

**Tenant Inspectors**



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**Open Door Inspection  
Update of voids report September 2007**

**Report dated: August 2012**

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### **Inspection Team**

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## **Preface**

Soha's Tenant Inspectors project started because of an idea from the Audit Commission that they may go lighter on inspections if an RSL had tenant inspectors in place. The Chairperson of the Tenants' Forum was concerned that they must be able to show an ability to do the work correctly as they would want the proof from the inspectors to show they are capable of doing a good job.

This led to a bid to Soha's *Excellence Fund* (the re-investment of efficiency savings) which was successful. The first Tenant Inspectors' training took place in October 2006.

There are currently 17 inspectors who decide the area they will inspect and how they will go about this.

Tenant Inspectors help Soha Housing to understand and put the views and needs of tenants first.

We carry out detailed and robust assessments of the services and functions provided by Soha Housing and its partner agencies to check that they do 'what it says on the tin'; to help them improve.

We promote and develop the role of tenants in Soha Housing's business; working towards a joint approach to regulation.

## **Introduction**

It was agreed in June 2012 by the Tenant Inspectors team that an open door inspection should take place.

The task would involve inspecting the procedures and recommendations made in the voids report drawn up in 2007, focusing on recommendations one and two. We wanted to know if recommendations had been acted on and what difference they have made.

## **The recommendations were:**

1. Voids standard review to include tenants on the working party.
2. A simplified minimum voids standard needs to be made available to the prospective tenants in a format that suits their individual needs. This is to be made available when offered the property.

## **How did you check?**

### *Methodology*

*Together the team devised a project plan that enabled everyone to look at specific areas. These also included:*

- *Tenant telephone interviews*
- *Staff interviews including an interview with the Head of Housing.*
- *Reviewing written evidence*

## **What did you find?**

### **Voids standard review:**

The team conducted several staff interviews and undertook an extensive desktop review.

The following documents were reviewed:

1. An update on the recommendations from Assistant Director of Customer Services
2. New homes leaflet
3. Tenant voids checklist
4. Moving in survey results
5. Lettings customer journey mapping report
6. Voids cleaning connect club results
7. Minutes of voids standard consultation meeting
8. Examples of pre termination visit tick sheets for the last 6 months.

The inspectors were satisfied that the evidence provided, proved that recommendations had been implemented and the inspectors felt that the standards are improving all the time, every effort is being made to both maintain the standards and to continually improve them.

The standard of homes available is a lot higher than they were 10 years ago and improvements are on-going, it was noted that residents are now given a much bigger say regarding the conditions of the properties.

### **Tenant Telephone Interviews.**

The Tenant Inspectors interviewed tenants over the phone that were previously asked (by letter) concerning a satisfaction survey. The results out of 4 calls were:

- 4 tenants were satisfied with the condition of their homes when they moved in.
- 1 tenant reported that there were outstanding repairs when they moved in.
- 3 tenants said that they were very happy in their new homes.
- 1 tenant reported that they were unhappy with their new home.

### **Interview with Assisted Director of Customer Services and Technical Officer.**

The Assistant Director was asked if the recommendations from the previous inspection had been implemented, his reply was yes, however they were continuing to look at areas for further improvement. Any negative feedback is investigated by the appropriate Technical Officer within 5 working days. They then have a timescale of 3 – 4 weeks to get the outstanding repairs resolved. Tenants are made aware of any outstanding repairs prior to moving in. If any repairs have been missed, they are raised as a new job.

If there are items such as furniture left behind, for example a bed, the staff will try and recycle it by giving it to a family that needs it.

Soha also offer a redecorating voucher policy. The voucher/s are issued by the Technical Officer if redecoration is required. A choice of Homebase or B & Q vouchers are available.

A new Dulux paint pack scheme has also been introduced, this is a paint pack that can be delivered to resident/s that struggle with transport in order for them to be accommodated. If the residents are vulnerable Soha can arrange for the rooms to be redecorated.

When asked if they had the right equipment for their role, the technical Officer mentioned that if they had PDA systems, they could record jobs whilst doing the inspection which could save 45 minutes filling in paperwork. They currently do not have these.

**Conclusion:**

Overall the Tenant Inspectors were pleased with their findings.

We achieved what we set out to do by collating evidence to support that our recommendations from 2007 are now in place. We are satisfied that they are doing what it says on the tin.

“Establishing relationships with new tenant/s is very important, we feel it’s very important that support needs for new resident/s are identified as early as possible in order to offer the support tenant/s need to settle into their new home. If a tenant is given a clean, good standard home, they are more likely to want to take care of it and have pride in their community.

No one would want to move into a property that is dirty and not up to our standards. It is vital that quality checks take place on all properties prior to them being re let.”  
**Janice Trevillion – Lead Inspector**

**Were our recommendations implemented?**

Over all the Tenant Inspectors were satisfied that the recommendations, had been successfully implemented.

However, it was noted that the offers of decoration vouchers requires more clarification, for example residents are unaware that they may be able to request additional decoration vouchers, if other rooms need redecoration. The Tenant Inspectors would like to see this highlighted in settling in visits and in the residents handbook.

**Are the voids standards being met?**

Overall, yes. There were exceptions, for example where the voids contract supervisor had not visited each void to complete necessary checks to ensure standards are being met. Upon checking with the Repairs Manager, it was confirmed that 100% properties are now checked; however some of the checks are completed by contractors due to rural locations. They are currently working with the contractors to confirm the standards.

The tenant inspectors agreed that gardens should be included in the final checks as feedback from satisfaction reports indicated that overgrown gardens are an issue.

During site visits, the inspectors viewed a flat that was owned by Soha, but in a building that was managed by a third party. The stairwell was filthy, had a putrid smell and had drugs paraphernalia strewn across the floor. Upon investigation it was identified that although Soha were responsible for the flat, they were not responsible for the communal hallways. A person that would be desperate for housing would accept the property despite the issues they faced with the filthy entrance hall etc.

The Tenant Inspectors advised that if someone was given a property that had a clean and welcoming environment, they were more likely to have pride in

the property once they had rented it. It was agreed that this should be looked into as a matter of priority. The Inspectors found the condition of the hallway both upsetting and unacceptable.

### Did our recommendations make a difference?

Overall yes, looking at the results of the completed satisfaction surveys there has been a clear improvement over the last year. The introduction of PDA'S has not yet been introduced. We would appreciate some feedback to indicate whether this may be given some consideration in the near future.

### Strengths:

Conclusion	Evidence 1	Evidence 2	Evidence 3
Customer satisfaction	Phone surveys	Paper Surveys	Tenant interviews
Increased Resident Involvement regarding voids.	Minutes of voids meetings.	Staff Interviews	Records of visits made by resident voids inspector.
Open lines of communication between Soha and its contractors.	Staff Interviews	Minutes of meetings.	

### Weaknesses:

Conclusion	Evidence 1	Evidence 2	Evidence 3
Delivering equal service standards for homes that have communal areas not managed by Soha.	Visits.	Staff interviews	

### Recommendations

1. We would like to see Technical Officers issued with the electronic equipment required which will save time and offer better Vfm.
2. Clarify the standards regarding cleaning with the contractors. This is particularly important for properties that are in areas where Soha re not responsible for the communal cleaning and maintenance.
3. The inspectors would like a mystery shop to take place in the next 6 months, to identify if standards have been improved. To ensure consistent monitoring, we would like it re visited in another 6 months.
4. A more detailed list of what can and can't be purchased with decorating vouchers.
5. Increase the capacity of the cleaning staff. There is currently only 1 person that does all the cleaning and we feel may be a contributing factor to low satisfaction.

## **Interview with Assistant Director of Customer Services & Technical Officer.**

### **Question 1: How do you feel your job works?**

Yes, I have been rather busy at the moment. I inspect every property and there is only one of me. Other Technical Officers help when required.

### **Question 2: Do the previous tenants know they might be charged for any repairs or damage?**

Yes, they are given time to put it right. (3-4 weeks.) Should it come to light, that damage was done that was not highlighted; the previous tenants can be recharged. We can stop tenants without outstanding debts from transferring.

### **Question 3: Can you recycle other tenants belongings for example, beds etc.?**

If a tenant does not want an item, for example, a bed, we will move it on to somebody else. If we have a situation where a house clearance is not easy for a family, we can and do organise a clearance however we do recharge this.

### **Question 4: re new tenants aware that decorating vouchers are available if required?**

We actually have a voucher policy. A choice of home base or B&Q vouchers are available. We also offer dulux paint pack which will be delivered free.

We will not give an elderly person vouchers, we will actually decorate it for them. We take individuals needs into account.

Our policy is generous compared to other housing associations, we have had talks with station flooring for a similar scheme, we are looking at a 10% discount deal.

### **Question 5: Are tenants informed of any outstanding repairs when moving in?**

Yes, but they do pick up on things we have missed and that will be put through as a new repair.

### **Question 6: How large is the cleaning team?**

1 person. We inspect his work once it has been completed.

### **Question 7: Do you repair a house when a tenant moves out ready for the new tenant?**

If a tenant is moving on, we will do a survey with this tenant to see what repairs they have. This means when they have moved we can make repairs before the new tenant moves in.

### **Question 8: Do you think you have the right equipment to do your jobs?**

No, we want to try and get an electronic device instead of spending approx. 45 minutes, filling in details after a job. I think this would be more efficient for our contractors. And we can do our jobs a lot quicker. There is a cost, but there is also a cost in my time. It would speed the whole process up.

### **Question 9: What are tenants' feelings about new houses or moving in?**

Those customers, who answer no on the satisfaction survey (Q7) are asked to elaborate so we can investigate and take action accordingly.



**Question 10: You mentioned that Jeakins Weir will go out, to inspect properties with soha. When will this happen?**

About 4 weeks. We also have a new interface with I.T at the moment that will allow us to see Jeakins Weir operative's diaries.

**Comments.**

It was suggested that youths and interested tenants could maybe do/help do the gardening.

## **Interview with Head of Housing**

### **1. How does your role cover cleaning?**

I don't. I am part of the lettings team.

### **2. What do you do if a tenant says in the survey that their house was not clean?**

Jeakins should clean up after they are finished. We have 4 weeks, and then we arrange for a surveyor to come, while the property is still lived in.

### **3. Do you show tenants a viewing of the house they are moving into?**

Yes, everybody will have a viewing of the house they are moving into. All repairs done or not, as long as it's safe.

### **4. Could signings be done at the house?**

The best practise is to sign it at the office.

### **5. What do you do as part of a lettings job?**

Our lettings team job is to make sure a tenant knows what they're doing. E.g. If a young tenant moves in, he/she might not know how to pay the bills, if they can have friends over etc. We need to make sure they are signing a contract where they know the rules and regulations and that they are happy, or we will not let them sign.

We aim to give people keys to their place on a Friday, so they can have the weekend to move in, so they can do any work they want done to the house.

### **6. Do you phone people up on repairs, to take any negative feedback?**

Yes, and if somebody rings about it, we will follow it up. They need to communicate with us to know what is going on.

### **7. If a communal stairway is unclean, who deals with this?**

Our Estates Manager.

They should be cleaned every other week by a contractor. Our Estates Manager will then spot check, to see if it has been done and the contractors are doing their job.

### **8. If a tenant is moving out, do you sort the garden before a new tenant moves in?**

We will do the garden.

### **9. How do you check the stock condition of somebody's home?**

8% of our properties move on, so we then take advantage to check/upgrade stock condition.

