housing review	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months?</b>
Review financial limit of Decoration allowances	<b>Medium</b>	<b>3 months</b>
Convert rented properties to shared ownership properties in areas where there is an over supply.	<b>Low</b>	<b>6 months</b>