



# **Customer Excellence Panel**

## **Empty Property and Lettings Review**

**May 2011**



**Report by**  
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## **Acknowledgements**

A special thanks to the Customer Excellence Panel members who took the time to carry out this review.

Tom Bate (Void Partnership Manager, Neighbourhood Services) and Mick Woodburn (Neighbourhood Lettings Manager) provided feedback to the panel and responded to any queries.

The review was facilitated by Graham Jones (Business Support Advisor) and Hannah Fitzhenry (Customer Insight Officer).

## Summary



### What matters most to tenants?

- Good first impressions of an empty property
- A well maintained garden
- Repairs completed to a good standard
- A clean property
- A reasonably good standard of decoration or vouchers to make own improvements
- Appropriate support for vulnerable tenants
- Agreed service standards are met
- An overall good journey when moving into a Helena Homes property -



### Do our service standards reflect what matters most to tenants?

Although the service standards reflect what matters most to tenants they are not always being met. No changes were suggested to the service standards



### Are we monitoring the right things?

Relet time performance demonstrates some assurance although there is room for significant improvement. Performance is low when compared to other similar organisations, Helena is ranked 23 or 30 similar organisations.

The following Performance Indicators will be reported to the panel as part of the Customer Excellence suite of KPI's:

- General Needs Relet time (All lets not new and not subject to major repairs)
- Unadjusted Relet time (General Needs and Supported)
- Satisfaction with the overall service
- Satisfaction with cleanliness
- Satisfaction with decoration
- Satisfaction with gardens



### Value for money

- Voids Works Management' service is ranked 10 out of 30 similar organisations with a cost of £19.60 per property. However percentage 'Void Rent Loss' was high at a rank of 16 of 30.
- In regards to the lettings service the cost of £37 per property gives a ranking of 5 of 30 similar organisations, the panel were happy with this performance.

*\*Please note costs have been taken from the 2009/10 Activity Based Costing*

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## **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of the Customer Excellence Panel (CEP) review of Helena Homes Voids and Lettings service.

The review was carried out between November 2010 and April 2011.

## **Background**

The Tenant Authority (TSA) expects housing associations to have a clear strategy for involving tenants and residents in influencing and monitoring service delivery.

Tenants should be clear on how they can be involved in managing their homes, and Helena must demonstrate how services have been modified in response to tenant views.

Over recent years there has been increased emphasis on tenant led regulation; ensuring housing associations are accountable to its customers.

“Making services and decisions accountable to, and contestable by, residents, and responding to the resident voice, are vital to achieving... excellence in housing.”

*Chartered Institute of Housing, 2008*

“We expect all housing associations to clearly show how their services have been commented on and influenced by the people living in their homes... We also expect housing associations to be able to show that responding to residents’ views is something that runs through all their activities as part of their culture and the way they deliver services.”

*Housing Corporation, 2007*

Helena has already made successful inroads to achieving this through its Customer Excellence and Resident Involvement Strategies, by providing greater opportunities for tenants to influence the decision-making process and shape the services that they receive. The Customer Excellence Panel is just one of a range of initiatives aimed at achieving this.

## **Introduction**

Helena Homes wants to ensure that our customers are at the heart of everything that we do.

The Customer Excellence Strategy aims to ensure we deliver high quality services based on what matters most to tenants. We want to ensure that we continually improve and deliver customer led services.

The Customer Excellence Panel have a key role within the Customer Excellence Strategy in helping to improve customer satisfaction and raise the percentage of very satisfied tenants by 25% over the next 5 years. It will help ensure that tenants play an active role in shaping service delivery and identifying areas for improvement.

## **About the Customer Excellence Panel (CEP)**

The Customer Excellence Panel (CEP) was established to provide an enhanced scrutiny role across the services Helena provides. Scrutiny is an important function, which helps to ensure that our customers receive high quality services that are relevant to their needs and demonstrate value for

money. It adds a new dimension to Helena's decision-making process by examining and questioning performance and decisions made by the organisation from a tenant's perspective.

## **Aims of the Panel**

The aim of the panel is to help Helena deliver better services by ensuring tenants are able to influence service design and hold Helena to account for performance.

The panel's role is not as a consultation group to advise on policy and procedure, but as a scrutiny panel to challenge the way in which services are provided.

The panel aims to regularly review Helena's performance, actively challenging the way in which we deliver services to assist us in continuous improvement.

The panel will draw on wider sources of information to ensure that they represent the views of the majority of tenants (and residents where applicable). Such information includes customer satisfaction surveys and complaint feedback.

The panel enables tenants to have a greater role in:

- Defining what is important and expressing preference in shaping service delivery, including reviewing and setting service standards
- Monitoring performance and holding Helena to account

In doing this it is hoped that the role of the CEP will help us to increase customer satisfaction with the services Helena provides

Overall the approach will help to further embed a customer focus in the way that Helena behaves, which will lead to better services for customers.

## **Review Process**

The panel has received independent training and support (from the Northern Housing Consortium) in order to build confidence and capacity in their role.

The review entails an overview of service delivery and performance, and questions whether the CEP can further develop a service to improve customer satisfaction and value for money.

To do this the panel is provided with a range of performance information and scrutiny activities to ensure they accurately reflect the customer's experience. The information provided includes:

- Performance data
  - against targets
  - over the past three years (trend analysis)
  - against similar organisations (benchmark information)
- Customer feedback to determine what matters most to tenants
- Complaints information
- Positive feedback and compliments
- Best practice information from other organisations
- Activity Based Costing (ABC) information
- Service Standards
- Findings from Customer Inspector reviews
- One Voice survey findings

- GIS maps to identify geographical trends (where applicable)
- Customer Insight information
- Other information as required

The panel use the stated information to gauge a view of how well a service is performing and ensure that we are working towards meeting tenant priorities and providing value for money. This then enables the panel to recommend service improvements.

If further information is required the panel can request questions to be put to the One Voice tenant panel, or they can request an inspection or a mystery shop by the Customer Inspectors.

As part of the review the panel are also given the opportunity to meet and discuss the service areas performance with the relevant service managers.

This approach helps to ensure that Helena keeps tenants are at the heart of service delivery and that tenant views and opinions are a key consideration in the decision-making process.

## **Empty Properties and Lettings – Customer Excellence Panel Review**

This is the seventh service review undertaken by the panel.

The schedule of reviews was agreed between the Performance and Intelligence Team and the CEP based on the current corporate priorities and aspects that tenants have identified as key drivers of satisfaction. The review schedule for 2011/12 will be published shortly and can be found on Highway within the Customer Excellence Project section.

### **Aims of the Review**

Specifically relating to Voids and Lettings, the review aimed to :

- Review and scrutinise performance & customer feedback (including complaints)
- Agree Customer Excellence Performance Indicators
- Review current Service Standards
- Recommend areas of improvement and identify actions
- Consider whether the service is providing value for money and delivering excellent services to tenants and residents.

### **Approach to the Review**

The Performance and Intelligence team presented an overview of performance to date drawing on the range of information outlined within the 'Review Process' section.

A number of breakout sessions were held throughout the presentation in order for the panel to discuss their views and opinions, ask questions and challenge performance.

The breakout sessions were structured around:

- What matters most to Helena Tenants?
- Do our Service Standards reflect this?
- How are we performing? (considering cost and value for money)
- Are we monitoring the right things?
- What improvements do tenants want?

Managers were invited to attend the meeting to respond to any questions the panel raised and explain any reasoning behind decisions made.

A wrap up session was held to develop an action plan. The action plan identified the recommended improvements to the Voids and Lettings service.

## Findings

Overall the panel were fairly impressed with the current performance of the Empty Property and Lettings service. The panel were happy with the current service standards and were satisfied that they met their expectations however were concerned that they were not always being met.

As with the previous service reviews the panel have agreed to continue to monitor a selection of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) specifically relating to aspects of the Empty Property and Lettings service that are important to tenants. Details of the specific KPI's can be found in the 'Are we monitoring the right things?' section of this report.

The panel acknowledged that when benchmarked in terms of value for money the 'Voids Works Management' service is ranked 10 out of 30 similar organisations with a cost of £19.60 per property. However percentage 'Void Rent Loss' was considered high at a rank of 16 of 30.

In regards to the lettings service the cost of £37 per property gives a ranking of 5 of 30 similar organisations, the panel were happy with this performance.

(\*Please note costs have been taken from the 2009/10 Activity Based Costing)

The following sections outline the findings and actions that have been discussed and agreed as part of the review of the Empty Property and Lettings Review.

## How are we performing?

The CEP considered that Empty Property and Lettings service to be performing well however highlight that there still needs to be some improvements made.

The Customer Inspectors reality check demonstrates good performance although highlights some ways to further improve the service particularly around cleanliness. The Inspectors gave ratings of 'very' or 'fairly' good to eight of the eleven properties that were given a reality check.

First impressions of a property were considered to be an important element of a property and the panel were pleased with the Inspectors findings giving a satisfaction level of 82%.

The panel considered performance with garden maintenance required some improvement, the Empty Property survey had a satisfaction rate of only 58%. Evidence from the Inspectors reality check and the One Voice survey highlighted that Garden Maintenance was an issue. The panel highlighted that 'curb' appeal needed to be considered when maintaining empty properties.

Repairs were discussed by the panel although performance was good at 89% (*Empty Property Survey*) the Inspectors reality check demonstrated that there were failures to meet the required repairs. This was considered particularly important as consultation with the One Voice panel underlined that it is the most important aspect to tenants when moving into a new property.

The panel were happy that the cleaning specification reflected what matter's to tenants and that the Empty Property survey supported that performance was high at 89% satisfied, however the panel



were concerned that empty properties were not always meeting the standard, demonstrated by the Inspectors reality check.

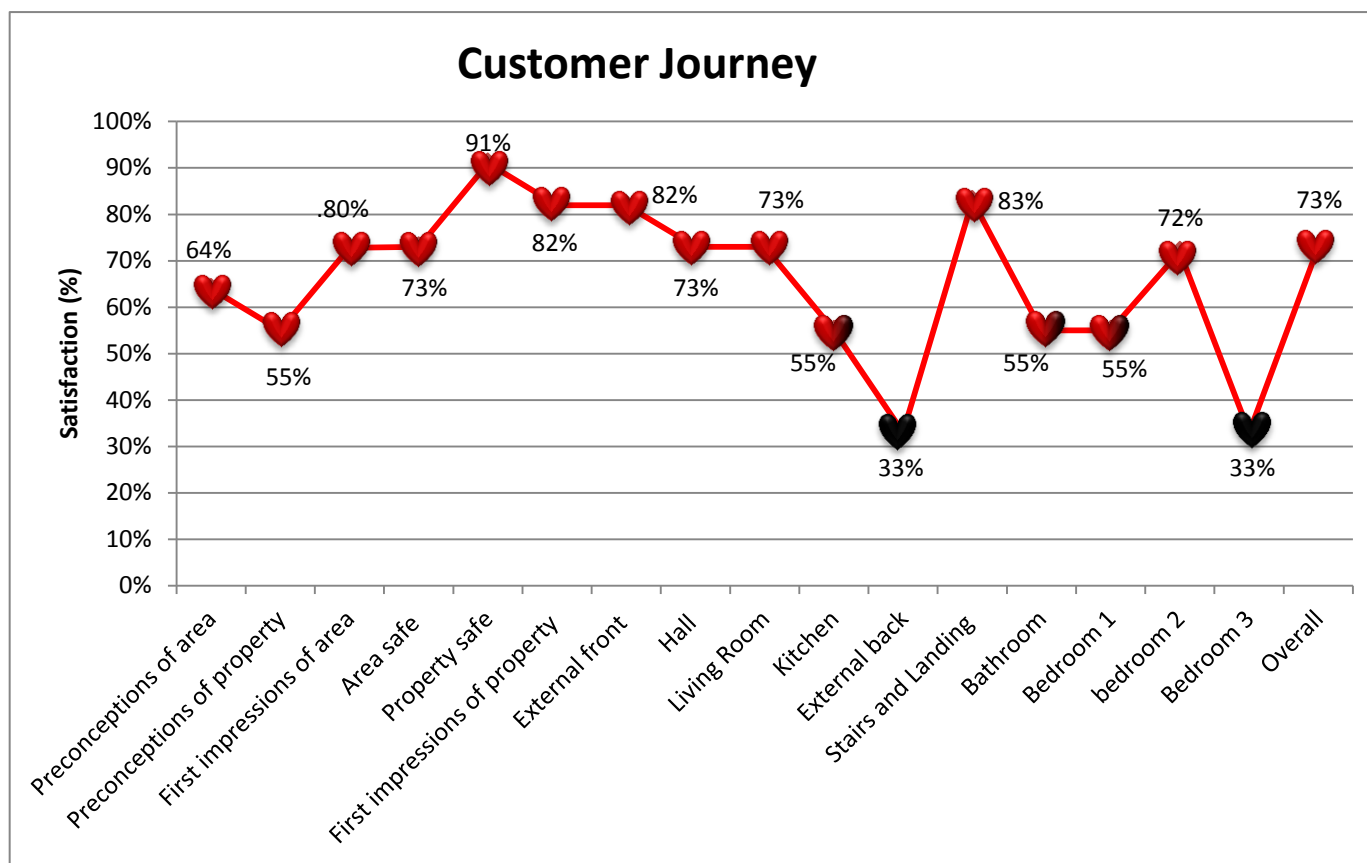
Decoration was something that was poorly rated by the Inspectors, the panel considered the cost of decorating properties and concluded that vouchers could be used to improve decoration although in extreme cases Helena should carry out improvements to the decoration.

Overall the panel agree that the service is performing well with improvements already taking place, the panel are keen to see continuous improvement with this service and would like to see an improvement when benchmarked with other similar organisations. The panel would like to continue to monitor the service in their suite of performance indicators and also conduct a small review at a later date supported by a reality check conducted by the Inspectors.

### What matters most to tenants?

As part of the review the panel considered a variety of evidence to demonstrate what is important to Helena tenants.

The Customer Inspectors conducted inspections in eleven randomly selected empty properties, the average opinion of the visits has been displayed as a Customer Journey below.



The panel were fairly impressed with the majority of the customer journey in particular the first impressions of the property and the external front areas of a property, the overall opinion of the property was also relatively high at 73%. Some areas of the journey demonstrated poor performance this related to the external back areas of a property and some bedrooms, the kitchen and bathrooms were also rated lower than other elements of the journey.

## ***First impressions***

Although overall first impression was rated highly at 82% the Customer Inspectors highlighted a small number of areas that were dissatisfactory.

Shutters had been used on a number of the properties that were visited as part of the inspection, they were considered to have an impact on the first impression of a property. For example the Inspectors visited a large property in Clock Face which had shutters, the first impression of this property were 'fairly dissatisfied'. As a result the panel discouraged the use of shutters and where necessary polycarbonate shutters should be used.

As a side issue the Customer Inspectors detailed that on a number of occasions where shutters had been fitted damage had been caused to the inside of the property. The panel considered this and felt that this supports the idea that they should only be used when completely necessary and when they are fitted care should be taken not to cause additional damage to the property which will later require repair.

The Inspectors also found that tall fencing at the front of a property makes a poor first impression, it was considered to be 'oppressive' and gave the impression it was the rear of the property. The panel suggested that this type of design should be avoided.

## ***Garden maintenance***

The Customer Journey highlights that the external back areas of a property are an area rated less satisfactory than others with an average rating of 33%.

The panel were keen that the maintenance of gardens in empty properties undergoes some improvements. Respondents to the One Voice survey (December 2010) who had an empty property near to where they live had some experience of ASB (50%) and fly tipping (55%). 50% also agreed that they had experienced an untidy garden whilst the property had remained empty.

The panel considered that a well maintained garden would reduce the likelihood of any incidents of nuisance and fly tipping. The panel noted that it would also be difficult for Helena to enforce elements of the tenancy agreement that relate to tidy gardens if Helena do not maintain them whilst they are empty. Only 58% of new tenants rated the appearance of the garden positively. (*Empty Property Survey*)

The Inspectors feedback from the empty properties they visited supported the need to improve garden maintenance, in three of the eleven properties the garden was highlighted as being most need of improvement.

An untidy garden gives a poor impression of a property when a prospective new tenant views a property.

Fencing was specifically highlighted as a concern for tenants in relation to empty properties, the Inspectors found that fencing was of a poor standard. (This was in 2 of the 11 external front areas and three of the six external back areas).

The panel are concerned with the maintenance of gardens in particular the back external areas of a property, it was considered to be an area that is important to tenants and therefore requiring improvement. To help overcome the issue regarding fencing the panel suggested that particular care is taken to inform new tenants of their responsibility to maintain fencing when they take a tenancy with a garden.

## **Repairs**

The completion of repairs was rated as the second most important element when moving into a new home. (*December 2010 One Voice survey*). The panel therefore considered it important to ensure the necessary repairs are being completed. They also acknowledged that the Inspectors found incidents when repairs were incomplete. The panel were aware that some repairs were carried out once the tenant moves into the property.

The panel were keen to minimise the amount of disruption caused to new tenants and were therefore pleased that when a property is within two years of its cyclical maintenance programme the works will be carried out whilst the property remains empty. They highlighted that any major works should be carried out before the tenant moves into the property.

Results of the Empty Property survey suggested that new tenants were happy with the repairs to their home before they move in, 84% were satisfied. Although the panel were pleased with the result of this the reality check conducted by the Inspectors suggested that there is still room for improvement.

The Inspectors found that on some occasions internal doors required repair to ensure they open and close correctly, the panel felt that this was a basic repair and should always be completed before the property is viewed.

The replacement of skirting boards was also highlighted as an issue by the Inspectors. The panel agreed that skirting should not be pieced, full lengths should be used to replace damaged skirting.

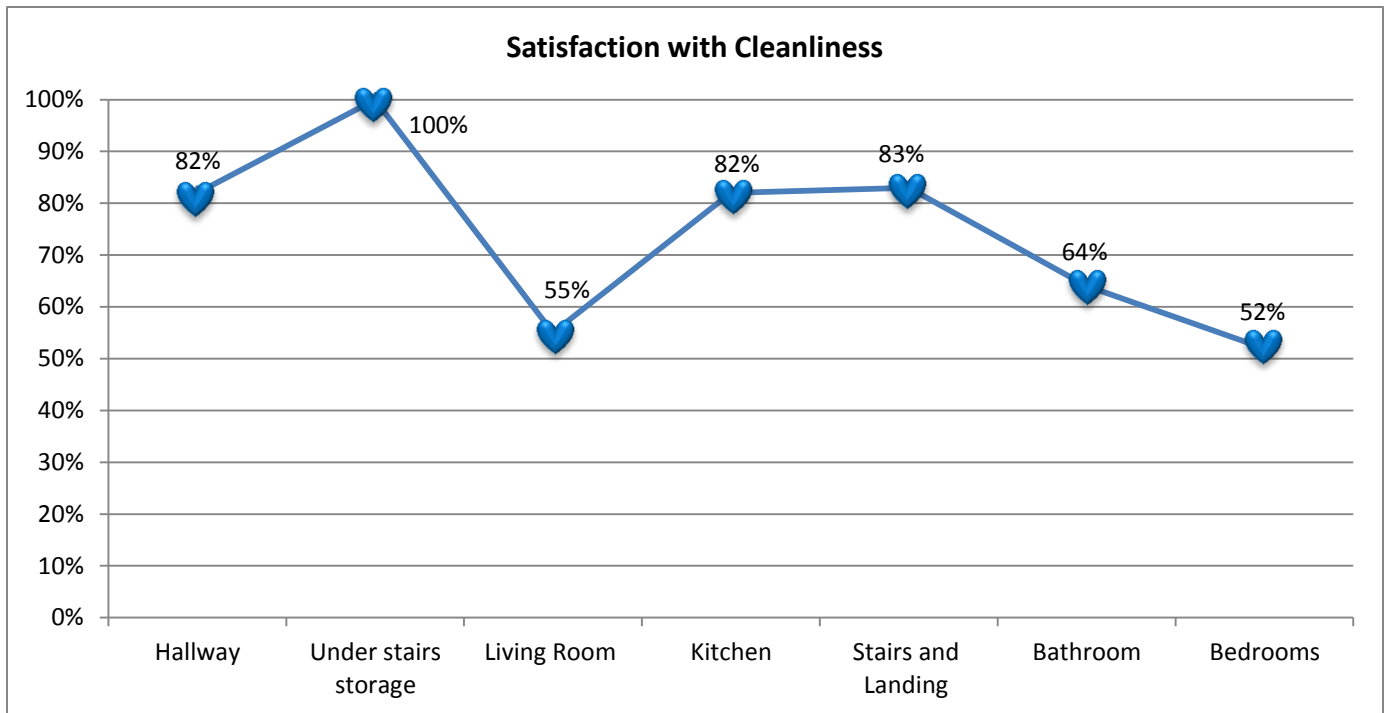
Based on feedback from the Customer Inspectors a number of additional issues relating to repairs were discussed by the panel, for example the fitting of external lighting to improve the feeling of safety equipment and also kitchen layouts. The panel felt that some of the issues related to the works carried out during an improvement programme, they therefore concluded that this would need to be carried out as a full review. This has now been scheduled to begin in June 2011.

## **Cleanliness**

Cleanliness was rated as the most important aspect when moving into a new property. (*One Voice December 2010 survey*) The panel therefore felt that it was important to have a good level of cleanliness in all properties that are ready to let.

The Empty Property survey demonstrated a high level of cleanliness with 89% being satisfied, the panel felt that this should continue to improve.

Although the survey showed a high level of satisfaction the Customer Inspectors were less satisfied with the cleanliness of the properties they visited. The diagram on the following page displays the average journey of the empty properties visited as part of the Inspection.



The panel considered the feedback from the Customer Inspectors journey map and felt that performance demonstrated some requirement for improvement specifically in the living room, bathrooms and bedrooms.

The panel were particularly disappointed with the cleanliness of some of the properties that were part of the inspections. They acknowledged that even though new tenants will want to clean the property themselves the service standards should always be met. The Letting Standard relating to cleanliness was not met completely in all the properties that were inspected. It was considered to give a poor impression, in particular the cleanliness of bathrooms required improvement with it generally being rated lower (64%) than other rooms and it was also highlighted as an important to room to demonstrate a high level of cleanliness.

It was advised that care be taken to ensure all aspects of a property are cleaned to the same standard. In particular the Empty Property Inspection evidenced that care should be taken when cleaning light switches, light fittings, plug sockets, radiators and sinks. The panel agreed that when these cannot be cleaned to a good standard they should be replaced.

The panel supported the Inspectors recommendation to ensure the toilet is always flushed when ready for let.

The panel requested copies of the cleaning specification to ensure it reflected what matter most to customers and it reflected issues highlighted the Inspectors. The panel were happy that the cleaning specification detailed all necessary elements that matter to tenants however highlighted that this standard should always be met.

### ***Decoration***

The Inspectors highlighted that decoration in some of the empty properties was of an extremely poor standard this therefore led the panel to consider that mechanisms should be put in place to rectify poorly decorated properties. Four of the eleven properties visited as part of the inspection were rated

as dissatisfied for their overall decoration, a further two were rated as 'neither'.

The journey diagram below displays the overall satisfaction levels of the decoration in the properties visited.



The panel suggested that all parts of the property should demonstrate some improvement with the decoration of a property. As a result it led the panel to consider the use of decoration vouchers.

The Empty Property survey provided the panel with information about the use of incentives when moving into a new home. As vouchers are currently issued on an ad hoc basis decided by the Lettings Officers, it was felt that there should be a more co-ordinated approach. Results of the One Voice survey (December 2010) highlighted which vouchers customers would prefer to receive. However the panel felt it was necessary for further consultation with customers specifically considering those customers who may require support with decorating and carrying out other improvements to their home.

Results of the Empty Property Survey demonstrated that a high proportion (84%) of new tenants received an incentive with over a third (34%) highlighting that they would not have accepted the property without it.

### **Complaints**

The panel were impressed with the number of complaints received in relation to Empty Properties and Lettings, this is only 2% of all complaints received. Due to low numbers received the panel felt that no further analysis could be conducted into any commonality to identify areas of improvement.

## **Vulnerable tenants**

As a result of this review the panel suggested that further investigation and consideration would be required into the services offered to vulnerable tenants. It was therefore suggested that in the future the panel would conduct a full review of tenancy support with supporting evidence in the way of a focus group.

## **Overall**

Properties that were inspected by the Customer Inspectors failed to meet the Letting Standard on at least one occasion. (*Customer Inspector Empty Property Inspection Report January 2011*) The panel suggested that standards had been set by customers and consequently should always be met.

## **Do our service standards reflect what matters most to tenants?**

It was highlighted that although the service standards reflect what matters most to tenants they are not always being met.

It was considered to be very important that the standards are met when all properties are let, this relates specifically to the letting standard. The Empty Property survey demonstrates that 66% of new tenants feel that their property met the letting standard. The Customer Inspectors also highlighted incidents where standards have not been met.

The panel recently reviewed all of Helena's service standards; the standards were published as the Customer Charter and distributed to all tenants. The panel were happy with the current standards and felt that it is important that are Helena are meeting what matters most to its tenants which is reflected in the agreed standards.

It was therefore agreed that there was no required changes to the service standards relating to Empty Properties and Lettings.

## **Are we monitoring the right things?**

The panel recognised the importance of measuring quantitative information to evidence compliance with Service Standards and Performance Indicators.

The panel have their own suite of Key Performance Indicators that they monitor on a quarterly basis. Whilst the panel recognise the need to monitor regulatory requirements and assess financial viability, they would also like to monitor issues that are important to tenants which will help us to ensure we are working towards improving services for tenants and in turn increase our percentage of very satisfied.

The panel were asked to consider what performance information they would like to monitor in relation to the Empty Properties and Lettings service.

Relet time performance demonstrates some assurance although there is room for significant improvement. Performance is low when compared to other similar organisations, Helena is ranked 23 of 30 similar organisations.

To improve the relet time the panel suggested that the number of back to back lets is increased along with encouraging tenants to give four weeks' notice, during which repairs can be completed.

The panel have suggested that the Voids and Lettings team look at what top performing organisations are doing to help reduce the relet time.

Reducing the lettings cycle from two weeks to one week would help to reduce the relet time and therefore the panel requested that the team also investigate this.

The panel suggested that to improve how Helena advertises properties the following should be considered:

- Estate Agent style advertisement including the inside of properties and gardens
- Access to floor plans of properties
- Advertise weekly on the website but continue with a fortnightly

The panel suggested an achievable target of 43 days for the relet time and highlighted that performance needs to demonstrate some improvements.

The following Performance Indicators will be reported to the panel as part of the Customer Excellence suite of KPI's:

- General Needs Relet time (All lets not new and not subject to major repairs)
- Unadjusted Relet time (General Needs and Supported)
- Satisfaction with the overall service
- Satisfaction with cleanliness
- Satisfaction with decoration
- Satisfaction with gardens

To support the performance indicators the panel requested some contextual information to explain any trends and reasons for performance.

### ***Changes to the Empty Property Survey***

The results of the Empty Property survey were considered useful by the panel and the results were used as evidence to demonstrate how well the service was performing. They suggested that some amendments were necessary to ensure that it is clear and customer friendly and there were elements to gather feedback areas that matter most to tenants and in turn the panel can use it to monitor performance.

In addition to enable the panel to monitor what matters most to our tenants and to monitor the impact of their recommendations the panel suggested some changes to the Empty Property survey.

A copy of the proposed Empty Property survey can be found within the Appendix at the back of this report.

## **Recommendations**

In order to increase the percentage of tenants stating that they are satisfied with this service the panel recommends that:

- Major repairs are completed before a customer moves into a property should be defined
- Where possible the customer should be given target times for the completion of minor repairs to be completed once they have moved in.
- Maximise the use of any items left by the previous tenant and offer them to the new tenant's where possible
- Gardens should be given a tidy once the tenant moves in
- Caretakers should ensure fly tipping is removed whilst the property is empty
- Properties with gardens should be given to those who are able to maintain them
- Further consultation is required with customers into the issuing of vouchers.

- Amend the Empty Property survey
- Improve the cleanliness in Empty Properties particularly in the living rooms, bathrooms and bedrooms
- In extreme cases decoration should be carried out instead of issuing vouchers
- When vouchers are given the tenant should be told specifically why the voucher has been issued

## **Next steps**

An action plan in response to the panel findings has been agreed.

The outcomes will be presented to the Customer Excellence Strategy Group and Board.

The Service Standards and Customer Excellence KPI's identified as part of this review will be publicised to tenants via headlines and leaflets and other literature amended accordingly.



## Appendix 1 - Action Plan

|   | <b>Recommendation</b>                                 | <b>Action(s)</b>  | <b>Reason</b>  | <b>Manager Response</b>  | <b>Who</b> | <b>When</b>       |
|---|---|---|--|--|------------|-------------------|
| 1 | <b>Make improvements to the Empty Property Survey</b> | Make amendments to the Empty Property Survey according to the panel feedback.                                   | The panel felt that the survey required some amendments to ensure tenants fully understand what they are being asked along with the considering what feedback is required on the Voids and Lettings service. | <b>Agreed</b> - The survey will be amended accordingly from Quarter 2 2011/12  | Tom Bate   | Quarter 2 2011/12 |
| 2 | <b>Improve safety</b>                                 | Fit security lights to the external areas of some properties.   | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop  | <b>Further feedback</b> will be gathered from the Assets team. Lights are only replaced if necessary.  | CEP        | From June 11      |
| 3 | <b>Improve the first impressions of a property</b>    | Where possible do not use security shutters.  | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop suggested that does not give a good first impression.  | <b>Agreed</b> - The use of screens has been reduced and the specification is for plastic at the front unless there is a justification for metal. Contractors will be reminded. | Tom Bate   | Complete          |
| 4 |   | Ensure fencing is of a good standard and inform tenants of their responsibility when they move into a property. | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop.   | <b>Agreed</b> - New tenants will be informed of their responsibility on sign up. Letting Officers will be informed.  | Tom Bate   | Complete          |
| 5 |   | To give a good impression there should be a nice front door fitted with a door number.                          | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop.   | <b>Further Feedback</b> - This is only carried out when the door is in need of replacement although further feedback will be gathered from Assets.                             | CEP        | From June 11      |
| 6 |   | Where possible do not have tall fencing at the front of a property  | Tall fencing at the front of a property looks oppressive and doesn't give a good first impression.   | <b>Agreed</b> - Front fencing is low unless it is an integral part of the estate design. (Empty Property should replicate existing fencing policy)                             | Tom Bate   | Complete          |

|    | <b>Recommendation</b>  | <b>Action(s)</b>   | <b>Reason</b>   | <b>Manager Response</b>   | <b>Who</b> | <b>When</b> |
|----|--|--|---|---|------------|-------------|
| 7  | <b>Tidy gardens, free from rubbish</b>                         | Gardens should all be tidy and free from rubbish.  | This is part of the standard however the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop highlighted incidents when this was not met.   | <b>Agreed</b> - A final quality check of the garden will be conducted   | Tom Bate   | Complete    |
| 8  |  | Gardens should be maintained whilst they are empty, for customers viewing the property.                    | The panel highlighted that it would be difficult to enforce the need for tenants to maintain their garden if Helena don't take responsibility whilst it is empty. | Additional tidy up's will be done on request and targeted at vulnerable new tenants. Prohibited by cost and capacity. After the Chamber have done an original tidy up further work is unlikely to be required if the property is let quickly.                           | Tom Bate   | Complete    |
| 9  |  | Tenant should be informed of their responsibility to look after the garden when they move into a property. | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop suggested that gardens were not always maintained by the tenant.  | <b>Agreed</b> - The maintenance of gardens forms part of the tenancy agreement. Lettings Officers will go through this at viewings. Letting Officers will be reminded to highlight this standard to new tenants.  | Tom Bate   | Complete    |
| 10 |  | Caretakers should ensure there is no fly tipping whilst the property is empty.                             |   | <b>Agreed</b> - Caretakers monitor voids on a periodic basis. Other Neighbourhood staff are also encouraged to check properties and report rubbish. From April 11 the Caretakers will provide a limited additional check to undertake any further tidying as necessary. | Tom Bate   | Complete    |
| 11 | <b>Improve poorly decorated properties</b>                     | In extreme circumstances decoration should take place based on a case by case basis.                       | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop suggests some properties have an extremely poor standard of decoration.   | This will be referred through the new tenants leaflet, however the extent of decoration is limited by the cost.   | Tom Bate   | July 2011   |
| 12 | <b>Further consultation on the use of vouchers/ incentives</b> | Incentives should be used to maintain the standard of the property   | Feedback from the One Voice November 2010 Survey.   | <b>Agreed</b> - The policy will be reviewed later in the year in consultation with customers, the panel will be updated.  | Tom Bate   | Dec 2011    |

|    | <b>Recommendation</b>   | <b>Action(s)</b>  | <b>Reason</b>   | <b>Manager Response</b>  | <b>Who</b> | <b>When</b> |
|----|---|---|---|--|------------|-------------|
| 13 | <b>Items left in the property</b>                                 | Leave any carpet that is in good condition, the tenant should make the decision to whether they want to keep them or if they would like them to be removed. | Further suggestions from the Customer Excellence Panel suggestion based on evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop  | <b>Agreed</b> - This has been implemented from the beginning of 2011, tenants are informed that once they agree to the carpets remaining in their property it then becomes their responsibility.   | Tom Bate   | Complete    |
| 14 |   | Customer should be asked if they would like to take ownership for any sheds that have been left in good repair.   | Further suggestions from the Customer Excellence Panel suggestion based on evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop  | <b>Agreed</b> - This has already been implemented. Tenants are informed that once they agree to the shed remaining in their property it then becomes their responsibility.   | NA         | NA          |
| 15 | <b>Appropriate repairs carried out before the tenant moves in</b> | Basic repairs should done once the tenant moves into the property.  | Feedback from tenants highlights that completion of repairs is important to tenants when they move into a property. In addition the Empty Property survey highlights that there is some room for improvement. | This usually relates to the external work that would not impact on the let ability of the dwelling.  | Tom Bate   | Complete    |
| 16 |   | Repairs that are easier to carry out when the property is empty should be done before the tenant moves in.  |   | Already existing practise  | Tom Bate   | NA          |
| 17 |   | New tenant should be promised which repairs will be done before and after they move in and all given specific times and dates.                              |   | <b>Disagreed</b> - Likely to have limited impact. Only gas servicing and certain improvements are done on tenancy (safety reasons) For small amounts of work we are considering asking the surveyors to re - inspect properties after moving in to facilitate their input. In such circumstances the repairs are done as day to day with appointments offered – possibly using a multi trade handy person. | Tom Bate   | NA          |
| 18 | <b>Replace fully length skirting board rather than a piece.</b>   | Replace full length of skirting board rather than a piece.  | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop   | <b>Agreed</b> - This is current working practise, existing examples will be examined.  | Tom Bate   | Complete    |

|    | <b>Recommendation</b>   | <b>Action(s)</b>  | <b>Reason</b>   | <b>Manager Response</b>   | <b>Who</b>   | <b>When</b>                |
|----|---|---|---|---|--|----------------------------|
| 19 | <b>All doors should be of a good standard</b>                 | Test all doors in the property to ensure they open and close correctly                          | Evidence from the Customer Inspectors Mystery Shop  | <b>Agreed</b> - This is currently done. The officers will be updated / reminded.  | Tom Bate   | Complete                   |
| 20 | <b>The cleanliness of empty properties should be improved</b> | Light switches, light fittings and plug sockets should be cleaned and when necessary replaced.  | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop suggested that this was an area that tended to be less clean than other parts of the property | <b>Agreed</b> - This is something that is contained within the cleaning standard, contractors will be reminded and performance reviewed.      | Tom Bate   | Complete                   |
| 21 |   | Clean and sometimes paint radiators that are of a poor standard.                                |   | <b>Disagreed</b> - This would occur as part of a full decoration of the room, it would be expensive. Vouchers are issued to solve this issue. | Tom Bate   | NA                         |
| 22 |   | Improve the cleanliness of bathroom in particular bathroom tiles.                               |   | <b>Agreed</b> - This is something that is contained within the cleaning standard, contractors will be reminded and performance reviewed.      | Tom Bate   | Complete (Review Aug 11)   |
| 23 |   | No property should look like it requires cleaning.  |   | Feedback from the Customer Inspectors led the panel to consider that all properties should look like they don't require cleaning.             | <b>Agreed</b> - Currently reviewing the marketing and specification of a domestic clean to increase customer satisfaction. Incentives are offered when a property is left in a good condition, this also helps to reduce the cost of the cleaning. |                            |
| 24 |   | Walls and woodwork should be cleaned to a good standard.  | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop   | See comment 22  | Tom Bate   |                            |
| 25 |   | Toilet flushed in all properties  | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop   | <b>Agreed</b> - All teams will be reminded.   | Tom Bate   | Complete (On going checks) |
| 26 | Remove builders dust from the sink                            | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop   | <b>Agreed</b> - Cleaning teams and operatives will both be reminded.  | Tom Bate  |  |                            |
| 27 | <b>Take care when fitting security windows and doors</b>      | When it is necessary to fit security windows and doors care should be taken not to cause damage | The Inspectors found example where the fitting of security windows and doors had caused damage.   | <b>Agreed</b> - Contractors will be monitored for further examples.   | Tom Bate   |                            |

|    | <b>Recommendation</b>                                | <b>Action(s)</b>  | <b>Reason</b>   | <b>Manager Response</b>   | <b>Who</b> | <b>When</b>    |
|----|--|---|---|---|------------|----------------|
| 28 | <b>Consider the best layout</b>                      | Consider the best layout of the kitchen and the boiler  | Evidence Mystery Shop suggests some kitchen are not always practical, particularly in small kitchens it is important to make best use of the space available. | <b>Further investigation</b> will be required with the Assets team as this is something covered as part of cyclical maintenance. Surveyors currently consider all the Health and Safety issues when repositioning elements of a kitchen | CEP        | From June 2011 |
| 29 |  | All kitchen appliances should fit in the kitchen.   | Evidence from the Customer Inspectors Mystery Shop, this is also something highlighted in the Letting Standard  | <b>Further investigation</b> - Reflected on the cyclical maintenance policies. Space limitations are an issue and surveyors engage with customers to make best use of the space available   | CEP        | From June 2011 |
| 30 |  | In properties with separate toilets a small hand basin should be fitted.  | Evidence from the Customer Inspector Mystery Shop.  | <b>Agreed</b> - This is implemented where possible  | Tom Bate   | Complete       |
| 31 | <b>Find out what other organisations are doing</b>   | Gather information from other organisations about their letting process (specifically length of the cycle)              | The Customer Excellence Panel suggested further information is required about the 2 weeks cycle.  | <b>Agreed</b> - Completed as part of the brief to improve the lettings process. Emphasis on identifying costs and benefits of developing a weekly advert cycle, research with other's indicates this gives better results.              | Tom Bate   | Nov 2011       |
| 32 | <b>Improve the way we advertise empty properties</b> | Include the number of the property within the advertisement so the customer can and view the property from the outside. | To enable customers to view the external areas of a property and help them to decide if the property is suitable.   | <b>Disagreed</b> - It may be possible to advertise flat block numbers however there will be security implications with empty properties.  | NA         | NA             |
| 33 |  | Advertisements of properties using an 'Estate Agent' style with photographs of the inside/outside                       |   |   |            |                |
| 34 |  | Include floor plans/layouts of the property   | To improve the time taken to let a property.  | <b>Further investigation</b> - Explored during the next 12 months as part of the Lettings process. Cost and turnaround may limit the scope.   | Tom Bate   | Feb 2012       |

|    | <b>Recommendation</b>         | <b>Action(s)</b>   | <b>Reason</b>   | <b>Manager Response</b>   | <b>Who</b>    | <b>When</b>    |
|----|-------------------------------|--|---|---|---------------|----------------|
| 35 | <b>Improve the relet time</b> | Encourage four week notices and conduct repairs during this period   | Based on the relet time along with benchmarking information | <b>Agreed</b> - Four week notices have risen from 15% to 60%. Access is now arranged to undertake an inspection making use of this period. This will continue and the panel will be updated on this progress.   | Mick Woodburn | Complete       |
| 36 |                               | Monitor and increase back to back lets   |   | <b>Agreed</b> - This is also something that is being conducted, the panel will be updated on this progress. This will be in conjunction with the evaluation of weekly advert cycle.   | Mick Woodburn | Nov 2011       |
| 37 |                               | Advertise properties on a weekly basis on the website, however to save on the cost of publishing in the properties in the paper this should remain as 2 weeks. |   | <b>Further consideration</b> - This is being considered for later in the year although all media outlets would need to be consistent for advert periods to avoid confusion. The panel will be updated on the progress.  | Mick Woodburn | Update in 2012 |
| 38 |                               | Consider the costs and resource implications and time practicality issues of changing the cycle to weekly.   |   | Currently part of a wider 2 year project, includes introducing new lettings policies/processes along with this years progress using the VIVO system. Alongside further Voids Management (VIVO system) phases a new service review is commencing for the introduction of "Open Access" computer system which could facilitate weekly adverts. However these will take time to fully cost, develop and implement. The panel will continue to be updated on this progress. | Mick Woodburn | Update in 2012 |

|    | <b>Recommendation</b>                                 | <b>Action(s)</b>  | <b>Reason</b>   | <b>Manager Response</b>   | <b>Who</b> | <b>When</b> |
|----|---|---|---|---|------------|-------------|
| 39 | <b>Publicise the support from other organisations</b> | Publish the available support from other organisations when a tenant moves into a property. | This will help tenants to maintain their property and is ultimately a benefit to Helena.  | <b>Agreed</b> - This is done within the time constraints at sign up. Lettings Officers provide information on sources for benefits advice, low cost furniture (in addition to furnished accommodation), Helping Hands service offered by the council, home fire safety check and the potential for tenancy support. Neighbourhood Officers will offer advice about tenants groups and more detail about local amenities. Officers will all be reminded.   | Tom Bate   | Complete    |
| 40 | <b>Service standards should be met</b>                | The panel recommend that all standards should be met.                                       | The panel highlighted that the service standards reflect what matter most to tenants however they are not always being met. Properties are inspected before let so the Customer Inspectors should not find incidents where the property does not meet the standard. | <b>Agreed</b> - Lettings Officers go through the checklist with new tenants. A new leaflet will be provided for 2011/12 allowing customers to tick standards that are applicable to a property.<br><br>Properties are inspected both before and after the contractors work is completed. We have introduced a Quality Assurance check at the end of the repairs and clean-up work. This has raised satisfaction levels as reported to board in September: The recent Mystery Shopping Inspection raised concerns on individual properties that are being reviewed to ensure greater consistency in performance. | Tom Bate   | Complete    |

## Appendix 2 - Workbook

The following workbook was completed by the Panel during the breakout sessions.  
The questions were used as a prompt to aid discussions.

The Panel were later given the opportunity to speak with Service Managers and discuss their findings.

The comments within this document were used to form the recommendations outlined in the service area review action plan.

### HELENA PARTNERSHIPS SERVICE REVIEW DOCUMENT *Customer Excellence Panel*

**Service Area:** Voids and Lettings  
**Date:** December 2010 – April 2011

**A presentation was delivered by the Performance and Intelligence Manager followed by breakout sessions with CEP to discuss:**

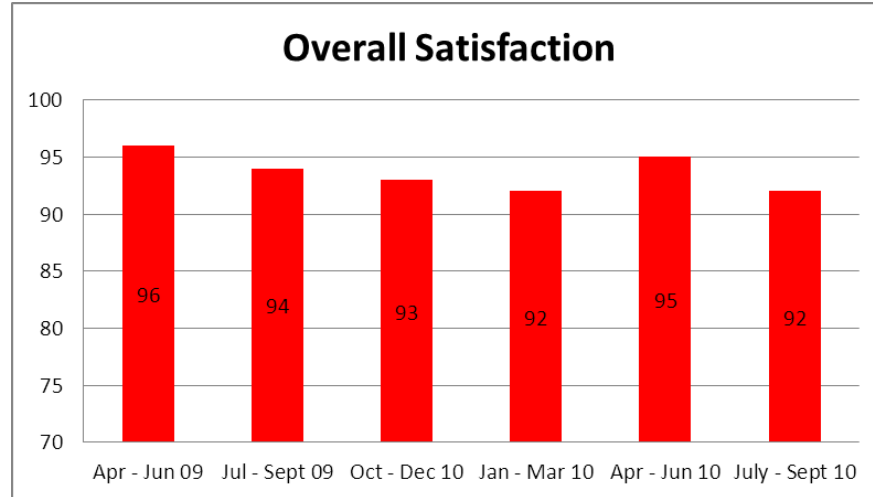
- Current performance (trend analysis and benchmark position)
- Target setting
- Summary overview – what we do well?
- Summary overview – areas for improvement?



## 1. Key Survey Findings



The chart to the left illustrates **overall satisfaction** with the process associated with gaining a Helena property.

The table to the left illustrates the elements which inform overall satisfaction with the process associated with applying for a home including **UOR**:







| Measure %<br>Satisfied (dissatisfied) unless stated            | Cumulative<br>09/ 10 | Qtr 1  | Qtr 2   | Trend |
|--|----------------------|--------|---------|-------|
| How easy was it to access the UOR advert?                      | 95 (0.5)             | 96 (2) | 98 (1)  | ↑     |
| UOR is user friendly?  | 94.5 (0.5)           | 95 (2) | 99 (0)  | ↑     |
| When bidding how easy was it to get through to UOR?            | 85 (1)               | 94 (1) | 91 (2)  | ↓     |
| How easy was it to place a bid?                                | 93 (0)               | 95 (2) | 95 (1)  | ↔     |
| Satisfaction with service from UOR team?                       | 92 (2)               | 95 (2) | 93 (4)  | ↓     |
| Were you given the opportunity to view before accepting? (Y/N) | 99 (1)               | 98 (2) | 100 (0) | ↑     |

The following table illustrates elements of the survey that relate to additional service elements not considered earlier.

| Measure %<br>Yes (No)                                     | Cumulative<br>09/ 10 | Qtr 1  | Qtr 2   | Trend   |
|---|----------------------|--------|---------|---|
| Have you received a welfare benefits assessment from us?  | NA                   | NA     | 22 (44) | NA  |
| Your experience at getting an Helena property             | 94 (3)               | 95 (1) | 92 (3)  |  |
| Level of assistance to help you settle into your new home | 82 (2)               | 71 (7) | 83 (2)  |  |

The following table illustrates elements of the survey that relate to the issuing of incentives. Incentives are issued on the basis of property condition and demand.

| Measure %<br>Yes (No)  | Cumulative<br>09/ 10 | Qtr 1   | Qtr 2   | Trend  |
|--|----------------------|---------|---------|--|
| Did you receive an incentive for moving in?                    | 84 (16)              | 84 (16) | 84 (16) |   |
| I would (not) have accepted the property without the incentive | 24 (5)               | 36 (7)  | 34 (10) |   |
| Made a big difference in helping me to accept the property     | 27                   | 16      | 16      |   |
| It was helpful but not the main reason I accepted              | 43                   | 41      | 40      |  |

## 2. Complaints

- Very few complaints received about voids or the lettings process ( 1 to 2% of total complaints received)
  - Dedicated lettings team manage whole process
  - Quality assurance
  - Improved cleanliness and garden maintenance
  - Minimum void standards reviewed
- Low numbers preclude analysis of commonality
- New complaints workgroup set up on Documotive to capture void standard or letting specific complaints
  
- In response to a complaint about the allocation of an empty property and the work that was carried out whilst the property was void, we made a number of changes to the way that we manage our void properties at the lettings stage. These include: -
  - Only advertising empty properties within 4 weeks of the date they are ready to let
  - Regular progress checks at the weekly void meetings
  - Improvements to the authority levels for releasing void works with timescales to measure performance
  - The introduction of quality assurance procedures to ensure all voids meet requisite standards

**Discussion Points: Thinking about the survey findings....**

|  | <b>Comments</b>  | <b>Is there any evidence to support your views?</b>   |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>What do the survey findings tell you? / What are the key issues for tenants?</b></p> | <p>The panel suggested that the Empty Property Survey should be reviewed to ensure the questions are customer friendly and also gauge relevant and useful feedback from new tenants.</p> <p>The panel suggested that major repairs should be carried out before the tenant moves into the property, some basic repairs should be carried out once the tenant moves in. The panel have also suggested the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Repairs completed before the tenant moves in should be defined</li> <li>- Repairs completed when the tenant has moved in should be defined and specific times given</li> <li>- New tenants should be given the opportunity to take ownerships of any items that have been left, for example sheds and carpet.</li> </ul> <p>The panel are pleased that when a property is within 2 years of a cyclical maintenance scheme the work is carried out whilst it is empty to minimise the disruption to the new tenant.</p> <p>The maintenance of gardens is an area that requires improvement. The panel considered that a well maintained garden would reduce the likeliness of incidents of nuisance and fly tipping. The panel suggested that it would be difficult for Helena to enforce elements of the tenancy agreement that relate to tidy gardens if Helena do not maintain the gardens when they are empty. The panel considered the following in relation to gardens in empty properties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gardens should be given a tidy once the tenant has moved in</li> <li>- Caretakers should ensure there is no fly tipping whilst the property is empty</li> </ul> | <p>The panel agreed that some of the survey questions may be misleading.</p> <p>The One Voice survey 2010 survey highlighted that completed repairs is the second most important element when moving into a new property.</p> <p>The Customer Inspectors mystery shop also highlighted that on some occasions repairs had not been completed.</p> <p>When a property is within two years of a cyclical maintenance programme it is completed whilst the property is empty to reduce the disruption to the new tenant.</p> <p>Respondents to the One Voice November 2010 survey who had an Empty Property near to where they live have had experience of ASB or nuisance (50%) and fly tipping (55%). 50% confirmed that they had experienced untidy gardens as a result of an empty property. In addition the panel noted that from the Empty Property survey only 58% were satisfied with the garden. Supporting the panels requirement to improve this element. The Customer Inspectors reality check also highlighted incidents of properties failing to meet the standard in terms of garden maintenance. Three of the gardens in the properties that were inspected as</p> |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tenancies with gardens should be given to those who can maintain them</li> <li>- Untidy gardens give a poor firsts impression</li> </ul> <p>Cleanliness has been highlighted as an important element when moving into a new property, the panel considered this along with the results from the Customer Inspectors mystery shop and as a result have requested to review the cleaning standards. The panel have requested feedback from the cleaning pilot when it becomes available.</p>  | <p>part of the mystery shop were rated as the element that was most in need of improvement.</p> <p>The Customer Inspectors mystery shop highlighted that three of the eight applicable properties were dissatisfied in term's of their overall cleanliness. In addition when broken down the Living Room (55%) Bathroom (64%) and Bedrooms (52%) were all areas where cleanliness required some improvement.</p>   |
| <p><b>Is any further research needed? E.g. through One Voice/Customer Inspectors?</b></p>  | <p>After considering the information from the Empty Property survey and the One Voice survey the panel found it necessary for further information to be gathered around the use of decoration vouchers. Although suggested that some decoration may be required before a tenant moved into the property. Rather than issuing vouchers this specifically relates to vulnerable tenants.</p> <p>The panel are keen to examine the support available for tenants and have requested a full review of this along with supporting evidence from current tenants. A focus group has been requested to support a review of tenancy support.</p> <p>To improve the safety in Empty Properties the panel discussed the fitting of security lights in external areas. However acknowledged that this may be something to include as part of a Cyclical Maintenance scheme.</p> | <p>Vouchers are currently offered on an ad hoc basis decided by the Lettings/Neighbourhood Officers. The panel considered that there should be a more co-ordinated approach however further information and consultation with customers would be required.</p> <p>Further information is required on the services offered to vulnerable tenants.</p> <p>The Customer Inspectors suggested that in some areas the feeling of safety should be improved.</p> |
| <p><b>What action would you like to take in regards to the survey findings? (Further research or make a recommendation?)</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve garden maintenance</li> <li>• Consider repairs before and after a tenant moves into a property</li> <li>• Amend the Empty Property Survey</li> <li>• Improve cleanliness of Empty Properties</li> <li>• A follow up mystery shop of Empty Properties to ensure standards are being met.</li> </ul>  | <p style="text-align: center;">As above</p>  |

### 3. Customer Inspectors Results

The Customer Inspector findings can be found in the Empty Property Report 2011 on Helena Highway.

#### Discussion Points: Thinking about the Customer Inspector findings....

|  | Comments   | Is there any evidence to support your views?  |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>What do the findings tell you?</b></p> | <p>A number of shutters had been used on the properties that had been visited as part of the mystery shop (Metal shutters at the back and polycarbonate at the front). The panel discouraged their use and when it is necessary to continue to use polycarbonate.</p> <p>The Customer Excellence Panel all agreed that when fitting any type of shutters care should be taken not to damage the property.</p> <p>The panel were disappointed that even though properties are checked before they are let that some properties failed to meet elements of the Lettings Standard.</p> <p>The panel were particularly disappointed with the cleanliness of some of the properties that took part in the mystery shop. They acknowledged that even though new tenants will want to clean the property themselves the standard should be met. Specifically around the cleanliness of a bathroom.</p> <p>The panel agreed that care should be taken to ensure all areas in the property are clean. In particular the Voids Inspection highlighted that care should be taken that light switches, light</p> | <p>The Customer Inspectors found a number of properties with polycarbonate shutters on the front of the property, it was reported to have an impact on the first impressions of the property. For example in 6 Bracken Court it was highlighted that the first impressions were 'Fairly dissatisfied'.</p> <p>The Customer Inspectors found that incidents where shutters had been fitted that has caused damage to the property.</p> <p>Properties that were inspected as part of the mystery shop failed to meet the Letting Standard on at least one occasion. See the January 2011 Voids Inspection Report for further details.</p> <p>The Lettings Standards relating to cleanliness were not met by all the properties that were inspected as part of the mystery shop. It was considered to give a poor impression when cleanliness of the property is not to a good standard. Bathrooms were highlighted as a room which was generally poorer in terms of its cleanliness than the rest of the property, overall satisfaction was 64%.</p> <p>The findings from the Customer Inspectors highlighted that light switches, sockets and light fittings tended to be an area requiring further cleaning. Radiators were</p> |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  | <p>fittings, plug sockets and radiators are cleaned to a good standard. The panel suggested that if these are in poor condition and cannot be cleaned then they should be replaced.</p> <p>It was highlighted by the Inspectors that builders dust was found in the sink of some properties, the panel therefore recommended that this is removed and cleaned before a tenant moves into the property.</p> <p>The panel agreed with the Inspectors recommendation that all internal doors should be in good repair and open and close correctly.</p> <p>Any repairs that are made to the skirting boards should consider replacing the full length rather than just replacing a piece.</p> <p>The Inspectors highlighted that decoration in some of the empty properties was poor and therefore the panel felt that mechanisms should be put in place to rectify poor decoration. After discussion the panel suggested that in extreme cases decoration should be done. This is instead of offering vouchers although this would be suitable in less extreme cases. When vouchers are distributed the panel have suggested that the tenant is informed of exactly what the vouchers are being given for, for example £20 voucher to paint the kitchen.</p> <p>The Inspectors results highlighted that tall fencing at the front of a property creates a poor impression, the panel therefore suggested that tall fencing should be avoided where possible.</p> <p>In addition the Inspectors were concerned with the fencing in the back of empty properties, in some cases the fencing was of a poor standard. To overcome this the panel suggested that new tenants should be informed of their responsibilities with fencing when they take up a tenancy.</p> | <p>also highlighted as an area that was often poor in terms of cleanliness.</p> <p>The Inspectors found properties that had builders dust in the kitchen sink.</p> <p>The Inspectors found incidents were internal doors did not close correctly.</p> <p>It was highlighted that in 6 Bracken Court the skirting board had been pieced together from different sections, it was highlighted that this gives a poor impression.</p> <p>The Inspectors highlighted that in some of the properties that were visited the decoration was of an extremely poor standard. They suggested that where possible walls should be painted magnolia along with all gloss painting. Four of the eleven inspected properties were rated as dissatisfied in terms of overall standard of decoration, a further two were rated as neither.</p> <p>The Inspectors found that high fencing at the front of a property looked oppressive and made it look like the back of a property.</p> <p>Fencing in some of the properties that were Inspected were of a poor standard, it was highlighted that two out of nine external front areas had poor fencing and three of six in the back of the properties.</p> |
|--|--|---|

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
|   | <p>Feedback from the Inspectors suggested that the layouts of some kitchens were not always logical and space was not used to its full potential. Although the panel agreed it led them to consider that kitchen layouts and the location of a boiler should be considered carefully although acknowledged that this required further information and scrutiny along with costing's.</p> <p>The panel agreed with the Inspectors recommendation that the toilet should always be flushed when it is ready to let.</p>   | <p>The Inspectors found properties in their mystery shop which had unusual layouts of kitchens and that in some cases it would be difficult to make practical use of the space. It was also found that appliances could not always be located in a logical place within the kitchen. It was specifically highlighted that the boiler in a number of kitchens was located in an awkward location.</p> <p>The toilet was not flushed in one of the properties visited during the mystery shop.</p> |
| <p><b>Is any further research needed? E.g. One Voice?</b></p>   | <p>The panel have requested that further research is conducted into the impact of poor decoration and customers overall satisfaction with the property. This will be reflected in the Empty Property Survey.</p>  | <p>The Inspectors highlighted that decoration in some properties was poor, the panel would like to consider the impact of the decoration due to cost implications at carrying out decoration works in the properties.</p>  |
| <p><b>What action would you like to take in regards to the Customer Inspectors findings? (Further research or make a recommendation?)</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further checks by the Customer Inspectors that properties are meeting the Letting Standard</li> <li>• All properties should meet the Letting Standard</li> <li>• The use of shutters should continue to be limited</li> <li>• Cleanliness of Empty Properties should be improved, in particular light switches, light fittings, radiators, plug sockets and bathrooms</li> <li>• Highlight to new tenants their responsibility of the maintenance of fencing</li> <li>• Remove builders dust from all sinks</li> <li>• Replace full lengths of skirting boards</li> <li>• Avoid tall fencing at the front of a property where it is possible</li> <li>• Consider the best layout for kitchens and also the boiler</li> <li>• Ensure the toilet is flushed</li> </ul> | <p>As above</p>  |



## 4. Service Standards

These were agreed by the Panel as part of their work towards delivery of the Customer Charter document. Details are included in the service review document. However details have been included here as they may put survey information into context.

### **Before moving in...**

- Ensure that all of our empty properties are secure.
- Put net curtains in the windows of empty properties and where screens are needed we will use clear plastic rather than metal.
- Check all work carried out on empty homes before you move into make sure that the work meets agreed standards.
- Make sure that your home is clean before you move in including removing building debris, cleaning kitchens, bathrooms, floors, woodwork and the inside of windows.
- Clear gardens of rubbish, strim overgrown grass and cut back overgrown hedges and bushes in empty properties.

### **When you are ready to move in...**

- Arrange for you to sign your tenancy agreement at a time that is convenient to both you and Helena.
- Give you a copy of your new tenancy agreement in a format that is appropriate to you.
- Make a referral to the Fire Service for a home safety and fire check.
- Provide you with a pack of relevant information about your home and neighbourhood including the standard you can expect the property to be in when you accept it.
- Assist you to complete all relevant forms relating to the property including Housing Benefit and utilities application forms.
- Offer all new tenants under the age of 25 and new tenants moving into homes specifically for older people a full "life check" including support and advice to help them live independently.




### **After moving in...**

- Consult you, in writing, on any changes to your tenancy agreement.
- Contact you within 20 working days of moving in to make sure you are settling in and provide advice as necessary.
- Carry out a gas and electricity safety check within 48 hours of you moving into your new home.

**Discussion points: Thinking about the service standards.....**

|   | <b>Comments</b>  | <b>Is there any evidence to support your views?</b>   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Do they meet tenant expectations?</b>  | <p>The panel highlighted that although the Service Standards reflect what matter most to tenants they are not always being met. It was considered to be very important that the standards are being met when all properties are let, this refers to both the standards contained within the Customer Charter and also the Letting Standard. The panel discussed the importance of Helena meeting the set service standards that have been previously agreed with customers.</p> <p>The letting standard highlights that appliances should be located within the kitchen. The panel consider that more information and investigation is required.</p> | <p>Standards are not always met as highlighted in the mystery shop of Voids. Empty Property Survey and KPI's are supporting evidence.</p> <p>The Inspectors as part of their mystery shop found properties were all kitchen appliances would not fit into the property.</p> |
| <b>Are these relevant to you as a customer? Do you agree with them?</b>           | <p>The panel are happy that the Service Standards are based on what matters most to tenants and therefore did not suggest any improvements to the Service Standards and Lettings Standards during this review.</p>   | <p>Standards are not always met as highlighted in the mystery shop of Voids. Empty Property Survey and KPI's are also supporting evidence.</p>  |
| <b>Are any changes to the standards required? e.g. Is there anything missing?</b> | <p>See previous comments</p>   | <p>See previous comments</p>  |

## 5. Performance Indicators

| Performance Indicator  | Q2<br>2009/10  | Q3<br>2009/10 | Q4<br>2009/10 | Q1<br>2010/11 | Q2<br>2010/11            | PaT   | Current<br>Target |
|--|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Void loss  | 1.67%  | 1.78%         | 1.58%         | 1.57%         | 1.46%                    |  | 1.55%             |
| Void Spend per unit (excluding improvement works)  | £3,020   | £2,824        | £3,150        | £2,200        | £2,288                   |  | £1,900            |
| <b>General Needs Relet time (days)<br/>All lets not new and not subject<br/>to major repairs</b> | 46   | 58            | 57            | 41            | Awaiting info from CoRE* |   | 43                |
| Supported Relet time (days) All<br>Lets not new and not subject to<br>major repairs              | Data currently not available due to<br>changes with administration of CoRE |               |               | 77            | Awaiting info from CoRE* |   | 60                |
| Unadjusted relet time- General<br>Needs and Supported  | 66   | 63            | 80            | 78            | 66                       |  | 55                |
| <b>Ratio of positive to negative<br/>reasons for<br/>leaving a property (70)*</b>                | NCR  | NCR           | NCR           | NCR           | NCR                      | NA  | 70                |

Note: GN Relet times & ratio of positive to negative reasons are currently in the Panels basket of KPI's

**Discussion Points: Thinking about the indicators that we monitor....**

|   | <b>Comments</b>   | <b>Is there any evidence to support your views?</b>  |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Are they the things you would expect us to monitor? Are they important to you as tenants?</b></p> | <p>Relet time performance demonstrates some assurance although there is room for significant improvement. To improve the relet time the panel suggested that the number of back to back lets is increased along with encouraging tenants to give four week's notice, during which repairs can be completed.</p> <p>The panel have suggested that the Voids and Lettings team look at what top performing organisations are doing to help reduce the relet time.</p> <p>Reducing the lettings cycle from two weeks to one week would help to reduce the relet time and therefore the panel requested that the team investigate this.</p> <p>The panel suggested that to improve how Helena advertises properties the following should be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Estate Agent style advertisement including the inside of properties and gardens</li> <li>- Access to floor plans of properties</li> <li>- Advertise weekly on the website but continue with a fortnightly</li> </ul> | <p>Relet time is higher when compared to other similar organisations. Helena is ranked 23 or 30 similar organisations.</p> |
| <p><b>Which (if any) does the panel want to monitor as a customer excellence KPI?</b></p>               | <p>The panel recently reviewed their full suite of performance indicators, following the review along with consideration of this service review the Customer Excellence Panel would like to monitor the following performance indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CoRE Relet time, not new and not subject to major repairs</li> <li>• Absolute Relet Time General Needs and Sheltered</li> </ul>  | <p>Not applicable</p>  |

## 6. Performance Overview

### Discussion Points: Thinking about the cost, quality and performance in relation to One Call....

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>How are we performing?</b></p>                     | <p>The panel highlighted that they are not concerned with the cost of repairs whether it be a void budget or responsive repairs budget they are concerned that repairs are completed in their property.</p> <p>Although the service standards reflect what matters most to tenants the panel are concerned that these are not being met.</p>  |
| <p><b>Are the targets realistic and challenging?</b></p> | <p>Targets have recently been reviewed at a planning session and suggested the following performance indicators for 2011/12:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average void costs</li> <li>• CoRE Relet time, not new and not subject to major repairs</li> <li>• Absolute Relet Time General Needs and Sheltered</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>How do we compare to others?</b></p>               | <p>The panel acknowledged that the costs of voids has reduced recently, although they pleased that this cost has reduced the panel are aware that this will have an impact on responsive repairs. The panel consider this to be a secondary concern to the satisfaction that a new tenant has when moving into a Helena property.</p>   |
| <p><b>What are the issues?</b></p>                       | <p>In summary the panel have highlighted the following as issues in regards to the Voids and Lettings review.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved gardens</li> <li>• Consider repairs that are completed before and after the tenant moves into a property</li> <li>• Increase the standard of cleanliness</li> <li>• Ensure first impressions are good</li> <li>• Decrease the time taken to relet a property</li> <li>• All properties should meet the required Letting Standard</li> <li>• Service standards should always be met</li> <li>• Tenants should be aware of their responsibility around fencing</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Value for money</b></p>                            | <p>The panel were pleased to see that costs (void works per property) were already starting to reduce although expectation was that the improvement programme would have had a greater impact. The outcomes of the VIVO project have yet to impact upon the reported performance. It was noted that a range of recommendations which have been made should have a positive impact on performance.</p>   |

## 7. Other issues:

The Customer Excellence Panel are keen to review the support that is available for vulnerable tenants, it was specifically highlighted during the service review about vulnerable tenants being supported with their electrics and making use of tools to reduce their costs for example remote control devices to turn off electrical items.

To support a review of the support available for new tenants the panel have requested evidence by means of a focus group.

The panel suggested that a 'health check' be offered to all new tenants to help when setting up a new home.

### **When would you like to receive an update on this service or review the service again?**

The panel would like to receive an update in 2012/13 support by a Customer Inspector reality check of Empty Properties

## Appendix 3 – Proposed Empty Property Survey Proposal

### NEW TENANT SURVEY

#### OFFICE USE SECTION

Q1 Property number:

\_\_\_\_\_

Q3 Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Q2 Tenancy number

\_\_\_\_\_

Q4 Tenancy start date

\_\_\_\_\_

### APPLYING FOR YOUR HOME

Q5 How did you bid for your new home?

Visited local office

Tenants and Residents Offices

Through the Under One Roof website

By phone

St Helens Council Office (Housing Options and Advice)

Through an advocate e.g. family, friends or another agency

Q6 How easy or difficult did you find it to...?

Very easy

Fairly easy

Neither

Fairly difficult

Very difficult

Access the Under One Roof advert

Bid on a property

Contact a member of the Under One Roof team

Q7 Were you given the opportunity to view the property before accepting it?

Yes

No

Q8 Were you given enough information about...?

Yes

No

The property

The area

Q9 The amount of time I was given to accept the property was...?

About right

Too long

Too short

Q10 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received when applying for your home?

Very satisfied

Fairly satisfied

Neither

Fairly dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied

Q11 If you were dissatisfied with the service, please explain why below

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

Q12 Were you contacted by Helena within 20 working days of moving into your new home?

Yes

No

Q13 The amount of information I received when signing my tenancy agreement was....?

About right

Too little

Too much

Q14 Have you or are you about to receive a welfare benefits check from Helena?

Yes

No

N/A

Q15 Have you had any issues claiming Housing Benefit?  
Yes  No  N/A

Q16 If yes, please give details below:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q17 How would you rate the following...

|                                   | Very good                | Fairly good              | Neither                  | Fairly poor              | Very poor                | N/A                      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| The cleanliness of my new home    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The decoration                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Internal doors                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| External doors                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Garden                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Communal areas                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Information on gas supply         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Information on electricity supply | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q18 Did you have to report any repairs on moving into your new home?  
Yes  No

Q19 If yes, have the repairs been carried out?  
Yes  No

Q20 If no, what repairs are outstanding?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q21 Did your new home meet your expectations on moving in?  
Yes  No

Q22 If no, please explain why?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q23 How would you rate the support you received from Helena when you moved into your new home?  
Very good  Fairly good  Neither  Fairly poor  Very poor

Q24 If you rated the support you received as poor, please explain why below.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q25 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your new home?  
Very satisfied  Fairly satisfied  Neither  Fairly dissatisfied  Very dissatisfied

Q26 If you were dissatisfied, please explain why below.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The following questions aim to collect background information on the people using our services. The questions are optional but answering them will help us to ensure we are not discriminating against you or anyone else.



- Q27** Do you have any long-term illness, health problems or disability which limits your daily activities?  
 Yes  No  Prefer not to say
- Q28** What is the nature of your disability?  
 Hearing disability  Sight impaired   
 Learning disability  Wheelchair user   
 Mental health disability  Other please specify below   
 Mobility
- 
- Q29** Gender  
 Male  Female
- Q30** Do you have the same gender identity you were assigned at birth?  
 Yes  No  Prefer not to say
- Q31** How would you describe your sexual orientation? Tick one box only.  
 Heterosexual  Gay Woman   
 Bisexual  Prefer not to say   
 Gay Man  Other
- 
- Q32** What is your religion? Tick one box only.  
 None  Muslim   
 Christian (all denominations)  Sikh   
 Buddhist  Any other religion   
 Hindu  Prefer not to say   
 Jewish
- Q33** To which of these age groups do you belong?  
 10-24  60-64   
 25-34  65-74   
 35-44  75-84   
 45-54  85+   
 55-59  Prefer not to say
- Q34** To which of these groups do you belong?  
 White British  Other Mixed  African   
 White Irish  Indian  Other Black   
 White other  Pakistani  Chinese   
 White & Black Caribbean  Bangladeshi  Other Chinese   
 White & Black African  Other Asian  Gypsy/Romany/Irish   
 White & Asian  Caribbean  Traveller   
 Other  Prefer not to say

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK**

