

HOME GROUP LIMITED

EMPTY PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the current performance of managing empty homes in the Copeland Borough Council area.
- 1.2 The report will consider the performance of Home Group firstly over the period between April 2011 and March 2012 and secondly over the first quarter of 2012/13 (between April 2012 and June 2012)

2.0 Performance between April 2011 and March 2012

- 2.1 Home Group currently has 5331 rented properties within the boundaries of Copeland Borough Council.
- 2.2 The table below shows the turnover for Home properties within Copeland Borough Council boundaries for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012. The turnover of properties for the Local Authority area for the 12 month period was 8.31%.
- 2.3 All empty properties are 'counted' and included in Home Groups' reporting figures. Analysis of property turn around times covers all empty properties regardless of the amount of work required within them.
- 2.4 The 'lettable' period is the time to carry out minor repairs which can be carried out in a reasonable length of time. The 'unlettable' period is the time for major void works, such as extensive plaster work or component replacements, and as such the timescales for work differs significantly. The table has distinguished between these two types of property repairs to allow for comparison and understanding of the sometimes lengthy empty property (void) process.
- 2.5 The void end to end times also include lost days as a result of applicants refusing properties on the day of viewing and sign up and also the lost days between tenancy sign up and the tenancy commencement date which is always a Monday.

Number of Properties	Properties relet between April 2011 and 31 March 2012	Average number of days empty – lettable void	Average number of days empty – unlettable void	Average end to end time all empty properties
5331	443	31.40	42.32	73.72

- 2.6 Home Group established new working patterns over the period of 2011/12 and as a result improved void turn around times significantly over the period. Our void rent loss in the North West was 1.13% over this 12 month period showing a marked improvement on previous years.
- 2.7 Improvements to our lettings times can be attributed to a number of factors. Improvements to the way that customers can choose properties, through Cumbria Choice, has assisted with a decrease in refusals from customers for properties, and the introduction of a proactive lettings approach where properties are allocated during the period of notice given by an outgoing customer has also helped with this improvement.
- 2.8 Additionally, pre-letting checks are carried out sooner in the lettings cycle and pre-sign up work is carried out by officers to ensure that as soon as a property is ready to let, it is let to the incoming customer immediately.
- 2.9 A trial for some maintenance work being carried out after the customer moved in (works on occupation) may also have had an impact with a small improvement in the length of time that properties were empty.
- 2.10 A number of long term void properties, which were a concern for the Strategic Housing Panel, were dealt with and all were repaired and let as soon as funding became available. There are currently few long term void properties awaiting maintenance decisions at this time.
- 3.0 Performance between April 2012 and June 2012**
- 3.1 The table below shows the number of voids and the time taken to let for the period 01 April 2012 to 30 June 2012.
- 3.2 Since April 2012, Home Group in the North West has entered into a partnership with Willmott Dixon. Willmott Dixon is the contractor who now holds responsibility for all repair works to Home Group properties, including voids across the region.

Number of Home Group properties	Number of Voids returned in period	Voids as a % of Home Group properties	Average end to end time
5331	74	2.13%	38

3.3 There are also 40 empty properties that are currently still being worked upon by Willmott Dixon. These are not included within the above table as work has not been completed. The average length of time that these properties have been empty is currently 56 days; however work is still in progress for each of these properties.

3.4 A positive aspect of the contract is that Willmott Dixon are contracted to turn around void properties within 5 or 10 days depending on the scope of work required in the property. Once they have ironed out the issues this will be the normal contractual obligation of our contractor.

3.5 It is apparent, from the increase in the times to complete works in some properties, that the new contractor has had some teething problems from inception of the contract. This has had a detrimental impact on the turn around times for empty properties in the Copeland area in some instances.

3.6 Home Group is working closely with Willmott Dixon to ensure that performance improves in this area. A recovery plan was put in place at the start of July with specific targets being set for the contractors to complete the backlog of voids in order for them to be in a position to meet their contractual obligation of turning voids around in 5 and 10 days going forward.

3.7 A joint working group has been established with our Customer Service and Property colleagues along the contractors to; keep the pressure on void turnaround times; prioritise and address the most urgent cases and to deal with any problems or blockages as they arise. It is envisaged that this group will continue to meet for the foreseeable future.

3.7 In recent weeks there have been some improvements in the volume of voids being turned around by the contractors and their resources have increased. However it is vital that Home Group continue to challenge and monitor their contractor to ensure that they comply with business requirements. The 5 and 10 day turnaround time is a challenging target but this demonstrates Home Group's commitment to make further improvements over this financial year.

4.0 Recommendation

4.1 The Panel is asked to note this report.