

Managing housing voids

The impact of low demand properties

Prepared for the Accounts Commission and Communities Scotland

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Managing housing voids – the impact of low demand properties

A joint report by the Accounts Commission and Communities Scotland

The Accounts Commission

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 their resources. The Commission has five main responsibilities:

- securing the external audit
- following up issues of concern identified through the audit, to ensure satisfactory resolutions
- reviewing the management arrangements which audited bodies have in place to achieve value for money
- carrying out national value for money studies to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local government
- issuing an annual direction to local authorities which sets out the range of performance information which they are required to publish.

The Commission secures the audit of 32 councils and 34 joint boards (including police and fire services). Local authorities spend over £9 billion of public funds a year.

Communities Scotland

Communities Scotland is a Scottish Executive agency, reporting to Scottish Ministers and operating both nationally and at local levels through its network of area offices.

The agency works with a range of people and organisations such as local authorities, other agencies and the private and voluntary sectors to help regenerate disadvantaged communities and provide better housing. It does this by raising standards, targeting investment and improving understanding.

The regulation & inspection (R&I) division of the agency registers and regulates over 250 independent social landlords to secure good services and viable, properly-governed and well-managed organisations. It also inspects the landlord and homelessness services of local authorities to support improvement.

R&I acts on behalf of Scottish Ministers who have delegated authority to it, set out a Code of Practice to govern the way it works, and established a Regulation Board to oversee its work and ensure it carries this work out independently.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the study advisory group, comprising a range of experts from councils, RSLs and other bodies. The group provided valuable advice and acted as a useful sounding board for the study team. Membership of the group is listed in Appendix 4. We would also like to thank the councils and RSLs who took part in the study.

The study was jointly managed by Jane Kennedy from Audit Scotland and Christine Dugan from Communities Scotland.

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 public funds.

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Summary



Effective property management, based on good information about population needs and demand for properties, is the key to minimising empty housing.

Background

Effective property management, based on good information about population needs and demand for properties, is key to minimising empty housing. This improves the availability of homes for those who need them and reduces rental loss to councils and registered social landlords (RSLs). Rent loss from unoccupied properties, or voids, amounted to £25 million across Scottish councils and £8.7 million in RSLs in 2002/03¹. This represents 2.8% of council and 2.1% of RSL total rental income.

Low demand properties account for 7.5% of all council stock and 10% of all RSL stock². Low demand properties are those which are 'frequently rejected or accepted only very reluctantly even by applicants in urgent housing need'³. They can be low demand for a number of reasons including their location, their state of repair, or their size. In councils and RSLs low demand properties can take more than twice as long to let as other stock. Tackling the issue of low demand properties can therefore go some way towards improving the performance of social landlords in terms of rent loss.

In the context of void management overall this report looks at the extent and impact of low demand housing across the social rented sector in Scotland, and proposes a revised performance indicator (P.I.) for monitoring the management of void performance and the levels of low demand properties in councils and RSLs.

This report provides a profile of low demand housing across the social rented sector in Scotland. The

information contained in the report is based on analysis of the data supplied by councils and RSLs using the draft performance indicator. Low demand housing is not an isolated problem and is linked to a number of other issues such as social inclusion, community regeneration and homelessness. Tackling low demand housing needs to be part of a considered approach to all these areas. This report highlights a number of areas where further work is required.

Communities Scotland is currently undertaking a thematic study on evictions; the Accounts Commission will be carrying out a review of housing stock transfer and is consulting on a future study programme over summer 2004.

Key findings

1. On average RSLs relet their properties twice as quickly as councils, with RSLs taking on average 22 days to relet their non-low demand properties compared to 50 days for councils; and RSLs taking 55 days to relet low demand properties compared to 108 days for councils.
2. The level of low demand stock is 25% higher in RSLs than in councils. RSLs reported 10% of their properties as low demand in March 2003, compared with 7.5% in councils.
3. Location is the main factor in reducing demand for properties. Other factors that can lead to properties becoming low demand include: poor or unpopular design or

condition of individual properties/blocks or estates; poor quality or availability of local services; stigma/poor perception of an area; anti-social behaviour/difficult neighbours.

4. Councils and RSLs have developed strategies for dealing with low demand properties they can no longer relet. As at 31 March 2003 19% of council and 4% of RSL low demand properties were reported as not actively being relet and subject to some form of strategy.

These findings are based on information provided by 62% of councils and 41% of RSLs.

Why we carried out the study

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Accounts Commission and Communities Scotland contains a commitment to harmonise performance information allowing comparison across the social rented sector. It states that the Accounts Commission and Communities Scotland should: '*aim to review performance indicators and harmonise indicator definitions and standards for housing and homelessness functions*'. Councils and RSLs were consulted on the best way to bring together and improve their performance indicators relating to voids reported to the Accounts Commission and Communities Scotland.

1 Accounts Commission Statutory Performance Indicators 2003; Communities Scotland's Scottish Registered Social Landlord Statistics 2003.

2 The figures throughout the report relate to 18 councils and 77 RSLs who could provide complete information.

3 *Managing housing voids: a review of good practice advice with particular reference to tackling low demand*, Pawson, H, Commissioned by Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland 2003. www.communitiesscotland.gov.uk

The study approach

The study was jointly managed by Audit Scotland (acting on behalf of the Accounts Commission) and Communities Scotland. An advisory group made up of officers from councils and RSLs and representatives from other stakeholder organisations provided practitioner advice to the study team (Appendix 4).

- The study team sent questionnaires to all councils and RSLs to get feedback on a draft PI and definition of low demand properties, and then to collect information on an amended version of the PI.
- Consultation meetings were held with groups representing councils and RSLs including the Scottish Housing Best Value Network and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations.
- Fieldwork visits were carried out in five councils and nine RSLs to obtain further information on the profile of low demand across Scotland and to examine methods for dealing with it.

Scope of the study

All councils⁴ and RSLs were asked to provide information for this study. Three councils did not participate. The remaining councils provided some information but, the findings in this report are based on the 18 councils which were able to provide a complete data set. Ninety RSLs provided some information, but again the findings in this study are based on 77 RSLs able to provide a complete data set.

Structure of the report

Chapter 1 – Low demand properties in Scotland

This chapter looks at the profile of low demand housing across Scotland. It examines what a low demand property is, the levels of low demand properties and the reasons for properties becoming or remaining low demand.

Chapter 2 – Performance in managing low demand properties

In the second chapter of the report we look at the performance of councils and RSLs in managing low demand properties. We look specifically at the revised indicator and at the differences it highlights between councils and RSLs.

Chapter 3 – Letting low demand properties

Here we look at the different initiatives employed by councils and RSLs to let low demand properties. We also look at the properties that councils and RSLs have decided not to relet on the basis that continued attempts to relet the properties would not be successful. We examine the number of properties in this category and the strategies to deal them.

Appendix 1

Proposed PI, guidance and definition of low demand.

Appendix 2

Communities Scotland's revised self-assessment questions on managing housing voids.

Appendix 3

Annotated bibliography of good practice in managing low demand housing.

Appendix 4

Advisory group members.

4 Dumfries & Galloway Council, Glasgow City Council and Scottish Borders Councils did not participate as they have transferred their properties to RSLs.

Chapter 1. Low demand properties in Scotland



Key findings

- The level of low demand properties is a quarter higher in RSLs than in councils.
- Location is the main factor that reduces demand for particular properties.

Introduction

This chapter looks at three aspects of low demand housing:

- how it can be defined
- the profile of low demand housing in Scotland
- the factors that lead to housing becoming or remaining low demand.

To date, definitions of low demand housing have been open to interpretation and judgement. One of the aims of this study was to develop a definition of low demand, which could be consistently

understood and operationally applied. Using the new definition, councils and RSLs have been able to supply information (in some cases estimated information) about their housing stock. This has allowed us to build a picture of low demand housing across the social rented sector.

Defining low demand

Low demand properties are properties that are 'frequently rejected or accepted only very reluctantly even by applicants in urgent housing need'. Operationally this definition does not assist councils and RSLs, many of whom have large numbers of properties, to identify low demand properties in their area. It is also focused on the letting of a property. It would be difficult to classify a property that has a tenant living in it as low demand under this definition.

Councils and RSLs need to know where their low demand properties are, how many they have and whether the numbers are increasing. Management information such as this can help councils and RSLs to:

- act quickly to relet a low demand property when it becomes vacant
- see early warning signs and take preventative action if a larger area starts to be affected by low demand properties
- inform strategies to deal with low demand properties.

Having consulted with all councils and RSLs, and a number of other bodies, the following definition of a low demand property has been developed:

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 area⁶.

Low demand housing across Scotland

Using the definition⁷ above, a number of councils and RSLs have identified the stock they estimate to be low demand. Councils state that 7.5% of their properties are low demand while RSLs identify a higher proportion of 10%. In identifying properties that had been low demand in the previous year, which continued to be low demand in 2003, councils reported little movement with 99% remaining low demand; RSLs reported 95%.

In order to manage low demand properties effectively, councils and RSLs need to know how many low demand properties they have and where they are. Findings from the consultation highlighted that 38% of councils and 14% of RSLs responding to the study could not, or had difficulty, providing information for the proposed P.I.

Some councils and RSLs only flagged properties as low demand when they became empty and therefore were unable to supply details relating to all low demand properties.

Recommendation 1:

In line with accepted good practice in the management of low demand properties, councils and RSLs should collect information on the number and location of low demand properties within their areas. They also need to be aware of factors that contribute to properties becoming low demand. This will enable councils and RSLs to develop informed strategies to deal with the issues of low demand.

Location of low demand properties

Levels of low demand properties vary among councils and RSLs ([Exhibits 1 and 2](#)). Pockets of low demand also exist within council and RSL letting areas. Low demand can affect a whole estate or an individual property on a street where demand for property is otherwise high. [Exhibits 1 and 2](#) show the proportion of properties that each council and RSL estimates to be low demand.

Two councils and forty-five RSLs stated they have no low demand properties.

Types of low demand properties

All property types were reported as being low demand in some areas. This reinforces the finding that location is the main factor contributing to a property becoming low demand. There are two exceptions to this. Bed-sits were

consistently noted as a property type that was low demand across both councils and RSLs.

Sheltered accommodation was also frequently mentioned as being low demand, particularly when in rural settings, often some distance from amenities and services. Low demand sheltered accommodation has been an issue in England and Wales for a number of years⁸. 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 also be a problem in Scotland⁹. There are a number of factors which cause sheltered accommodation to be considered low demand:

- outdated design and facilities
- poor location
- over-provision of sheltered accommodation locally¹⁰.

Recommendation 2:

In line with accepted good practice in the management of low demand properties, councils should ensure that the way in which they manage their sheltered accommodation supports their overall community care strategy.

⁶ Detailed guidance on this definition and how to apply it appears in Appendix 1.

⁷ Landlords were also given guidance at the time of data collection on the application of the definition. This guidance appears in Appendix 1. Since the data collection exercise we received further comments asking for more detailed guidance through examples. These have now been added, but were not available at the time of data collection.

⁸ *Difficult to let sheltered housing*, Tinker, A., Wright, F & Zelig, H., HMSO (1995).

⁹ *Low demand housing in Scotland*, CHIS, Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland (2003).

¹⁰ *Difficult to let sheltered housing*, Tinker, A., Wright, F & Zelig, H., HMSO (1995).

Exhibit 1

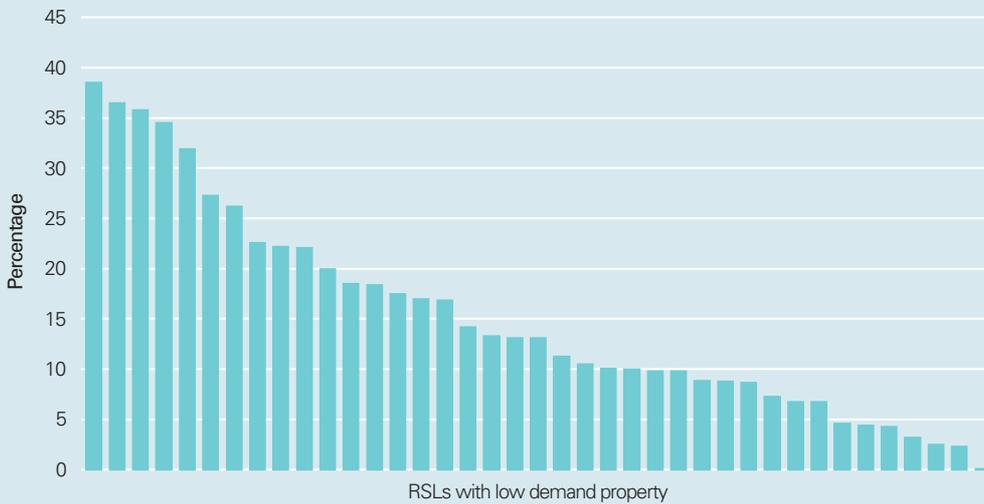
Percentage of council properties estimated to be low demand



Source: Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland 2003

Exhibit 2

Percentage of RSL properties estimated to be low demand



Source: Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland 2003

What factors lead to properties becoming low demand?

Whether or not a property is low demand depends on a number of factors, but appears to be linked mainly to the location of the property. One property type may be both low demand and high demand within the same council or RSL. For example, one city council stated that tenement flats are in high demand in the city centre, but are low demand on the outskirts of the city.

Overall, the factors which can contribute to a property or group of properties becoming low demand can be broken down into three categories: environmental, aspirational and housing management.

Environmental factors

The reputation of a property or estate, and population change within the council or RSL letting area can have a major impact on the demand for a property or properties.

Councils and RSLs consistently report that reputation is one of the strongest factors in influencing the demand for a property and also one of the hardest to overcome. 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. Once a property or group of properties has a poor reputation, even if the cause is no longer present, it is very hard to change public perception. Once an area is stigmatised in this way, demand for properties can fall.

Population change also influences demand for properties. The demand for certain types of property is

changing as the proportion of older people in Scotland increases and the number of younger people decreases. However, other areas are affected by an overall population decline and this can lead to a general lack of demand for property.

Aspirational factors

There has been a significant growth in the number of owner-occupiers in Scotland. People are moving away from renting and either buying the property they have previously rented or buying their own property on the private market. Since the 'right to buy' policy was introduced in 1980 almost 350,000¹¹ council houses have been sold to tenants in Scotland.

This, according to councils has had a significant impact on their ability to let properties. Councils report that existing tenants bought many of their high quality and high demand properties. This has left them with a lower quality of property available for rent. Potential tenants may turn to RSL properties or the private housing market to get a better quality property.

Within the next two years RSLs could find themselves in a similar situation as tenants exercise their right to buy their RSL property. This was introduced in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

Management/policy factors

Management factors such as the letting policy of the council or RSL can create a situation where there is low or even no demand for a property. A number of councils and RSLs have lettings policies that govern the allocation of certain types or sizes of properties, which disallow under-occupation¹². Lettings policies such as these can falsely restrict demand.

11 Scottish Executive Housing Statistics branch 13 December 2003.

12 Under occupancy refers to the practice of letting a property that is too big for the needs of the applicant e.g. a three bed roomed house to a couple with one child.

Chapter 2. Performance in managing low demand housing



Key finding:

On average RSLs relet their properties twice as quickly as councils.

Introduction

Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland have developed and piloted a revised void management P.I. which separately measures the level of and performance in reletting low demand properties across Scotland. The information from this indicator, along with additional information supplied by councils and RSLs, provides a baseline picture of levels and trends of low demand housing across Scotland. It has also allowed comparison, for the first time, of low demand property levels across the social rented sector. This chapter looks at the proposed indicator and analyses council and RSL performance.

The indicator

Under the current Accounts Commission and Communities

Scotland PIs, councils and RSLs are asked for information on the number of properties relet in the following time bands: under two weeks; two to four weeks; and over four weeks. In 2003 councils reported that 60.5% of their stock was relet in over four weeks whilst RSLs reported a level of 42%. There is no further breakdown of information on relets within this time band. These properties could take five weeks, six months or over a year to relet. This lack of information, coupled with councils' and RSLs' concern that low demand housing skews their overall performance on relets,¹³ led to the development of the proposed indicator.

Eighteen councils and 77 RSLs submitted completed information on the proposed P.I. Most of the information was based on estimated data for a number of reasons: IT systems could not retrospectively calculate low demand levels or relets in the requested time bands; or councils and RSLs did not collect the data. The relative performance of councils and RSLs is outlined in the following sections.

Reletting properties

Reported performance shows that councils take an average of 76 days to let a property while RSLs take less than half that time at 35 days. [Exhibit 3 \(overleaf\)](#) shows the performance of RSLs and councils when low demand is separated out from the remaining properties.

For both councils and RSLs it is clear that 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 their other properties.

This table also shows that on average an RSL lets its low demand properties in nearly the same time it takes a council to let its non-low demand properties. Overall, RSLs take approximately half the time to let their properties as councils. This is true for non-low demand and low demand properties.

¹³ A full version of the indicator along with guidance is set out in Appendix 1.

Exhibit 3

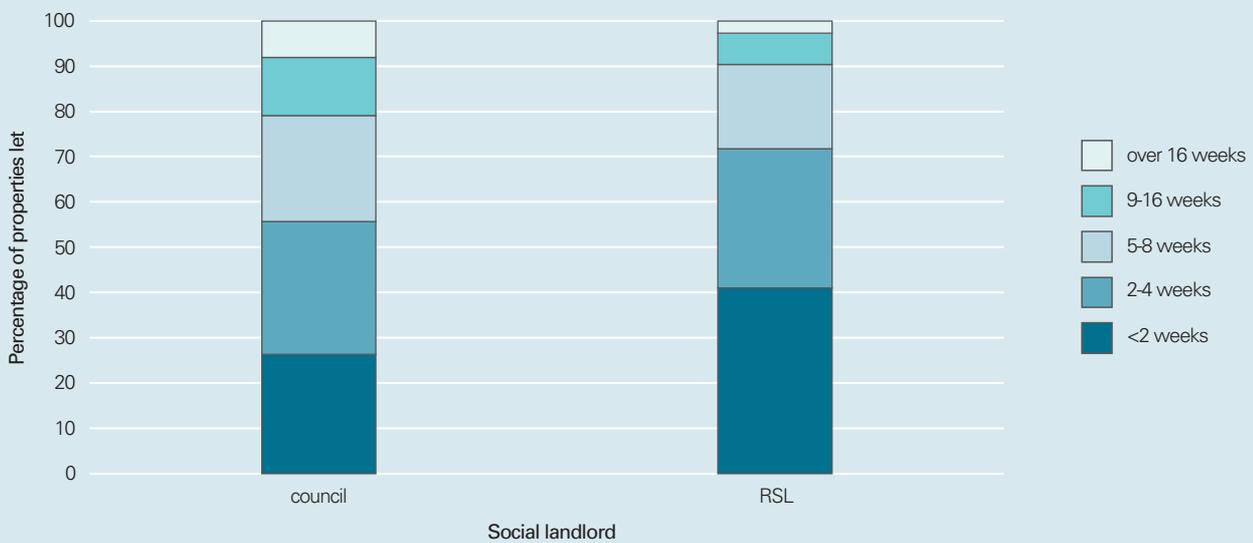
Average relet times for councils and RSLs for the year to 31 March 2003

Landlord	Average relet times in calendar days		
	Low demand	Non-low demand	All properties ¹⁴
Council	108	50	76
RSL	55	22	35

Source: Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland 2003

Exhibit 4

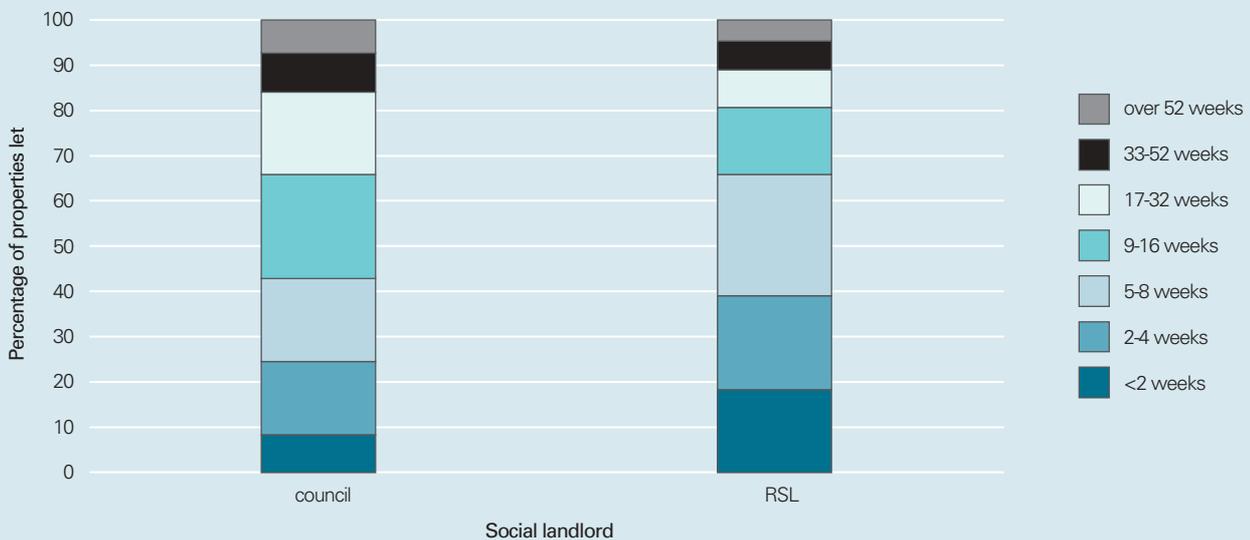
Non-low demand property relet times for the year to 31 March 2003



Source: Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland 2003

Exhibit 5

Low demand property relet times for the year to 31 March 2003



Source: Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland 2003

14 Information from the Accounts Commission Statutory Performance Indicators (SPIs) and Communities Scotland's Scottish Registered Social Landlord Statistics 2002/03.

Exhibit 6

Void low demand property as at 31st March 2003

	% of low demand stock that is void	average number of void properties per council /RSL	average time properties are void in calendar days
Council stock	15%	189	299
RSL stock	5%	7	138

Source: Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland 2003

Exhibit 7

Turnover of property for the year to 31st March 2003

	Turnover of non-low demand	Turnover of low demand
Council	8.1%	22.7%
RSL	8.8%	22.5%

Source: Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland 2003

RSLs also have a quicker turnaround for letting properties. This is shown in [Exhibits 4 and 5 \(opposite\)](#). These graphs show relets on an individual time band basis across low demand and non-low demand properties. RSLs let a higher percentage of their non-low demand properties in under four weeks. Around 45% of council non-low demand properties take over five weeks to relet.

With low demand properties, again RSLs are quicker at reletting with a almost 40% of relets within four weeks, for councils the figure is just below a quarter.

Void properties

As at 31 March 2003, 15% of council low demand properties were empty, this compares to 5% of RSL low demand properties. Over the year to 31 March 2003, low demand council properties remained void for twice as long as RSL properties ([Exhibit 6](#)).

Turnover of properties

One area where councils and RSLs perform at a similar level is in turnover of properties. Around 8% of non-low demand properties are relet within a year. This figure rises to around 23% for low demand properties ([Exhibit 7](#)).

Performance summary

Overall, RSLs let their low demand properties more efficiently than councils. They relet properties more quickly and their void properties are empty for a shorter period of time than council properties.

There may be a number of reasons for this including the age of council properties; the impact of 'right to buy'; and new build RSL properties being marketed in the same areas.

Recommendation 3:

In line with accepted good practice in the management of low demand properties, councils and RSLs need to ensure that their letting process does not exacerbate the amount of time properties lie empty.

Recommendation 4:

In line with accepted good practice in the management of low demand properties, councils and RSLs should carry out local benchmarking in order that good practice can be shared across the social rented sector.

Chapter 3. Letting low demand properties



Key finding

Both councils and RSLs have developed strategies for dealing with low demand properties they can no longer relet.

Introduction

This section looks at what councils and RSLs are doing to let their low demand properties and what options are available to them when this cannot be done.

Initiatives to reduce low demand

Councils and RSLs employ a range of strategies to let low demand properties. Across councils and RSLs similar strategies are being applied. Some of these strategies are discussed below, but for a comprehensive guide to good practice options for dealing with low demand properties see [Appendix 2](#)¹⁵.

Creating incentives

Many initiatives used by councils and RSLs to let low demand properties are based on making the property more attractive to the potential tenant. This includes 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.

Councils and RSLs either offer these incentives up front or discuss them as options while showing a potential tenant around a property. Some councils and RSLs felt that this was the best way to ensure they did not lose a prospective tenant over something that they could easily rectify.

While incentives such as these can help let a property, councils and RSLs should ensure that they are creating a sustainable tenancy. Any benefits of letting the property quickly through incentives will be short-term if the tenancy only lasts a few weeks or months.

Marketing properties

Another popular method for encouraging the take-up of tenancies on low demand properties is marketing them. This course of action is aimed at making more and different people aware of the properties a council or RSL has available for let through advertising. 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. Marketing properties in this way can be very successful, but councils and RSLs need to be ready to respond to increased interest.

Choice based letting is another method of marketing properties. Many organisations are now turning to a 'property shop' or estate agency method of marketing properties. This way prospective tenants can come into a property shop and choose the property they want, provided they meet the criteria for that property (for example size of family).

Environmental improvements

In some areas the physical environment of the property needs to be up-graded and protected to make it more acceptable to prospective tenants. This is a particular option if a whole street, block of flats or estate is low demand.

Tidying gardens, fixing gates and painting walls, 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.

Properties which have been set aside

The types of improvement mentioned above can be highly effective at letting low demand properties more quickly. However, many councils and RSLs have properties that they have decided are no longer viable to relet. Reasons for this can be varied but include:

- **Demographics:** if the population is falling in a council or RSL letting area, then there may be reduced demand for housing.
- **Investment:** if the properties require significant investment to make them attractive to a potential tenant the level of investment may be greater than future income.
- **Environment:** for example, if a property continually gets flooded it may no longer be worth repairing and may be unattractive to tenants because of the risk of flood and/or the inability to gain insurance.

On average 4% of RSL low demand properties and 19% of council low demand properties are not actively being relet and the landlords are

developing other options, to deal with them. These options include:

- **Re-designation of the properties**
Where the stock is transferred to another landlord with access to capital investment needed to make it viable to let, or it is sold.
- **Demolition**
This may be an option where the council has an over supply of housing due to population changes. It might also be the case that the condition of the stock, or the reputation of the area is such that it would be more cost effective to demolish the stock and regenerate the community.
- **Re-configuration of the properties**
This could be an option where the properties that a council or RSL has available for let are not of the type or size suitable for prospective tenants.

Councils and RSLs must make a decision based on the best information they have about the future viability of house types and consider their options. Whatever course of action councils and RSLs decide to follow, it must be part of a wider housing and community planning strategy and involve consultation with the relevant partners.

Recommendation 5:

In line with accepted good practice in the management of low demand properties, councils and RSLs must ensure that any strategy developed for properties they can no longer relet is part of a wider housing and community strategy agreed with other relevant agencies.

Appendix 1. Proposals for a new housing void performance indicator

Definition of a low demand property

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 dwelling are frequently refused for reasons other than personal reasons
- higher than normal rates of tenancy turnover for a property in an area.

The above definition applies to both void and occupied properties.

Guidance

When considering if a property is low demand the following guidance should be taken into account:

1. The definition of a low demand property relates to an individual property.
2. One or more of the criteria must be present for a property to be considered low demand.
3. A small or non-existent waiting list is determined by comparing the number of applicants on the waiting list for the property against the number of applicants on the waiting lists for other properties in the same letting area ie, the definition of 'small' may vary across each letting area and is to be determined by each organisation. It should be borne in mind that there might be small or non-existent waiting lists for properties that are not low demand – this may be due to the fact that there is little turnover for a property, which may act as a deterrent to applicants.
4. Tenancy offers frequently refused is defined as applying to properties where the offer of a tenancy is refused three or more times before it is let. In considering this definition the reasons for refusal **must** be for reasons other than personal reasons.
5. 'An area' is defined as follows:
 - a. for RSLs this is defined as the letting areas in which they operate
 - b. for Councils this is defined as each letting area within the total council area.
6. Higher than normal rates of tenancy turnover is defined as a property with a higher rate of tenancy turnover than the average for the letting area to which it belongs by a measure of three. Examples of this would be:
 - a. if the average tenancy turnover for the area is two then a property which has had a turnover of 5 tenancies or more in the reporting year would be higher than normal
 - b. if the average tenancy turnover for the area is five then a property which has had a turnover of 8 tenancies or more in the reporting year would be higher than normal.
7. In reporting properties that are not being actively relet, these should be properties which are subject to a formal decision by the RSL or council not to relet.
8. In completing this indicator RSLs are required to supply the information for each local authority they operate in and by tenancy type as this will assist local benchmarking and aid cross sector analysis and reporting.

It is acknowledged that there are many factors that contribute to the problem of low demand properties such as:

- poor or unpopular design or condition of individual properties/blocks or estates
- poor quality or availability of local services
- inaccessible location
- stigma/poor perception of area
- anti-social behaviour/difficult neighbours.

Definition of void

The void period is the time – **measured in calendar days** – between the date of termination of a previous tenancy or repossession and the start date of a new tenancy.

Only properties that were relet during the year are to be included. Houses remaining void at the year-end are to be included in the following year's returns. Relets where **no void** period occurred are to be included in the 'less than 2 weeks' band. One week is **7 calendar days**.

Mutual exchanges and successions are **not** to be included

A void is any property that has no tenant for a period of time. A property may be counted as void on more than one occasion during the year. In replying to these questions do **not include the following**:

- empty properties awaiting or undergoing major repairs/structural work (e.g. to rectify damage caused by fire or flood or modernisation) during which period it would be unsafe for them to be occupied. **NB** Following completion of major repair work any subsequent void period occurring until the date of relet should be counted as a void ie, any void period from the date of completion of major repair work to the start date of a new tenancy is to be included in the reporting of voids
- houses held for decanting tenants
- lock-ups and garages
- properties that are or were empty and the subject of a Governing Body/sub-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.

The performance indicator

1. Of your stock which is **not low demand** how many properties were relet within the following time bands over the year to 31 March YYYY?

Less than 2 weeks	
2 - 4 weeks	
5 - 8 weeks	
9 - 16 weeks	
More than 16 weeks	
Average relet times in calendar days	

2. Of your **low demand stock**, how many properties were relet within the following time bands over the year to 31 March YYYY?

Less than 2 weeks	
2 - 4 weeks	
5 - 8 weeks	
9 - 16 weeks	
17 - 32 weeks	
33 - 52 weeks	
More than 52 weeks	
Average relet times in calendar days	

- 3.

How many dwellings did you have at the 31 March YYYY which you considered to be low demand? (This figure should include both void and occupied properties)

How many of these dwellings were considered to be low demand at 31 March last year? (This figure should include both void and occupied properties)

How many low demand properties were you not actively re-re-letting at 31 March YYYY that you have a strategy for dealing with?

4. Of your low demand stock at 31 March YYYY,

How many properties remained un-let as at 31 March YYYY?

Of these properties what is the average length of time they were vacant as at 31 March YYYY?

Appendix 2. Communities Scotland – self-assessment questions

We reviewed the Performance Standards self-assessment questions on Communities Scotland’s Inspection Guidance website in the light of the review of good practice¹⁶ carried out for this study. As well as

AS1.5 (Void Management) other relevant Performance Standards include GS2.3 (Sustainability), AS1.1 (Access), AS1.2 (Lettings), AS1.3 (Tenancies), AS1.5 AS1.9 (Anti-social behaviour) and AS2.1 (Repairs). Three

new questions have been added to the existing questions, and these are highlighted bold in the list below.

Performance Standard: GS2.3 Sustainability

Self Assessment

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about your organisation’s commitment to sustainability:

- (For RSLs): Does our approach to repairing, maintaining and improving our housing and building new houses:
 - demonstrate an awareness of environmental sustainability issues (such as energy efficiency, emissions and brownfield development)
 - reflect Communities Scotland’s policy and good practice?
- (For local authorities): Does our approach to repairing, maintaining and improving our housing:
 - demonstrate an awareness of environmental sustainability issues (such as energy efficiency and emissions)
 - reflect relevant legislation and good practice?
- (For RSLs): Are we working towards producing a sustainability policy and action plan which:
 - identify the environmental sustainability issues important to our organisation
 - explain how we will address these issues
 - include measurable targets?
- Can we demonstrate that we assess environmental sustainability issues when we procure contractors, goods and services?
- Are our policies and practices for landlord services framed in a way which takes account of their wider economic and social impacts in terms of individual, household and local community sustainability?
- Are our investment decisions and (where relevant for RSLs) wider role activities informed by an understanding of local priorities and a consideration of their broader impact on the community?
- In our work with other agencies, do we promote a strategic and co-ordinated approach to investment decisions and policy initiatives which takes into account their potential impacts on the area’s economic, social and environmental sustainability?

Other Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.

Performance Standard: AS1.1 Access to housing

Self Assessment

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about access to your housing list:

- Do we promote fair and equal access to our housing list and can people apply and be assessed at any time?
- Do we actively and widely publicise the means by which people can apply to our housing list?

¹⁶ *Managing Housing Voids: a review of good practice advice with particular reference to tackling low demand*, Pawson, H., unpublished report for Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland, (2003).

Performance Standard: AS1.1 Access to housing (continued)**Self Assessment (continued)**

- Do we provide information and assistance on accessing housing for those who do not have English as a first language or who might have other difficulties in applying?
- Do we admit all applicants who are aged sixteen or over to our housing list?
- Do we minimise suspensions from our housing list?
- Do we ensure that we do not unreasonably suspend from our housing list on grounds of:
 - rent arrears?
 - anti-social behaviour?
 - property ownership?
 - local connection?
 - age?
 - immigration status?
- Where we operate suspensions, do we make them explicit and monitor their impact?
- Have we eliminated restrictive practices, such as screening of application enquiries, limiting distribution of applications forms, etc?
- Do we test our policies, procedures and actual practices against legislative requirements and good practice across the range of access issues?
- Have we reviewed our access policies and procedures to ensure that they contribute to the prevention, and resolution, of homelessness?
- Do our operational practices reflect our policies and procedures and are we consistent in applying these?
- Do we actively manage our housing list to ensure that it is accurate and up-to-date?
- Do we monitor and report outcomes to ensure our objectives on access are being achieved?
- What are our service-users' views on access? What are satisfaction levels?
- What are our partners' views on access?

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the service user focus of your access arrangements:

- Do we provide applicants with accurate and timely information to allow them to make informed judgements about their housing options?
- Do we regularly inform those on our housing list of their current position and their housing prospects?
- Do we provide an accessible and fair appeals process?
- Do we publish outcome information, including equalities information, to demonstrate transparency and accountability in our decision-making and to help inform choice?
- Do we involve tenants, applicants and potential applicants in the development and review of our policies and procedures on access?

Performance Standard: AS1.1 Access to housing (continued)

Self Assessment (continued)

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about your partnership work to maximise access:

- Do we work with other landlords/partners to maximise access to housing in our area?
- Have we engaged with our partners on the development of a common housing register?
- Do we work with our partners to ensure statutory requirements relating to the needs of people who are homeless are met?
- Have we agreed a protocol with our partners for dealing with referrals under section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, and do we monitor its effectiveness?
- Are our nomination arrangements effective, do they cater for local circumstances, and do we operate them efficiently?
- Are our partners satisfied with the operation of our nomination agreements?
- Do we have appropriate arrangements with care and support agencies to improve access to housing for those with support needs?
- Do we participate in appropriate mobility schemes?

Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.

Performance Standard: AS1.2 Lettings

Self Assessment

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about your allocation policy and practices:

- Do our allocation policies, procedures and practices comply fully with legislative requirements?
- Do we give priority to applicants in housing need?
- Have we clearly defined housing need in our allocation policy?
- Is our definition of housing need supported by a robust analysis of the needs of our tenants, applicants and potential applicants?
- Does our definition of housing need fully accommodate statutory definitions?
- Do our allocation policies and practices positively contribute to the prevention, and resolution, of homelessness?
- Does our policy accommodate mobility issues, including national and local mobility, exchange schemes, transfers and 'move-on' for tenants with changing support needs?
- Do we ensure equality of access for all applicants to our full range of housing stock?
- Do we promote choice throughout our allocation policy and processes?
- Do we empower applicants to make decisions about where and in what type of accommodation they wish to live?

Performance Standard: AS1.2 Lettings (continued)**Self Assessment (continued)****You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about your allocation policy and practices:**

- Do we consider the needs of the community when making allocation decisions? Is our approach to this clearly set out in our policy?
- Do we consider the sustainability of individual tenancies and the stability of the community when making allocation decisions? Is our approach to this clearly set out in our policy?
- Is our use of lettings plans and local lettings initiatives provided for in our allocations policy?
- Is our use of special lettings plans and local lettings initiatives based on a robust analysis of local need and demand?
- Do our special lettings plans and local lettings initiatives support the objectives of our allocation policy?

Performance Standard: AS1.2 Lettings**You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the service user focus of your approach to letting houses:**

- Do we provide clear and accessible information on our allocation policy to tenants, applicants and potential applicants, and other stakeholders?
- Do we have an accessible and fair appeals process?
- Do we publish outcome information, including equalities information, to demonstrate transparency and accountability in our decision-making in allocations?
- Do we involve tenants, applicants and potential applicants, and our partners in the development and review of our allocation policies and procedures?

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the quality of management systems supporting the letting of your houses:

- Do our systems provide us with full information about applicants' needs and preferences, and property information to allow appropriate matching and the best use of our stock?
- Do we have quality assurance systems that:
 - allow us to demonstrate that decision-making and practice is fair and consistently in line with our policy?
 - allow us to demonstrate that allocation outcomes match our policy intentions?
 - allow us to demonstrate accountability in exercising any discretionary elements in the policy?
- Have we set challenging targets/timescales for each stage of the allocation process?
- Do we publicise these targets/timescales, and monitor and report our performance against them?

Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.

Performance Standard: AS1.3 Tenancies

Self Assessment

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the forms of tenancy you use (relevant from 1 October 2002):

- Do we provide our tenants and sharing owners with an agreement that maximises their rights?
- Do we always provide our tenants with a Scottish secure tenancy where possible?
- Do we have a clear policy on the use of short Scottish secure tenancies, which is consistent with Section 34 and Schedule 6 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001?
- Do we have a clear policy on the use of occupancy agreements, which is consistent with Schedule 1 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001?
- Do we maximise tenant and resident rights when we use occupancy agreements?
- How do our tenancy and occupancy agreements compare to best practice models?
- Do we encourage our partners to maximise tenancy rights for their tenants and residents?

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the service user focus of our tenancy agreements and practices:

- Do we explain rights and responsibilities to tenants and prospective tenants?
- Do we use a range of techniques to provide tenants with information on their rights and responsibilities, such as:
 - sign-up sessions?
 - tenancy information packs and tenants' handbooks?
 - verbal explanations of tenancy agreements?
 - settling in visits?
- Do tenants find our agreements and supporting information clear and helpful?
- Are our agreements and supporting information written in plain English and can we make them available in different languages and formats?
- Do we consult tenants on any proposed changes to the terms and conditions of a tenancy, and give appropriate notice of all changes?

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the quality of systems supporting your management of tenancies:

- Do we have policies and procedures to deal with a range of tenancy matters, such as relationship breakdown, assignments and exchanges, lodgers and subletting and succession?
- Are these consistent with legislative requirements and established good practice?
- Do we maintain good quality information on each of our tenancies?
- Do we have effective control systems for ensuring the quality and consistency of decision-making on the enforcement of tenancy terms and conditions?

Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.

Performance Standard: AS1.5 Void management**Self Assessment****You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of your void management process:**

- Are our void management policies, procedures and practices clear and consistent with established good practice and legislative requirements?
- Do we explain to tenants their responsibilities relating to termination of tenancy?
- Do we act quickly to identify a prospective tenant when we first become aware that a property will become/is vacant?
- Do we ensure that all relevant departments and partner agencies are notified of the void/prospective void?
- Where necessary, do we secure the vacant property immediately?
- Do we provide prospective tenants with good quality information about the property offered, such as viewing arrangements, rent levels, amenities, transport and shopping facilities, schools, and tenants' groups and representatives?
- Do we have procedures for the recovery of abandoned property that minimise vacant periods, and comply with legislative requirements?
- **Do we have clear procedures for the disposal of abandoned or unclaimed personal belongings left in an abandoned property?**
- Do we have challenging targets and timescales for each stage of the void process?
- Do we provide all relevant staff and partners with accurate and timely performance information to enable them to effectively monitor and manage the void process?
- Do we effectively communicate throughout the process with departments and partners involved in void management?
- Do we monitor the efficiency of referral arrangements with our partners, including nomination agreements and protocols for dealing with referrals under section 5 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001?
- **Do we record the reasons for vacancies that occur within our stock?**
- Do we collect and analyse refusal information to inform the management of our housing list?
- Do we report our performance in the management of voids to tenants, prospective tenants and other stakeholders?

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the standard of your relets:

- Do we have clear relet standards for all our stock?
- Do our relet standards meet all relevant statutory requirements and reflect good practice in relation to standards of safety and security?
- Do we publicise our relet standards, so that prospective tenants know what to expect?
- Do we have systems that ensure repairs to void properties are properly defined, completed on target and to the appropriate standards?

Performance Standard: AS1.5 Void management (continued)

Self Assessment (continued)

- Do we clearly identify circumstances where we may deviate from our published standards?
- Are our tenants satisfied with the condition of the properties let to them?
- Do we consult tenants and prospective tenants on the development and review of our relet standards?
- Do we collect and analyse refusal information to inform our review of relet standards?

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about your approach to the management of low demand:

- Do we assess the nature and impact of particular difficult to let properties?
- Do we have a range of responses to assist in the letting of particular difficult to let properties?
- Do we collect and analyse refusal information to inform our analysis of demand?
- Have we identified areas of low demand and analysed demand issues in these areas?
- Have we put in place appropriate strategies to tackle areas of low demand?
- Do these strategies link with our property management and development strategies?
- Do we work with our partners on a strategic approach to void management in low demand areas?
- Do we have robust arrangements for monitoring the impact of our strategies?
- Are we improving our low demand strategies through monitoring and review?

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about void management and sustainability:

- Do we consider sustainability issues throughout our void management process?
- Does our approach to void management encourage sustainable tenancies?
- Does our approach to void management, together with our management of estates and anti-social behaviour, positively contribute to sustainable communities?
- Do we use results from void property inspections and refusal information to inform our longer-term maintenance investment plans and priorities?

Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.

Performance Standard: AS1.9 Antisocial behaviour

Self Assessment

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about our prevention and management of antisocial behaviour:

- Do we build and maintain our properties to standards that minimise the impact of antisocial behaviour on residents?
- Do we consider lifestyle issues in the design and layout of our houses and communal areas?

Performance Standard: AS1.9 Antisocial behaviour (continued)**Self Assessment (continued)**

- Is our approach to the prevention and management of antisocial behaviour integrated with our management of allocations, estates and void properties, and does this positively contribute to sustainable communities?
- Are we pro-active and supportive in our management of incidents of antisocial behaviour?
- Do we have clear and accessible policies and procedures on the management of antisocial behaviour?
- Do we consult with tenants, residents and other stakeholders on the development and review of our approach to the management of antisocial behaviour?
- Do our tenancy agreements include appropriate nuisance clauses?
- Do we have a range of remedies to tackle incidents of antisocial behaviour, including mediation, use of Antisocial Behaviour Orders, and the use of short Scottish secure tenancies?
- Do our staff have clearly defined responsibilities and do we equip them with the necessary skills to manage antisocial behaviour?
- Do we investigate incidents promptly and have we set challenging targets/timescales for each stage of the procedure?
- Do we monitor our performance in meeting these targets/timescales and report findings to relevant stakeholders?
- Do we have agreed liaison and referral arrangements between other departments and agencies, including the police and the Procurator Fiscal Service?
- Do we maintain accurate records of incidents, and monitor case progress and outcomes?
- Do we publish outcome information, including equalities information, on our management of incidents of antisocial behaviour?
- Is our approach to the management of antisocial behaviour proportionate to the scale of the problem and do our services represent value for money?
- Do our policies and practices on the prevention and management of antisocial behaviour positively contribute to the prevention, and resolution, of homelessness?

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the service user focus of your management of anti-social behaviour:

- Do we publicise our approach to the management of antisocial behaviour, highlighting the support we can provide to tenants and other complainants?
- Is the support and protection of victims and staff central to our approach to the management of incidents of antisocial behaviour?
- Do we keep complainants and victims informed throughout any investigation and follow-up action?
- Do we provide access to an appeals process?

Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.

Performance Standard: AS1.10 Estate management

Self Assessment

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about your approach to the management of estates and neighbourhoods:

- Do we have a pro-active and strategic approach to the management of our properties, estates and neighbourhoods?
- Do we work in partnership to improve the physical quality, safety and attractiveness of our estates and neighbourhoods?
- Do we have strong links at an estate and neighbourhood level with other agencies and service providers, such as education, social services, health, police and welfare benefits?
- Do we co-ordinate our services with those of other agencies and service providers operating in our estates and neighbourhoods?
- Do we have clear policies and procedures for the management of our estates and neighbourhoods which adhere to legislative requirements and established good practice?
- Do our policies and procedures cover the full range of estate management services, including:
 - caretaking?
 - common area maintenance?
 - close cleaning?
 - grounds maintenance?
 - litter/waste collection?
 - removal of abandoned cars?
 - removal of graffiti?
 - management of empty properties?
 - the management of garages, sheds and other buildings and sites?
- Do we assess management issues for each of our estates or neighbourhoods using a range of information sources, including feedback from residents and our partners, regular environmental audits and service monitoring information?
- Do we have local strategies to tackle identified estate management issues, including low demand?
- Do we devolve budgets and decision-making to a local level where appropriate?
- Do we monitor and report the impact of our services on our estates and neighbourhoods?

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about resident focus of your management of estates and neighbourhoods:

- Do we have clear structures for promoting, encouraging and supporting the participation of all residents, including harder to reach groups, in the management of their estates and neighbourhoods?
- Do we know resident satisfaction levels with our estates and neighbourhoods?
- Do we have clear service standards and targets for the management of our estates and neighbourhoods?
- Do we publicise these standards, so that residents know what to expect from our services?
- Do we consult residents on the development and review of our estate management service standards?
- Do our tenancy agreements, handbooks and general information provision clearly set out tenant and resident responsibilities relating to estate management?

Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.

Performance Standard: AS2.1 Repairs**Self Assessment****You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the quality of the responsive repairs service:**

- How well do we perform in terms of key performance indicators and internal targets for emergency, urgent and routine repairs?
- What are tenants' views on the responsive repairs service (eg, quality, speed, accuracy and reliability of the service)?
- Can we demonstrate through internal monitoring that repairs are carried out to a good quality?
- Are we meeting our legal obligations?

Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.**You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the user focus of the responsive repairs service:**

- Do we give tenants an opportunity to participate in setting standards, policies and priorities?
- Are robust mechanisms in place to seek tenants' views on the quality of the responsive repairs service?
- Does our tenancy agreement reflect good practice in the division of responsibilities between tenant and landlord?
- Do we ensure that all tenants have fair and equal access to the responsive repairs service?
- Do we provide tenants with comprehensive information on the responsive repairs service?
- Are our publications written in plain language, and can they be made available in different languages and formats?
- Do we offer tenants an appropriate range of methods for reporting repairs (including emergency arrangements)?
- Do we ensure tenant choice and certainty about when repairs will be done, through an effective appointment system or other method?

Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.**You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the management and support systems which aid the delivery of the responsive repairs service:**

- Do we have a clear system for prioritising repairs, and are the categories of responsive repairs defined clearly?
- Is there an appropriate balance between emergency and non-emergency repairs, taking into account considerations such as safety, responsiveness and value for money?
- Do we operate a Right to Repair scheme in line with legislative requirements?
- Do we operate a Compensation for Improvements scheme in line with legislative requirements?
- Is there an effective pre-inspection monitoring framework through which we ensure repairs requests are received and categorised accurately?
- Do we have clear and effective arrangements for reporting, instructing and authorising repairs?

Performance Standard: AS2.1 Repairs (continued)

Self Assessment (continued)

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the management and support systems which aid the delivery of the responsive repairs service:

- Do we minimise the need for repeat work?
- Do we assess the cost-effectiveness of our responsive repairs service?
- Do we identify and administer owner-occupier responsive repairs efficiently?
- Do we have an effective system for identifying repairs which are not the landlord's responsibility, and is our approach to recovering the cost of work done cost-effective and equitable?
- Do we have an appropriate framework for monitoring variations between contractors' estimates and the actual cost of repairs, and do we take effective action to address issues highlighted?
- Do we process repairs payments efficiently, and do we retain clear audit trails?
- Do we assess systematically the quality of repairs work?
- Do we respond effectively to unsatisfactory work?
- Do we monitor contractor performance and take appropriate action where required?
- Do we use the outcomes of tenant consultation and feedback to improve the service?

Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.

You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about the procurement of responsive repairs services:

- Do we have clear internal controls governing delegated authority, the circumstances where quotations, competitive tenders and so on are required, and do we follow these consistently?
- Do we comply with relevant procurement legislation?
- Do we follow Best Value principles and good practice when deciding how best to procure services, and do we assess quality as well as cost in procurement exercises?
- (For RSL's): Does our approach to procurement reflect Communities Scotland's Procurement Guide and other recognised good practice sources, and is it consistent with the aims of Building a Better Deal?
- Do we follow robust tendering procedures and are these supported by standard documentation which articulates clearly our requirements?
- Do we define our standards clearly through contracts?
- Do we seek an appropriate range of contractor information as part of the tendering process?
- Can we demonstrate clear audit trails for all appointments?
- Do we manage contracts effectively?
- Do we monitor performance throughout the project and take corrective action where this is required?
- Do we carry out thorough reviews of contractor performance, and can we show clear links between performance reviews and subsequent tendering/review of our approved list?

Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.

Performance Standard: AS2.2 Stock management**Self Assessment****You may wish to ask the following self-assessment questions about your stock management strategies:**

- Do our decisions on the resourcing and prioritisation of responsive repairs and lifetime maintenance services take due account of trends in demand and need; demographic changes; service users' preferences, satisfaction and their changing needs?
- Do we take into account broader neighbourhood issues when we make decisions on the resourcing and prioritisation of responsive repairs and lifetime maintenance services?
- Do we have systems in place for measuring and analysing the cost of our void repairs?
- In areas where other social landlords also operate, do we work together towards ensuring we make best use of the stock?
- Do we use appropriate option appraisal techniques to assess alternative stock management strategies and determine the most appropriate response?

Guiding Standards may contain self-assessment questions that are relevant to this activity.

Appendix 3. An annotated bibliography of good practice advice on void management¹⁷

Managing the Crisis in Council Housing, Audit Commission, London, 1986

The central aim of this wide-ranging report was to encourage social landlords to adopt a more 'business-like' approach to housing management and strategy formulation. It discussed appropriate performance indicators for void management and listed 'good practice' measures to speed up lettings. The basis for these recommendations was that the cited activities were identified practices in 'more efficient authorities'. The report also contained specific recommendations for the management of voids in a 'difficult to let' context.

Responding to Low Demand Housing and Unpopular Neighbourhoods: A Guide to Good Practice, Bramley, G., Pawson, H. and Parker, J., London: Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000

Fairly comprehensive report aimed at local authorities and housing associations. Provides advice on tackling problems due to low demand at both strategic and operational levels. Coverage includes analysis of the problem, developing a low demand strategy, housing management initiatives, and demolition and disposal of surplus stock.

Making the Best Use of the Social Rented Stock: Good Practice Briefing No 2, Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing, 1995

This pamphlet lists 'good practice' ideas on void management, together with examples of social landlords operating such approaches. It includes specific section on measures to tackle difficult to let problems. It is mainly useful as a quick reference guide for busy managers.

Housing Standards Manual; Coventry: Chartered Institute of Housing, 2003

A comprehensive set of good practice guidance on void management as well as on many other aspects of housing practice – including subjects such as rehousing, repairs and maintenance. Focuses, in particular, on performance indicators, legal requirements and good practice examples. No specific focus on the 'low demand' context.

Low Demand Housing in Scotland; Edinburgh: Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, 2003

Report looks at the extent and causes of low demand in Scotland, focusing mainly on the problem as it affects social rented housing. Details possible responses on the part of social landlords, both in relation to tenanted housing and void management and letting procedures.

Good Practice in Housing Management: Void Management Good Practice Note 3, Edinburgh: Scottish Office, Housing Policy and Practice Unit and School of Planning and Housing, 1994

This good practice guide examines the circumstances in which properties become empty, action to let, and repairs. It has advice on strategies for properties which are in low demand and the relationship between void management and properties in refurbishment, disposal or demolition programmes.

Void Targets: A New Approach to Controlling Empty Housing, Merrett, S. and Smith, R., London: Institute of Housing, 1989

This guide gives advice on monitoring empty property. It points out that the number of properties which are empty at one point in time is not a useful indicator of performance and argues that the average duration of vacancies and the range of void periods are more appropriate indicators.

Low Demand Housing in Scotland: Identifying the Problems and Solutions, Moore, A., Edinburgh: Chartered Institute of Housing in Scotland, 1998

This report discusses the causes of low demand housing and illustrates the lack of consistent data to measure the phenomenon in Scotland. It briefly discusses some techniques in the field of estate management, void management and housing allocations which are common responses to the problem.

Empty Public Sector Dwellings in Scotland: A Study of Empty Public Sector Dwellings in Scotland in 1992, Murie, A., Wainwright, S. and Anderson, K., Edinburgh: Scottish Office Central Research Unit, 1994

This report is based on a study of empty housing owned by public sector landlords in Scotland. It identifies a number of factors associated with higher void rates and describes a range of initiatives and practices to speed up the reletting process.

¹⁷ Taken from a review of good practice commissioned by Audit Scotland and Communities Scotland and carried out by Hal Pawson, School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University.

Good Practice in Housing Management: A Review of the Literature, Scott, S., Currie, H., Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Kintrea, K., Rosengard, A. and Tate, J., Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Central Research Unit, 2001

Review of academic, official and professional good practice recommendations on housing management, broadly defined to include areas such as energy efficiency and housing advice, as well as void management, housing allocations and repairs and maintenance.

Managing Voids and Difficult to Let Housing, Pawson, H., Kearns, A., Keoghan, M., Malcolm, J. and Morgan, J., London: Housing Corporation, 1997a

This report discusses void management practices by housing associations in England, both with respect to mainstream housing and in terms of low demand or 'difficult to let' housing. It also examines the implications of local authority nomination arrangements for housing association void rates and makes recommendations on the content of nomination agreements aimed at striking a fair balance between the interests of the two parties in this context.

Managing Voids and Difficult to Let Housing: A Review of the Literature, Pawson, H., Kearns, A. and Morgan, J., London: Housing Corporation, 1997b

Drawing on research such as the *Baseline Study of Housing Management in Scotland*, this report summarises earlier research and good practice advice on policies and practices in void management by social landlords. The report examines, in turn, each stage of the reservicing and reletting process. It also examines policy responses of social landlords to problems of low demand or 'difficult to let' housing.

Appendix 4. Study advisory group members

Jim Butler	Principal Officer, Operations, Angus Council
Angela Cameron	Housing Manager, Sanctuary Housing Association
Rob Hughes	Policy and Practice Co-ordinator, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations
John MacMillan	Development Co-ordinator, Stirling Council
Murray McMillan	Area Manager, Link Housing Association
Frances Paterson	Director of Housing, Loreburn Housing Association
Mark Weir	Service Development Officer, Perth & Kinross Council

Managing housing voids

The impact of low demand properties



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