

Customer Inspectors

Empty Property Inspection June 2009



Report by
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Acknowledgements

This research project was conducted by Joanne McMahon, Project Officer, Community Engagement and Hannah Fitzhenry, Customer Insight Officer.

Steven Garner, Repairs and Maintenance Manager conducted the briefing with the Customer Inspectors.

A special thanks to all Customer Inspectors who took the time to complete the Void Inspection Checklists.

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to summarise and evaluate the Customer Inspectors first inspection of Helena Homes Empty Properties. The report analyses the information from the checklists completed and the comments made by the Customer Inspectors for each of the properties that they inspected.

Background

Helena Partnerships want to ensure that our customers are at the heart of everything we do. We want to demonstrate that we continually improve and deliver customer led services.

The creation of the Customer Excellence Strategy has led to the development of Customer Inspectors.

A Customer Inspector is a volunteer whose role is to test and feedback the level of service being provided from a customer perspective. They carry out mystery shopping or reality checks which provide feedback on actual service delivery.

Customer Inspectors have a key role within the new Customer Excellence Strategy and will help to improve customer satisfaction inline with the overall target of 25%.

Helena Homes have recently trained a group of eleven tenants to become Customer Inspectors and to conduct a variety of overt and covert exercises.

The first study undertaken by the Customer Inspectors was on Empty Properties. Considering the service standards developed by the Voids team the Customer Inspectors expressed their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with each of the void properties.

The Customer Inspectors will continue to conduct reality checks on Helena Partnerships services, the areas to follow include:

- Environmental Services
- One Call
- Local Access Points
- Experience of New Tenants
- Responsive Repairs Service

The results of these studies will provide feedback to service managers, this will help to identify strengths and weaknesses which in turn can highlight areas for improvements.

To adhere to the overall Customer Excellence goal the information will be scrutinised by the Customer Excellence Panel and the feedback given to board.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the Void Inspection is:

- To provide a reality check on properties ready to let
- To establish a customer view of the void service standards
- To identify strengths and weakness of the void standards

To achieve the aims the Inspection will focus on:

- The void service standards
- Additional comments from the trained Customer Inspectors

Context

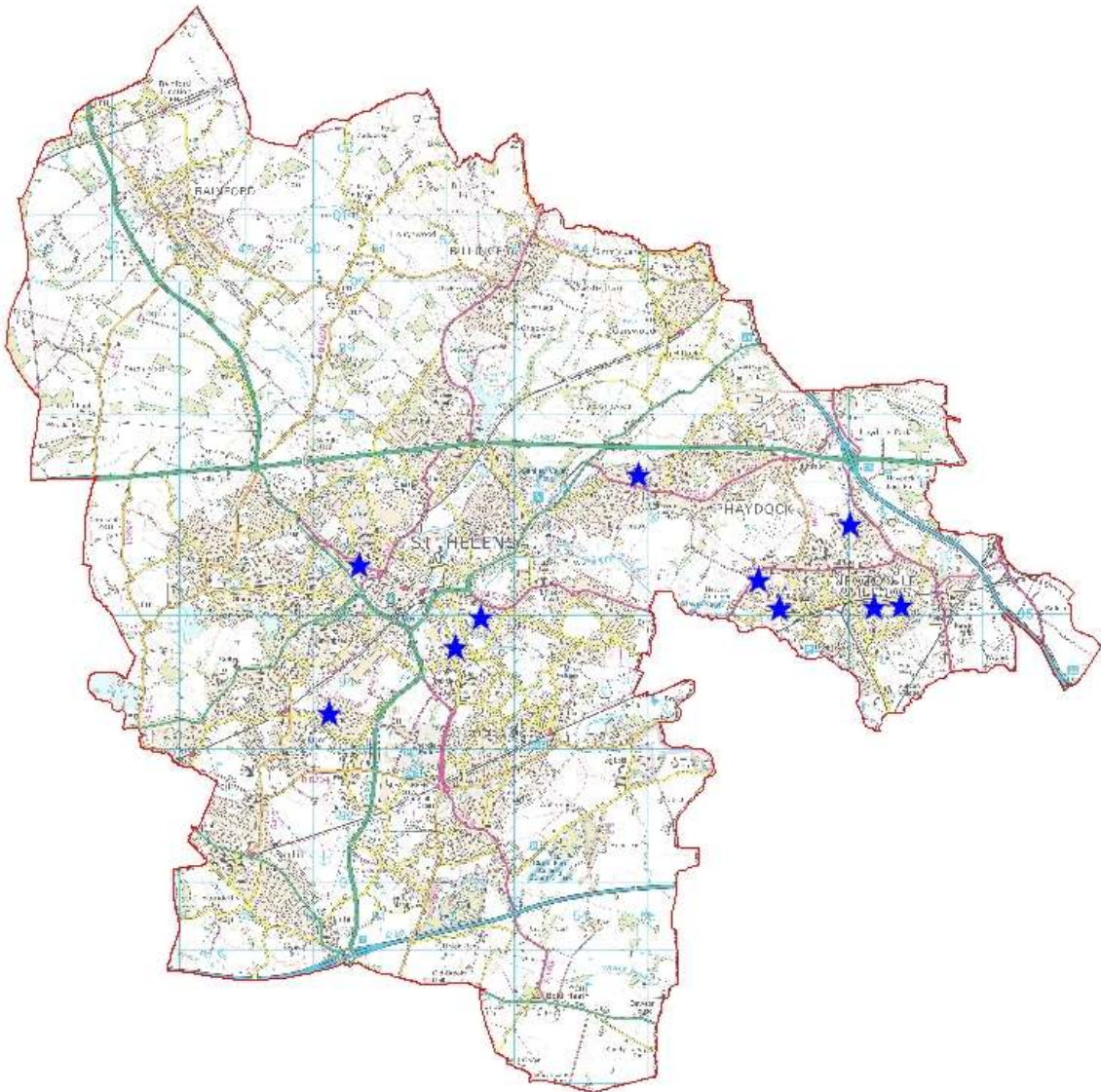
The Customer Inspectors inspected ten Helena Homes properties over a period of four weeks in May/June 2009. The choice of properties was dictated by what was available to let at the time of inspection.

A range of different property types were inspected by the Customer Inspectors. These are displayed in the table below.

Type	Frequency
1 bed flat	2
2 bed flat	1
1 bed sheltered bungalow	1
2 bed house	6
3 bed house	1

These properties were distributed over a range of different areas in St Helens. The table below highlights the number of properties inspected within each area.

Area	Frequency
Newton-le-Willows	6
Thatto Heath	1
Town Centre	1
Parr	1
Peasley Cross	1



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EMPTY PROPERTY INSPECTIONS JUNE 2009



KEY
 Inspected Property

Scale: 1:85,000
 Date: 3rd July 2009
 Drawn by: One Message
 Client: Customer Inspectors



Map Centre:
 Easting (X): 353500
 Northing (Y): 393300

Method

The Void Checklist was developed inline with the Void Service Standards. The checklist is an extensive list of all aspects of the standards that relate to the specific room in the void property. Some parts of the standard were left out from the checklist as they were not appropriate for the Customer Inspectors to check, this includes gas and electrics.

Pilot

A pilot void inspection was conducted using the first trained Customer Inspector. Initially the void checklist was a short document that was used in combination with the Voids Service Standards and a 'Hints and Tips' leaflet. In light of the test it was suggested by the Customer Inspector that the form needed to be a more comprehensive list that followed the design of the property and went through each of the standards.

Revised Checklist

As a result of the pilot study the checklist was redesigned and a single checklist was developed. This ensured the Customer Inspectors had only one list and could focus on the specific standards in each room of the property. This also allows the Customer Inspector to focus on one document.

The final checklist breaks down the property into different rooms. Thinking about the standard the Customer Inspectors were asked to look in each room and see if the service standard was satisfied or dissatisfied. This was completed using the scale below.

Key

☺ - Satisfied the standard

☹ - Neither satisfied or dissatisfied the standard

☹ - Dissatisfied the standard

N/a - Not applicable to the property

The First Inspection

On the first void inspection the Customer Inspectors were briefed by Stephen Garner, the Repairs and Maintenance Manager at the Bold Miners Club in St Helens. This involved going through the Void Service Standards to familiarise the Customer Inspectors with what they needed to look for in the empty properties. The briefing session also gave the Customer Inspectors an opportunity to go through the checklist and raise any queries they may have before the actual inspection.

To help the Customer Inspectors complete the inspections they were given the following equipment:

- A clipboard
- Camera
- Hand sanitiser
- Pen

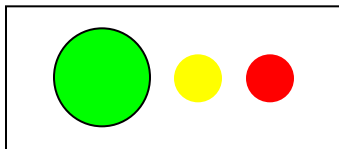
After the briefing the Customer Inspectors inspected the available properties in small groups. Photographs were taken to support areas where the Customer Inspectors were dissatisfied.

Sample

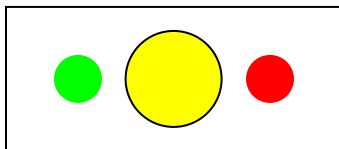
A full census of the available properties was conducted over a four week period in June/May 2009.

Analysis

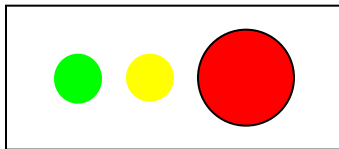
To highlight the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with each of the standards a traffic light symbol has been used to illustrate the overall perception of the Customer Inspectors.



The large green circle highlights were the majority of responses satisfied the standard.



The large yellow circle highlights were the majority of responses neither satisfied or dissatisfied the standard.



The large red circle highlights were the majority of responses dissatisfied the standard.

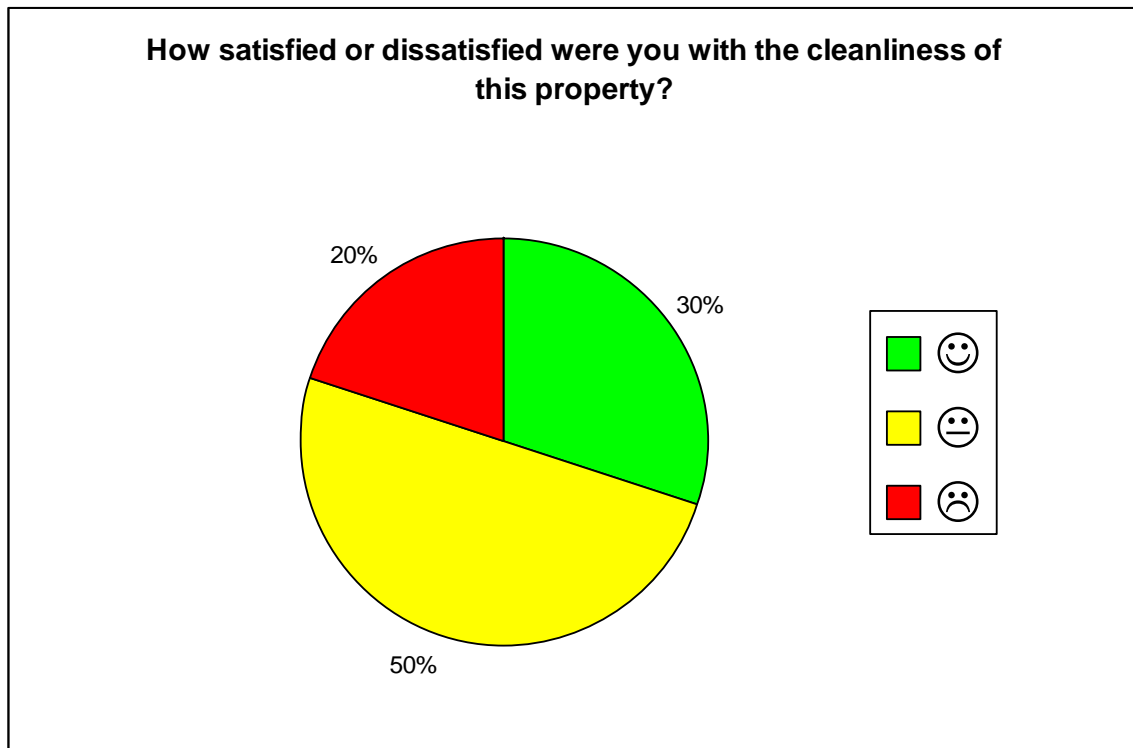
Summary of Main Findings

This section of the report summarises the results of the Empty Property Inspections. A more detailed analysis of the results can be found in the following section.

Cleanliness

Each of the properties that were inspected at some stage failed to meet the standard for cleanliness and rubbish. This included all internal and external areas.

The Customer Inspectors were asked to rate their satisfaction with the overall level of cleanliness in each of the empty properties. This is displayed in the pie chart below.



Along with the overall satisfaction a number of comments were made about the cleanliness in some of the inspected properties, this includes:

“Flat ok but could do with good clean”

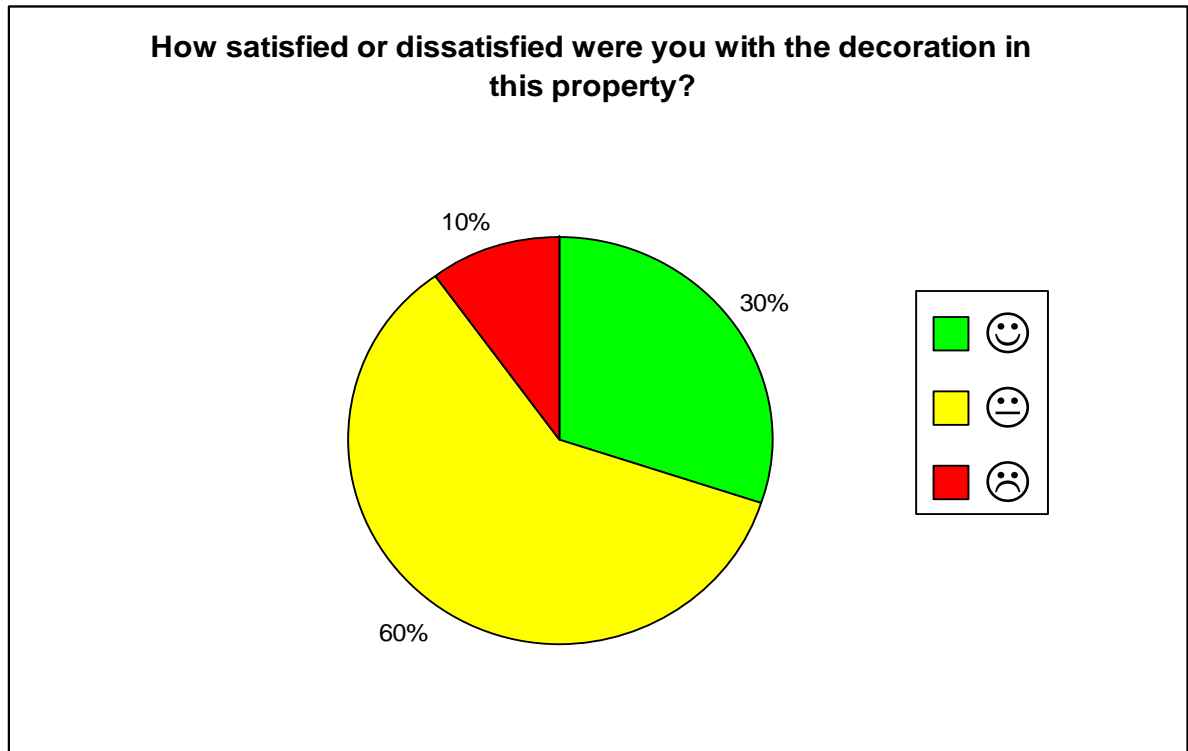
“Smoke alarms very dirty”

“Felt that overall the house still needed a further clean”

“Should be a lot cleaner throughout”

Decoration

The Customer Inspectors were asked to rate their overall level of satisfaction with the decoration in each of the properties they visited. The pie chart below displays their responses.



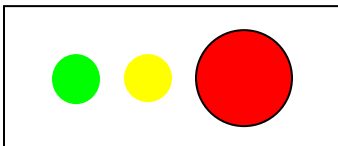
The Customer Inspectors considered the decoration in some of the properties to need improving, comments surrounding this include:

“One bedroom needs redecorating”

“If the walls had been stripped it would have looked better”

“generally in good condition, wallpaper hanging not nice to see plus cracks should have been fixed by now”

Energy Efficient Lightbulbs



The standard that relates to fitting energy efficient lightbulbs was not satisfied in the majority of properties. In the small number of properties where the light bulbs were fitted they appeared to have been there a long time and were often covered in dust.

External Areas

The external areas in the properties were consistently rated poorly in terms of rubbish. In a number of the properties that were inspected rubbish was found, some of which had been left behind by workmen.

Another aspect raised by a number of the Customer Inspectors was the dissatisfaction with the state of the gardens. A number of comments were made about the gardens being untidy and the grass and bushes being overgrown. Comments included:

“Lots of tipping from residents and workers”

“Rubbish at the back of the window and bins...path clearing of weeds”

“Trees overgrown, dangerous”

“Garden needs to be cut back and pruned”

The photograph below shows an example of a front garden that is overgrown.



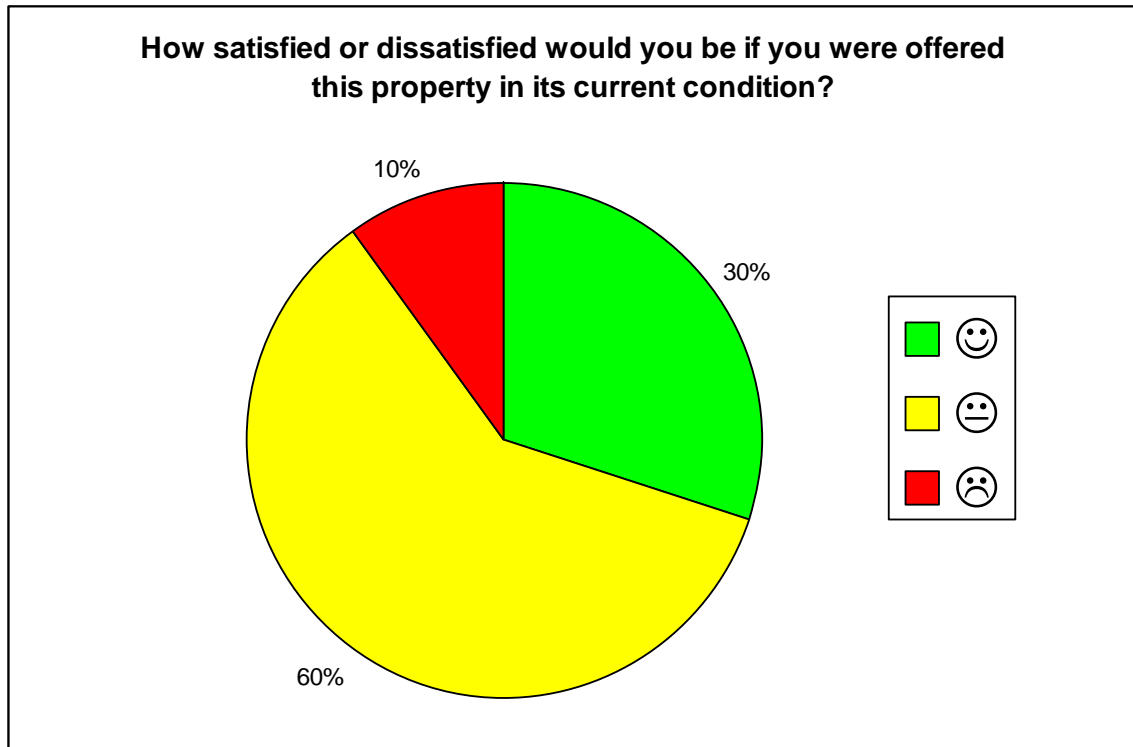
NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Window Keys

An issue that was raised by the Customer Inspectors was in regards to missing window keys. Comments were made in three of the properties that were inspected.

Overall Satisfaction

The Customer Inspectors were asked how happy they would be if they were to have been offered each of the properties they visited. The results are displayed in the pie chart below.



Following the debrief the Customer Inspectors shared the view that they were surprised with the standard of the properties that they visited. They also expressed that they were satisfied with the properties that they visited. Although the majority of Customer Inspectors gave a neutral response to being offered the properties a number of positive comments were made:

“Excellent Standard”

“Very nice, ready to let, not much needs doing”

Customer Inspectors Overall Feedback

The Customer Inspectors who took part in the Empty Property Inspection’s gave some overall feedback, generally feedback was very positive.

“1st inspection – wasn’t expecting the properties to be in such good condition, would be quite happy to live in them myself and my standards are quite high. I am looking forward to more inspections and training”

"I found voids inspection interesting and checklists helpful, even though they were quite lengthy!"

"I expected the properties to be clean and tidy and to my surprise they were so. Unfortunately the state of the gardens were generally not good"

"Inspecting Helena Homes properties has opened my eyes to the improved standards that have appeared. I would have happily accepted most of the properties if they had been offered to me"

"I was very pleased with the standards of the properties but a bit let down with the cleaning standards as well as the gardens which would have been better if this had been dealt with"

"I was quite surprised about the standard of the empty houses that we had void as they were really clean and up to standard. It was interesting to see your properties empty and not a mess for the next tenant to come into."

"On taking part in the property inspections I enjoyed viewing the homes with a view to check the conditions in/outside with a tenant to be in mind. Also learned what to look for"

The comments highlight the satisfaction with the empty properties, generally the Customer Inspectors appear surprised with the standard of the properties they have visited. The comments were positive and a number of the Customer Inspectors expressed that they would be happy to move into some of the properties they inspected.

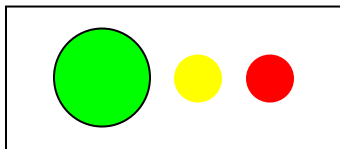
Detailed Analysis

This section provides a detailed analysis of each of the Void Service Standards considered in the checklist.

General Standards

The standards included in this section apply to all of the internal rooms and some of the external areas.

Clear from rubbish



The Customer Inspectors rated the properties in regards to this area of the standard relatively highly. The majority of responses expressed that they thought the properties satisfied the standard. Areas in which this particular standard seemed to fall down was in relation to the front and back external areas, where there were a few instances where the properties were not clear from rubbish.

A comment was made by a Customer Inspector in relation to rubbish in one of the inspected properties:

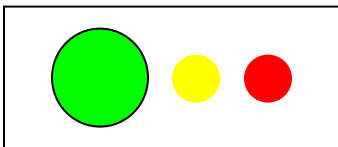
“lots of tipping from residents and workers, rubbish.”

The photograph below illustrates some rubbish that has been left in the external areas of 20 York Close,



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Floors swept, scraped clean and mopped with disinfectant



The majority of responses to this standard made by the Customer Inspectors were positive, and the properties satisfied the standard. There were a number of neutral responses expressing that they were neither satisfied or dissatisfied.

There were a small number of responses that were dissatisfied with the cleanliness of the floors, however this is not consistent amongst properties as it occurs in a variety of different rooms. Rooms that were considered not to have met the standard included:

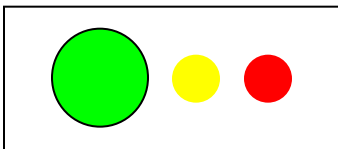
- Living Rooms
- Kitchens
- Bedrooms
- Hallways, Stairs and Landings

Below is a photograph that shows an example of a floor that has not met the standard. The photograph is taken in the Living Room of 6 Cross Meadow Court, Peasley Cross.



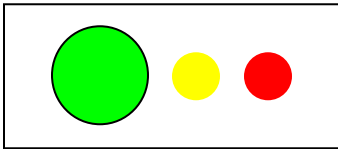
NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Floorboards secure with no movement



The majority of the responses to this standard were positive. There were only two properties that did not completely satisfy the standard, the first property was 30 Gloucester Street which received several middle responses of neither satisfied or dissatisfied. These responses were located in the hallway, stairs and landing and bedrooms one and three. The other property, 6 Cross Meadow Court, also received mainly positive responses with only one exception of bedroom one where the Customer Inspectors found the floorboards to have movement.

Storage areas/cupboards free from rubbish, cleaned and mopped



A number of the properties that were inspected had rooms with storage areas. Of those rooms that contained storage areas the Customer Inspectors rated them highly with the vast majority satisfying the standard.

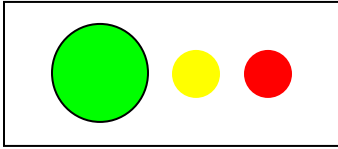
There was one occasion when a storage area in a property clearly did not satisfy the standard, this was in 5 Adelaide Avenue.

The photograph below supports that the external storage area in 5 Adelaide Avenue was not free from rubbish.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

All screws and hooks removed from walls



Responses to this part of the standard highlighted that in the majority of cases the standard was met.

There were three properties that did not receive a completely satisfied response, the rooms in the properties to receive a poor response included a variety of rooms including:

- Living Room
- Hallway, Stairs and Landing
- Under Stairs Storage

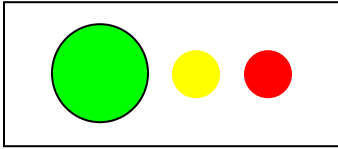
These areas are all located on the ground floors of the properties.

The photograph below shows an example of where this standard was not met. The photograph was taken in the Living Room of 30 Gloucester Street.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Walls left ready to decorate



In regards to this part of the standard the Customer Inspectors rated the majority of rooms satisfying the standard. There were four properties that contained some rooms that the Customer Inspectors were not satisfied with. The majority of the dissatisfied responses were about the walls located in the bedrooms of the properties.

A number of comments were about the conditions of the walls at 20 York Close, they highlight the need to improve the condition of the walls to improve the standard of the property.

“if the walls had been stripped it would have looked better, but it was a lovely house.”

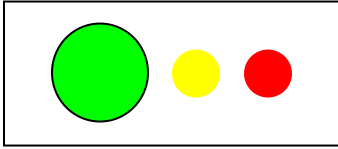
“... wallpaper hanging not nice to see plus cracks should have been fixed by now.”

Below is an example taken from 20 York Close showing where the Customer Inspectors were not satisfied that the walls have been left ready to decorate.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Skirting boards clean and in good repair



The Customer Inspectors responses to this standard were mainly 'satisfied', this illustrates that the properties had clean skirting boards that were in good repair.

Two of the properties inspected received a response of neither satisfying or dissatisfying the standard. Within these two properties this response was given to the living rooms and dining rooms in the properties.

A comment made by a Customer Inspector about 56 Siddeley Street highlights on some occasion the skirting boards were not up to standard.

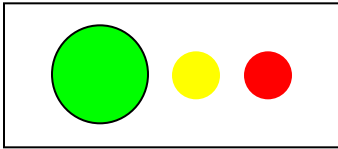
“skirting old and battered”

The photograph below shows a skirting board that has not met the standard, it was taken at 6 Cross Meadow Court.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Sockets and light fittings clean



The majority of responses to this standard made by the Customer Inspectors were positive and on most occasions the standard was considered to have been satisfied.

There was a small number of occasions where the standard was not met, this occurred in a range of rooms in the properties, including:

- Living Rooms
- Bedrooms
- Halls, Stairs and Landings
- Bathrooms/Toilets

A comment was made by a Customer Inspector in relation to the cleanliness of the light fittings at 8 Martin Avenue.

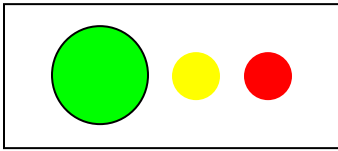
“yellow and dirty”

The photograph below supports the comment above, where the standard was not satisfied at 8 Martin Avenue.



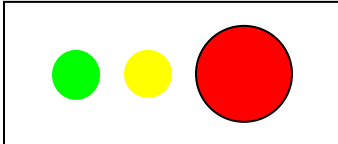
NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

All polystyrene tiles removed



This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

Low energy light bulb fitted where fitting allows



The response to this standard from the Customer Inspectors was fairly low. Although there were some occasions where low energy light bulbs had been fitted, the majority of cases did not. This applied to all rooms and all different property types.

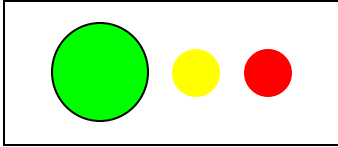
On at least one occasion each of the properties received a 'dissatisfied' response to this standard.

The photograph below shows an example of a light fitting where no low energy light bulb has been fitted. The photograph was taken at 8 Adelaide Close.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Doors free from damages and defects



The majority of responses to this standard made by the Customer Inspectors were positive and the properties inspected satisfied the standard. There were a number of responses of neither satisfied or dissatisfied.

There were a small number of responses that were dissatisfied with the standard of the doors. The specific rooms that were highlighted as not meeting the standard included:

- Halls, Stairs and Landings
- Living Rooms
- Dining Rooms

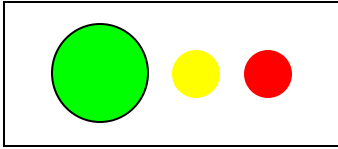
These rooms are all located on the ground floor of the properties.

The photograph below highlights a door which does not close properly, it was taken in the Kitchen of 8 Martin Avenue.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Windows, window frames and window boards washed and cleaned and free from damages and cracks.



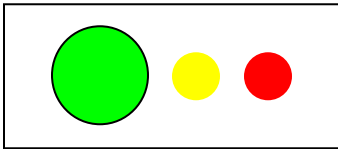
The Customer Inspectors responses to this standard were mainly positive, the majority of rooms in the properties satisfied the standard. There were a number of responses that were 'neither satisfied or dissatisfied'.

The number of properties that has instances were this standard was 'dissatisfied' included:

- 6 Cross Meadow Court
- 56 Siddeley Drive
- 30 Gloucester Street

No particular room consistently failed to meet the standard.

Windows function smoothly, open fully and have a tight seal to be draft free

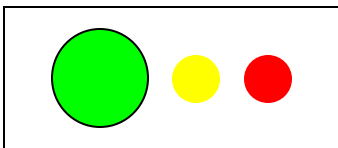


The majority of the properties inspected satisfied this standard. There was one occasion when the standard was 'dissatisfied', this was at 5 Adelaide Close where the window in the hallway did not satisfy the standard.

Kitchen

This section contains standards that relate only to the kitchen.

Clean, damage free, matching vinyl flooring

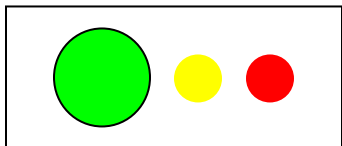


In regards to this standard the Customer Inspectors considered that in the majority of the properties the standard was met. This means all of the floors in these properties were clean, damage free with matching vinyl flooring.

The only property not to satisfy the standard was 20 York Close where the floor was not considered as satisfactory. A comment made by one of the Customer Inspectors supports that the flooring did not satisfy the standard.

“...floor tiles between dining room and kitchen old and not matching and a tripping hazard...”

Kitchen units clean, damage free, hygienic and serviceable inside and out. Doors and draws open and close correctly. Doors and handles are secure and all match.



The majority of the properties inspected by the Customer Inspectors satisfied this standard.

There were two cases where the kitchen failed to meet the standard, this was at 6 Meadow Cross Court and 190 Oak Avenue.

A Comment was made by the Customer Inspector who inspected 190 Oak Avenue,

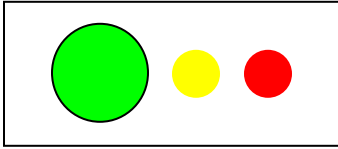
“Under sink backboard is warped and the door is loose”

The photograph below shows the broken draw from 6 Meadow Cross Court.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

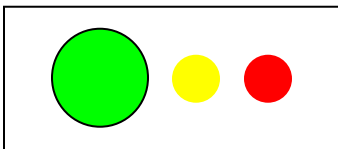
Extractor fan clear of dust



The Customer Inspectors response to this standard was positive, the majority of the properties had an extractor fan that was clear from dust.

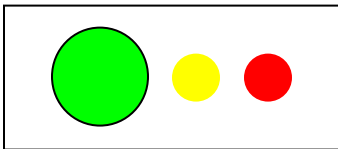
Two of the properties that were inspected were highlighted as not being free from dust, this was at 20 York Close and 5 Adelaide Avenue.

Silicon sealant in good repair



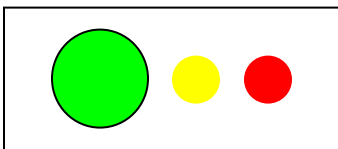
This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

Sink unit has a suitable plug and chain



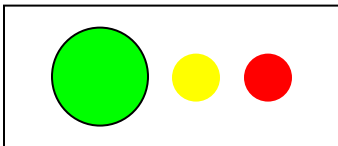
This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

Gas or electric cooker point provided



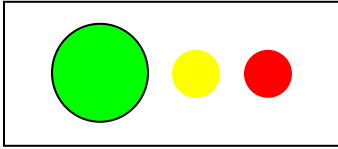
This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

600mm space for washing machine with red and blue valves



This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

600mm space for fridge with suitable plug and fuse above worktop



The Customer Inspectors rated the majority of the properties as satisfying this standard. The only property that failed to provide a 600mm space for a fridge was the flat at 5 Adelaide Avenue.

Comments made by the Customer Inspectors about 5 Adelaide expressed their concern that they were unsure where the fridge would fit in the kitchen. Comments included:

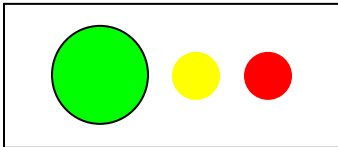
“No room for fridge”

“Not sure where a fridge could go, only perhaps a mini fridge on the worktop.”

“No room for fridge”

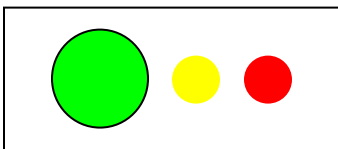
“No space for fridge”

Worktops have at least one layer of matching tiles



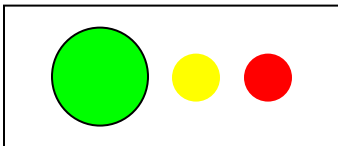
This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

Hallway, Stairs and Landing



This section contains standards that relate only to the hallway, stairs and landing.

Handrail to stairs is secure

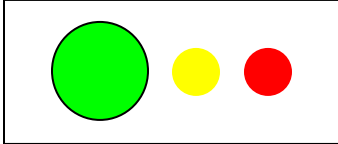


This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

Bathroom and Toilet

This section contains standards that relate only to the bathroom and toilet.

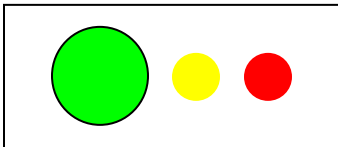
All appliances clean damage free, hygienic and serviceable



The majority of the bathrooms and toilets inspected satisfied this standard. On a number of occasions the bathrooms and toilets in the empty properties were rated as neither satisfying or dissatisfying the standard.

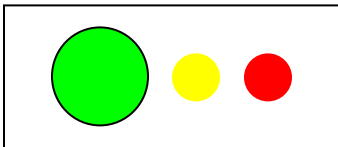
There was one case where a bathroom did not satisfy the standard, this was at 6 Cross Meadow Court where the appliances were considered not to be free from damages.

Bath panel should be damage free and match the existing suite



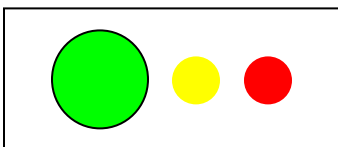
The majority of the properties inspected by the Customer Inspectors met this standard. There was one occasion where the standard was not satisfied, this was at 6 Cross Meadow Court.

Flushing mechanism is in full working order



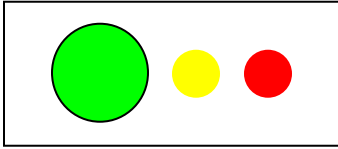
This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

Sink unit has a suitable plug and chain



This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

Extractor fan clear of dust



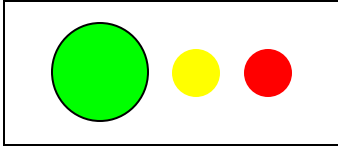
The majority of properties satisfied this standard. A small number of properties were given a response of neither satisfied or dissatisfied, whilst there were no cases of any bathroom or toilet failing this standard.

The photograph below displays an extractor fan from 6 Cross Meadow Court that is not clean and free from dust.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

New WC seat



Similar to the previous standard, this standard was met by all but one of the properties. This was also at 6 Cross Meadow Court.

An issue commented on by the Customer Inspectors was the ability to tell whether or not a new toilet seat had been fitted in the bathroom of the properties.

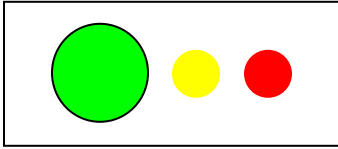
“i assume the toilet seat is new, no stickers.”

The photograph below was taken in 6 Cross Meadow Court where the Customer Inspectors highlighted it as not meeting the standard.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Silicon sealant is in good repair



This standard was satisfied by all but one of the inspected properties. This was in 238 Earle Street where the sealant has mould.

The photograph below highlights the silicon sealant that was not in good repair at 238 Earle Street.

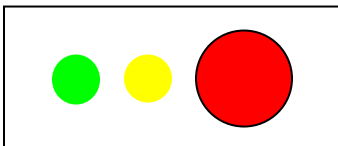


NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

External Front and Back

This section contains standards that relate to the external areas.

All shrubbery and grass is cut and tidy



This standard received a mixed response from the Customer Inspectors. Forty percent of the properties satisfied the standard whilst sixty percent were considered to be at a dissatisfactory standard.

Both front and back external areas were considered to be relatively untidy and overgrown. This occurs in six of the ten properties that were inspected.

The Customer Inspectors made a number of comments about the conditions of the external areas. Some of which are included below.

“...barbed wire on fencing, check if legal. weeds in garden, windows not clean.”

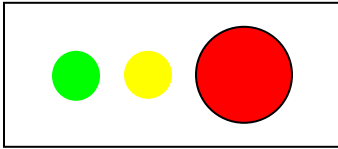
“...grass very overgrown, shed full of rubbish etc. can't see the slates of the roof.”

The photographs below show examples of untidy gardens at 56 Siddeley Drive.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Free from trip hazards



The Customer Inspectors responses to this standard were relatively poor in comparison, In a number of the properties the front or rear gardens contained trip hazards.

The properties that contained a hazard in either the front or back external areas included:

- 56 Siddeley Drive
- 190 Oak Avenue
- 106 Oak Avenue
- 20 York Close
- 7 Maple Avenue
- 30 Gloucester Street

The photograph below shows an example of a trip hazard at 30 Gloucester Street.



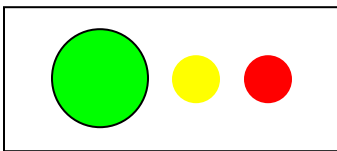
NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

The photograph below also shows an example of a trip hazard left in the front garden of 30 Gloucester Street.



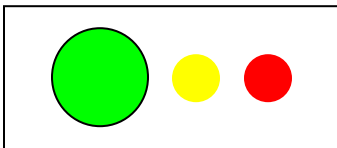
NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Loose or missing slates on the roof



This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

Existing fencing is secure and in reasonable condition

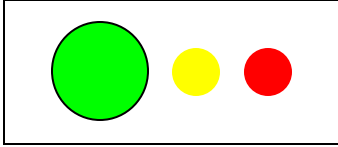


Of the ten properties that were inspected by the Customer Inspectors eight of them satisfied this standard. The two properties that did not were 30 Gloucester Street and 106 Oak Avenue.

Comments made by the Customers highlight that not all of the fences are in reasonable condition.

“Fence doesn't close properly

Steps to the property are secure and are a non slip surface



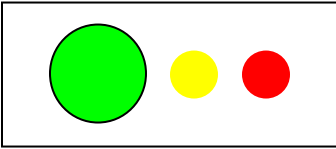
The majority of the properties inspected satisfied this standard. The only property that failed to satisfy the standard was 30 Gloucester Street,

The photograph below highlights the broken step at 30 Gloucester Street.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Windows, window frames and window boards washed and cleaned



The majority of the properties that were inspected satisfied this standard. Four of the properties did not satisfy this standard and were highlighted to be not clean.

A Customer Inspector commented on the cleanliness of the windows at 8 Martin Avenue.

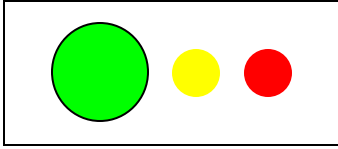
“Window sills not clean”

The photograph below shows an example at 8 Martin Avenue where the window has not been washed and cleaned.



NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

Three air fresheners left in the property



The majority of Customer Inspectors stated that three air fresheners had been left in the property. However feedback states that the air fresheners are not always effective.

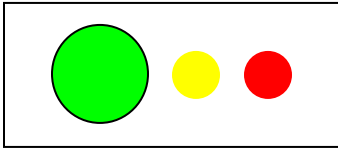
“Air fresheners are not strong enough”

In 8 Martin Avenue the Customer Inspectors found an incident where the sticker from the air freshener had been stuck to the wall of the property and had not been cleared with the rest of the rubbish from the property.



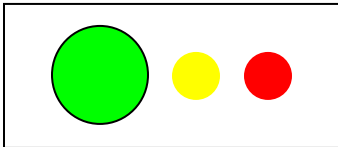
NB This photograph is not representative of the majority, it is an example of where the standard has not been met.

External door fit for purpose, provides adequate security and opens and closes with ease



This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

Sandpit and ponds removed and left with grass finish



This standard was satisfied in all of the properties that were inspected.

Customer Inspectors Recommendations

The Customer Inspectors have given their own suggestions to how the empty properties can be improved. The original versions of the recommendations can be found in the Appendix

Customer Inspector Recommendations

“Gardens need to be tended near the date of allocation due to if tended when property becomes empty they can then become overgrown again and then it looks like it hasn’t been done when in fact it has.

Hot water need to be provided to the cleaners as often disinfectant etc. isn’t used to it full potential with cold water.

Metre/stopcock information to be given to tenants to on sign up

Toilet seats to either be given to tenant or a sticker placed on it when the seat was fitted as most people will still go out and buy a new toilet seat when moving into a property”

Customer Inspector Recommendations

“Decoration, I would recommend that bungalows for OAP’s should be decorated for them when they move in.

Garden I would recommend that when void houses have been cleared that inspectors should go in and inspect.”

Customer Inspector Recommendations

“Old and discoloured light fittings and switches could be replaced rather than trying to clean them.

As no electricity is on in the voids there is no need for bulbs to be fitted, perhaps it would be better if new tenants were given the energy saving lightbulbs when the keys are given.

There are detergents on the market that can be used with cold water – would need to speak to contract cleaners about it.”

Customer Inspector Recommendations

“Gardens and open spaces: recommend that they are tied up and rubbish removed the week before the keys are handed over.

Cleaners: Need access to hot water for cleaning floors and windows as at present they are streaky and money is both is being wasted on this exercise.

Woodwork: such as skirting and door casings to be fully replaced when looking battered as there was sharp contrast between new areas such as new kitchens and bathrooms.

Estate caretaker/manager to do five minute walk around property a few days before keys are handed over to check everything is as it should be.”

Customer Inspector Recommendations

“Recommend property for OAP and disabled people should be in a good standard for them as some don't have people to help them.

Recommend that photos be taken when workmen have cleared the rubbish up then will know if fly tipping is taking place.

Gardens should be cut while empty then done when tenants has moved in so it helps them to maintain their own garden.

Cupboards should all be checked as their were items left is some of the properties. Properties need to be checked when cleaned as I feel they are getting paid and not doing the job properly”

Customer Inspector Recommendations

“Cleanliness – awkward to provide on site without hot water.

Decoration – no wall paper left on.

External areas – garden to be strimmed etc..., one week before let.

Indoors – can check for nails sticking in walls and doors.

Fill in holes in walls

Lightbulbs to be put in house just before the tenant moves in.

Toilet seats replaced before let”

Recommendations

This section contains recommendations about the research project that was carried out and how future inspections of empty properties can be improved.

The checklist that was developed considered all of the standards included in the Void Service Standards, this meant the document was very long and took a long time for the Customer Inspectors to complete. The Customer Inspectors highlighted this in their feedback. The checklist will be reduced for the next empty property inspections.

This set of inspections has been the Customer Inspectors first inspection of an empty property, this meant they were still becoming familiar with the checklist and still learning how to conduct a void inspection. As a result of this a number of the forms were incomplete leaving gaps in the data. A recommendation to resolve this issue would be to reduce the length of the form dramatically which will ensure the dataset is complete.

The Customer Inspectors also completed more than one form per property this meant the data for each property had to be averaged which then prevented the results from being analysed further. To resolve this issue the inspectors should work in pairs and complete one inspection checklist.

The Customer Inspectors took a number of photographs to support their findings. Although there were a great number taken they did not always support where the Inspectors showed the most dissatisfaction. It is therefore important for the Customer Inspectors to take as many photographs as possible to highlight elements of the standard that have not been met.

In relation to the photographs that were taken, they all highlighted areas of dissatisfaction. Although this illustrated where the standard had been met it was not always representative of the sample and made the results appear to be negative when actually the response was very positive. Therefore a recommendation is to take photographs of satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction.

In light of the debrief it was highlighted that the Customer Inspectors should be equipped with a torch, a map and a tape measure to carry out the Empty Property Inspections.

Next Steps

Findings from this report along with the recommendations from the Customer Inspectors will be presented to the Customer Excellence Panel by the Customer Inspectors. The managers from the service area will attend the Customer Excellence Meeting to hear their feedback.

Considering the Customer Inspectors recommendations and other performance data the Customer Excellence Panel will then develop a set of actions for the service area.

A summary of findings and agreed actions will be published in Helena Headlines.

Appendix

Sample of the Void Checklist



Voids Inspection Checklist

House

Customer Inspector.....Date.....Time.....

Property Address.....

Type of property.....

Before you complete your inspection ensure that you have read the briefing carefully and have all the equipment you need to carry out the task. Use the equipment checklist below to help you.

The property you are about to visit has been prepared and inspected for letting. This means there are no foreseeable risks in inspecting the property other than those that would occur in everyday life. No risk assessment is therefore required, however if you do feel there is a risk whilst visiting go immediately to the accompanying officer.

Use the key below to complete the void inspection checklist.

Key

☺ - Satisfied the standard

☹ - Neither satisfied or dissatisfied the standard

⊖ - Dissatisfied the standard

N/a - Not applicable to the property

If you have any further questions about the completion of this checklist please contact Hannah Fitzhenry on 01744 671557

External – Front					
		☺	☹	☹	N/a
1	Clear from rubbish				
2	All shrubbery and grass is cut and tidy				
3	Free from trip hazards				
4	Loose or missing slates on the roof				
5	Existing fencing is secure and in reasonable condition				
6	Windows, window frames and window boards washed and cleaned				
7	Steps to the property are secure and are a non slip surface				
8	External door fit for purpose, provides adequate security and opens and closes with ease				
Additional comments					

Voids Briefing



Voids Briefing for Tenant Inspector

What is a void?

A void is a property that has no legitimate tenant and the property is therefore empty.

Summary of the void procedure

After the termination of a tenancy a Voids Performance Surveyor visits the empty property and determines what works are required for the property to meet the Helena Partnerships Void Standard. These works are then carried out by Helena Propertycare.

During this void survey an asbestos survey and energy performance survey are also carried out. Results of these surveys are passed to new tenants.

Once the property meets the agreed letting standard it will be let via the Helena Neighborhood teams.

Aim of the Inspection

Inspecting this void property will help give us a reality check and will enable us to check that we are meeting our void service standards.

What will happen as a result of your Void Inspection?

The feedback you provide us with will be passed through to our Customer Excellence Panel who will ensure that the recommendations are forwarded to the relevant service manager for action.

Void Standards

	Property Item	Types of Works/ Standard	Core Void Works	Major Void Works	Investment Works
1	Core works completed on all void properties	<p>Test all appliances and issue current NICEIC certificate</p> <p>Ensure smoke alarms are checked and working</p> <p>Test all gas appliances and carry out safety checks</p> <p>Cap off gas supply. Turn off gas and electrical supply and drain domestic hot & cold water in winter months (Dec-Feb)</p> <p>Check water isolation stop tap- ease & adjust if necessary</p> <p>All locks to property changed and at least 2no keys provided- including all communal door keys in HMO's</p> <p>Renew WC seats on all internal WC's</p> <p>Treat vermin and insect infestation, clean & treat as appropriate</p> <p>Clear all remaining rubbish from property including loft spaces and gardens</p> <p>Low energy light bulbs will be installed in every light where fitting allows</p> <p>All walls and ceilings throughout property should be left ready to decorate. All screws/ hooks should be removed, all cracks/ holes in plasterwork should be filled and surfaces should be left free from damaged plaster</p> <p>Complete domestic clean to property to include following items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All floors swept, scraped clean where necessary and mopped with scented disinfectant • All sockets, light fittings and ceiling roses to be cleaned • All doors, architraves and skirting's washed and wiped down • External ground floor, all internal windows, window boards and frames washed down and cleaned • Kitchen units, drawers and work surfaces degreased and cleaned inside and out • Storage areas and stairways to be swept and mopped • All bathroom fittings to be cleaned and disinfected 	<p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p> <p>●</p>		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3no air fresheners to be left in property 			
2	Electrics	<p>Remove all dangerous fittings left by previous occupiers. Leave electric showers in good working condition</p> <p>Ensure electric meter is boxed in cupboard. Ensure cupboard doors open and close easily</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • 		
3	Loft Insulation	Upgrade all loft insulation to 250mm where required. Ensure top layer of insulation is laid at 90° angle to base layer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 		
4	Ventilation	Where extractor fans are fitted, check for excessive dust build up and service if necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 		
5	Floors & Stairs	<p>Repair/ renew all damaged wooden floors/ stairs</p> <p>Ensure all floorboards are nailed and secure with no movement</p> <p>Ensure handrail to stairs is in place and secure. Replace if been removed. Ensure full balustrading is in place. Board over any 'ranch style' railings and decorate in 2no coats of white gloss paint</p> <p>Remove all carpet gripper rods from all rooms</p> <p>Where floor tiles in place, patch repair where necessary- not including kitchens or bathrooms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 		
6	Windows and Doors	<p>All windows should function smoothly, are capable of being fully closed and have tight seals so they are draught free</p> <p>All broken or missing handles, fasteners, vents, restrictors and hinges will be replaced if required</p> <p>All glazing will be free from damage or cracks</p> <p>If windows are not double glazed, Fusion 21 specification double glazed windows should be installed. This will be completed within 3 months of a new tenant moving into the property</p> <p>All external doors must be fit for purpose, robust and provide adequate security, securely hung and able to open and close freely</p> <p>Where a replacement door is required, a Fusion 21 specification composite door will be installed. This will be completed within 3 months of a new tenant moving into the property. This will be a Secured by Design door. Incoming tenants will be given a choice of colours and design of the new door unless it is required prior to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ○ ○

		<p>occupancy</p> <p>If new door is to be fitted to a flat within HMO or bungalow with porch screen, a marked 1 hour fire resistant door is to be installed. This door should meet BS5588 and include smoke seals and a self closer</p> <p>All internal doors should be free from damage or defects, sound and have adequate ironmongery. All kitchen doors in HMO's should be at least 1 hour fire resistant with appropriate door closer fitted</p> <p>All unrestricted windows above ground level must be fitted with Securistyle thumb latches.</p>	●		
7	Internal Joinery	All internal joinery- including facings or skirting boards- to be replaced if required	●		
8	Kitchen	<p>All kitchen units should be clean, damage-free, hygienic and serviceable. All doors/ drawers should open and close correctly and will be clean internally. All doors and handles will match and be secure</p> <p>Wherever possible, ensure a 600mm space for a washing machine is provided with suitable valves installed and also a 600mm space for a fridge with suitable plug and spur fuse above worktop</p> <p>Ensure sink unit has suitable plug and chain is attached</p> <p>Ensure gas or electric cooker point is provided</p> <p>Ensure all worktops have at least 1no courses of matching tiles behind. Renew silicon sealant around worktops if necessary</p> <p>Ensure clean, damage-free and matching vinyl floor tiles are installed throughout kitchen. Replace if necessary</p> <p>Where units are uneconomical to repair, a Fusion 21 specification kitchen will be installed. This will be completed within 3 months of a new tenant moving into the property. This will include replacement of all units, worktops, tiling, flooring and decorating. Incoming tenants will be given a choice of colours and design of the new kitchen.</p>	●	○	○
9	Bathroom/ WC's/ En-suites	<p>All bathroom appliances should be clean, damage-free, hygienic and serviceable. Plugs and chain should be fitted to all basins/ baths</p> <p>Flushing mechanisms should be checked and be in good working order</p> <p>Replace bath panel if damaged/ broken to match existing suite</p>	●		

		<p>Ensure all appliances have at least 1no courses of matching tiles behind. Renew silicon sealant around appliances if necessary</p> <p>Level access showers should have a good seal</p> <p>Where appliances are uneconomical to repair, a Fusion 21 specification bathroom will be installed. This will be completed within 3 months of a new tenant moving into the property. This will include replacement of WC, bath and basin, all tiling and decorating. Incoming tenants will be given a choice of colours and design of the new bathroom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ● 		○
10	Bedrooms	Remove all bedroom fireplaces and make good to brickwork, plasterwork and floor. Ensure ventilation is provided			○
11	Decoratio n/ Finishes	<p>Leave any carpets/ curtains in good condition</p> <p>Remove any polystyrene tiles from dwelling and make good any damage to plasterwork</p> <p>All graffiti to walls, flooring or ceilings should be removed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ● ● 		
12	External	<p>Ensure all shrubbery and grass is cut and tidy</p> <p>Ensure property is free from trip hazards externally. Remove concrete hardstands previously left from sheds/ outhouses. Ensure external steps to property are secure and are a non slip surface</p> <p>Renew fencing if health and safety or security issue. All dividing fencing is the responsibility of the incoming tenant, however all existing fencing should be checked to ensure it is secure and in reasonable condition</p> <p>All ponds/ sandpits will be removed and filled and left with grass finish</p> <p>Check for loose or missing slates/ tiles and repair if necessary</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
13	Post Inspection Visits	100% Post Inspection visits will be completed by Propertycare	●		
14	Void Welcome Pack	Upon tenancy all new tenants will receive a welcome pack			

Original Customer Inspector Feedback Sheets

Customer Inspector Recommendations

1. GARDENS AND OPEN SPACES; RECOMMEND THAT THEY ARE TIDIED UP AND RUBBISH REMOVED THE WEEK BEFORE THE KEYS ARE HANDED OVER.
2. CLEANERS; NEED ACCESS TO HOT WATER FOR CLEANING FLOORS + WINDOWS AS AT PRESENT THEY ARE STREAKY AND MONEY IS BEING WASTED ON THIS EXERCISE.
3. WOOD WORK; SUCH AS SKIRTINGS AND DOOR CASINGS TO BE FULLY REPLACED WHEN LOOKING BOTTLED AS THERE WAS A STRIKE CONTRAST BETWEEN NEW AREAS SUCH AS KITCHENS + BATHROOMS.
4. ESTATE AGENT/manager TO DO A 5 MINUTE WALK ROUND PROPERLY A FEW DAYS BEFORE KEYS ARE HANDED OVER TO CHECK EVERYTHING IS AS IT SHOULD BE.

Customer Inspector Recommendations

Gardens need to be tended near the date of allocation due to if tended when property becomes empty they can then become overgrown again and then it looks like it hasn't been done when in fact it has.

Hot Water need to be provided to the Cleaners as often disinfectant etc is not used to it full potential with cold water.

Notes / Stopcock information to be given to tenants on sign up.

Toilet seats to either be given to tenant or a sticker placed on it when the seat was fitted as most people will still go out and buy a new Toilet Seat when moving into a property.

Customer Inspector Recommendations

Recommendation: I would recommend that Bungalow for R.P. should be decorated for them when they move in. Gardens should be decent for when they move in. I would recommend that when void houses are have been cleaned that inspector should go in and inspect.

Customer Inspector Recommendations

Cleanliness - ~~ask~~ ask ward to provide on site without Hot Water.

Decoration - no wallpaper left on.

External areas - Garden to be strimmed etc. 1 wk before let.

Indoors - Can check for nails sticking - walls + doors.

fill holes in walls.

light bulbs - to be put in houses just before tenants.

Toilet seats - replaced before let.

Customer Inspector Recommendations

old & Discoloured light fittings & switches
Could be replaced rather than trying to clean
them.

As no electricity is on in voids there is no
need for bulbs to be fitted Perhaps it
would be better if new tenant was
given enough E.S.L.B. when they are
given keys -

~~As~~ there are detergents on the market
that can be used in cold water - would
need to speak with contract cleaners about it.

Customer Inspector Feedback

.....
CLEANERS / CLEANING SHOULD BE OFF A MUCH BETTER
STANDARD + HOT / COLD WATER FOR CLEANING SHOULD
CHECKED.....
BUNGALOWS + OTHER PROPERTIES THAT ARE MAINLY.....
FOR DISABLED + OLDER PEOPLE SHOULD ALL BE
STRIPPED BACK + DECORATED EMULSION MET WALLPAPER
GARDENS CUT BACK BEFORE KEYS SIGNED FOR.....
HAKIMA WORKMAN SHOULD CHECK THOSE OWN.....
RUBBISH + SCRAP BITS.....
ALL DAMAGE TO WALLS SHOULD BE REPAIRED.....
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Customer Inspector Recommendations

Recovered Property for org and Disable People
Should be in good STANDARDS for them
As some dont have People to help them

Recommend TUM Photos Be Taken
When work men have cleared Rubbish
Up then will know if fly Tipping is
Taking Place.

Gardens Should Be cut while Empty
and then Done when Tenant has
Moved in so it Helps them To Maintain
There own garden

Cabinets Should ALL Be checked
as Items was left in some Propertys
Properties need To be checked when
cleared as I feel they are getting payed
and not doing the ^{Job} Property Property

Raw Data

The Customer Inspectors collected a large amount of data in each of the properties that they inspected and also a great number of comments were made. If you would like a copy of this data please contact Hannah Fitzhenry on 1557.