



## Investigation into whether the lettable standard used by Rotherham Council during the voids process is suitable and meets tenant expectations



**Report July 2023**

**Rotherham Federation**

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## 5. Summary of Evidence

### 5.1 Void costs and targets

Over the past few years, Rotherham Council have handled approximately 30 void properties per week. However in April 2023, this reached 50 per week. The average cost to bring a void home up to a lettable standard is £3500, which means a spend of over £5.5m per annum from the Housing Revenue Account.

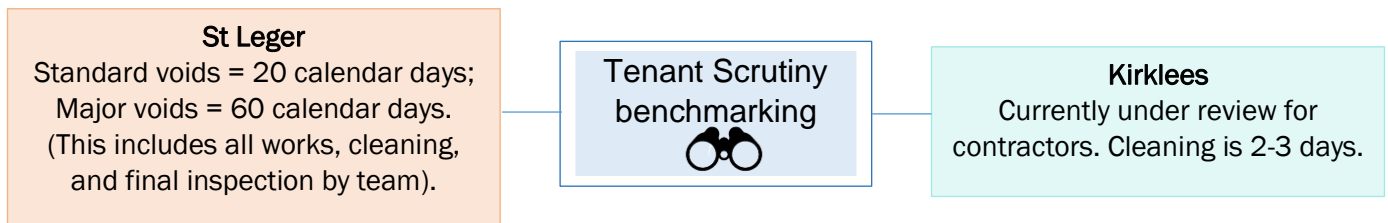
#### *Key Performance Indicator (KPI)*

The KPI for the void re-let time is currently under review to try to bring about greater tenancy sustainability (through increased support, checks on affordability, and the offer of tenancy - ready workshops).

The current target (April 2023) for contractors to complete void works is 17 days and current performance against this is 13 days.

In 2022, Council officers benchmarked themselves against some other councils and found that:

- The average void time is 68 days across Yorkshire and Humber
- The longest void time across Yorkshire and Humber was 159 days
- Rotherham's performance was at around 48 days, at this point, making them mid-table.

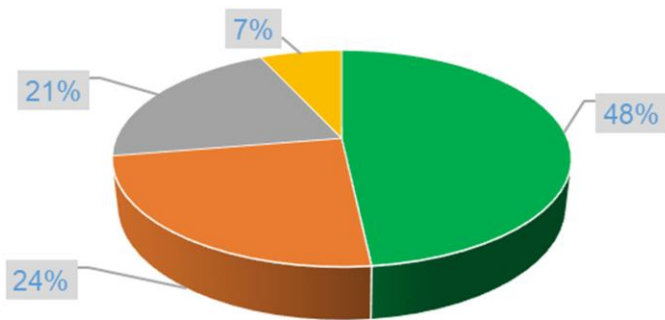


Rotherham seemed to be performing well compared to other housing providers.

#### *Scheduled works*

In order to meet the performance targets and reduce the costs of the voids process, the Council will consider whether major works to comply with decent homes standards e.g. new bathrooms and kitchens, should be carried out prior to the new tenant moving in or remain on the planned schedule. As part of the new tenant survey, the panel asked this question:

## Would you delay moving in?



- Move in and have the works done in one year's time
- Be asked if you would like the work completed now or later
- Not sure
- Delay moving in for two weeks

- If a new kitchen or bathroom was due within a year, 48% of new tenants would still like to move in and not delay their move.
- 24% of respondents said that they would like to be consulted on whether to move in or delay this.

### PANEL VIEWS:

- ✍ The panel were happy with the targets and performance by Rotherham Council compared to other councils.
- ✍ The feedback from the tenant survey suggested that each new tenant should be consulted on whether they would like major works completed before moving in. This is likely to only cause a void delay to less than a quarter of properties.

### Recommendations

## 5.2 Communications with leaving tenants

There are two letters sent to people who are ending their tenancies:

- Termination One – Confirming the request to end the tenancy and a notice form for completion (giving four weeks' notice).
- Termination Two – Confirmation of notice plus a checklist of next steps for both the Council and the tenant.

There are different letters used if a tenant has passed away and the next of kin is being contacted.

These letters were reviewed in 2022.

Tenants are asked to remove everything from the property; however some voids take three days to clear before works can commence. If a visit has been made, some furnishings that are in good condition may remain in the property, at the officer's discretion.

A comparison was made between the different responses to communications with the vacating tenant during the benchmarking exercise. (See Appendix 1 for full summary). All content was very similar to the Rotherham letters, but presented in different formats including leaflets and online information.

The Tenant Scrutiny panel also reviewed the letters in terms of layout, accessibility, content and clarity. Numerous comments were made and the full detail of these can be found in Appendix 2. Suggestions were made for improvement which included:

### Layout

Using page numbers on all documents and using tick boxes for the Termination Two checklist.

### Accessibility




- Removing council jargon and phrases that are difficult to understand such as 'remedy damage' 'liable to pay', 'notice to quit'.
- Making the information available in other formats such as braille, large print or easy read, plus in different languages.

### Content/clarity

Various queries around the phrasing and wording of the letters and forms, such as replacing 'encourages' with 'must' when talking about clearing their belongings; more clarity around what to do with furniture that is part of a furniture package (see Appendix 2 for full details of comments/suggestions).

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## PANEL VIEWS:

-  The panel were pleased that the letters were quite clear and that they had recently been reviewed.
-  However, they felt that further improvements could be made as described in Appendix 1. This would help people leaving tenancies to better understand their responsibilities.
-  They did feel that including this information online would further help communication with tenants leaving their homes.

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Recommendations

### 5.3 Lettable standard

The lettable standard has been agreed across Council and contract partner colleagues and acts as a standard for the works that are required each time a property becomes void, prior to re-let. The last revision of the standard took place in November 2020.

#### *Feedback from visits*

From the visits carried out by tenant scrutiny representatives and the new tenant surveys, there were a number of issues raised about whether these areas/items should be made clearer or be included in the Rotherham Council lettable standard.

These included:

- Leaving carpet grippers on floors

*Response* – the standard says that unnecessary fixings should be removed, but not specifically carpet grippers.

- Leaving decking in gardens

*Response* – the new tenant should sign to say they are responsible for any decking that they wish to keep (this should be made clear).

- Smoothing plaster filling ready for decorating

*Response* – contractors should ensure that plaster is smooth and this is included in the lettable standard (although not evident in all voids).

- Kitchen floor covering

*Response* – is a 'wet-room' floor the best option for a kitchen (found to be hard to keep clean)? The flooring used for kitchens is polyurethane, which is similar but does not have non-slip properties.

- Overgrown gardens

*Response* - Contractors have only three hours to complete gardens, without further charges, and sometimes the garden grows again by the time the tenant moves in.

- Collapsing outbuildings

*Response* – The new tenant would sign to say that they would like the outbuilding to remain, otherwise they should be demolished if in poor condition.

There was some concern expressed by officers that removal of grippers and decking is against the Council's environmental sustainability principles

### *Benchmarking*

Looking at the other housing providers, the panel found five online:

- Kirklees – brief overview
- Warrington – Empty Homes Maintenance Strategy includes quite detailed lettable standard
- Wigan
- Red Kite (High Wycombe)
- STAR (Shropshire)

We were also given access to two paper copies of the lettable standards used in:

- Kirklees
- St Leger

### *Headlines from a comparison exercise*

The comparison exercise looked at six other lettable standards and noted:

1. Areas where Rotherham's lettable standard performed well – where it includes items/more details that makes it better than some of the other lettable standards.

2. Things that could be improved – that were either better explained in other lettable standards or were not explicitly considered in the Rotherham version
3. Things that are missing from the lettable standard but other areas include them.

### 1. Areas where Rotherham's lettable standard performed well

- ✓ Safe balustrade to stairs,
- ✓ Checking that taps are on the sides,
- ✓ Replacing shower heads and hoses,
- ✓ Providing new shower curtains,
- ✓ Using halophane paint to cover mould (and another paint for graffiti),
- ✓ Putting air fresheners in every room,
- ✓ Fitting window restrictors to first floor,
- ✓ Keeping air bricks unobstructed and vermin/water proof,
- ✓ Changing the locks to outbuildings,
- ✓ Smooth plaster for decoration,
- ✓ Removal of unnecessary nails, screws, and fixings.

### 2. Things that could be improved

- ? Replacement of fences if damaged, without client having to request it (Kirklees and Wigan offer this as standard to the front of properties).
- ? External doors – it is good that number is fitted (but Warrington also fit a door with a spy hole and draught excluder as standard)
- ? Cleaning behind radiators – the lettable standard says 'as far as possible' (Wigan says behind *all* radiators)
- ? External windows – the lettable standard says 'correctly fixed' (Warrington replace any missing putty, and STAR clean them outside at ground floor level)
- ? Toilets – limescale is removed (Red Kite leave cleaning fluid in all the toilets)
- ? Paths – are checked for good run off for water, (Kirklees sweep the paths too)



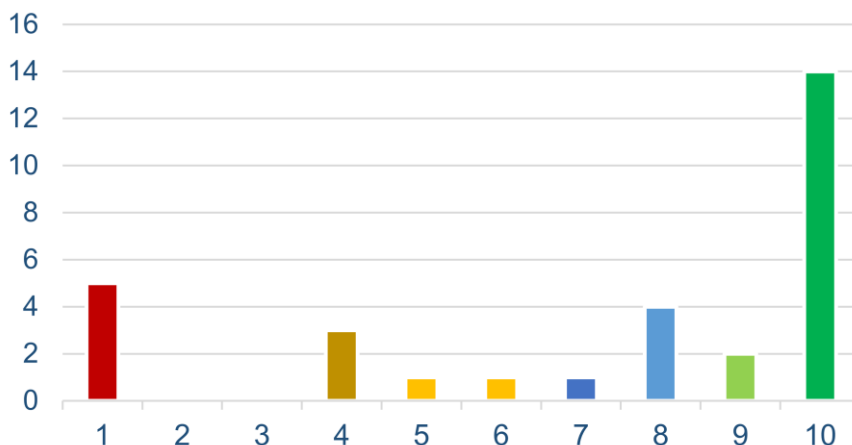
### 3. Things that are missing from the lettable standards but included in other areas

- Clothes posts
- Security screens
- Outdoor lighting
- Lightbulbs
- Hot water cylinder insulation
- Stop taps – accessibility and ease of turning
- Baths replaced by accessible showers (other areas specify that these won't be replaced)
- Extractor fans
- Curtain battens
- Internally glazed doors - are they replaced?
- Decoration allowance (other areas supply for vulnerable tenants)
- Smoke alarms – testing mentioned but nothing about how many (Kirklees provide heat detector in kitchen, smoke alarms in hall and landing, Carbon monoxide detector next to flued gas appliances)
- Plumbing – not clear if flushed and if any dead legs are removed
- Programmable heating
- Loft insulation (laid to 270/250 mm in Red Kite and Warrington)
- Fire rated kitchen door (half hour fire rated in Warrington)
- Number of electrical sockets (listed how many in each room in Warrington and STAR)

The summary of the full comparison of lettable standards can be found in Appendix 3.

Findings from the survey of new tenants:

#### How satisfied with new home (where 1 is poor and 10 is good)?



- 16/31 (52%) of respondents were very satisfied.
- 5/31 (16%) were satisfied.
- 5/31 (16%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- 5/31 (16%) were very dissatisfied.

- There was a combination of areas showing dissatisfaction and satisfaction; Rotherham North showed nothing but satisfaction (but there were only four responses from this area)
- There was also a range of ages showing different levels of satisfaction, with no age group reporting more dissatisfaction than others.

### Satisfaction in Rotherham South



- Highly dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Highly satisfied

### Satisfaction in Rotherham North



- Highly dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Highly satisfied

### Satisfaction in other areas not specified



- Highly dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Highly satisfied

It feels like 'home' x 7

The view x 2

Moving away from nuisance neighbours x 2

Near my family x 3

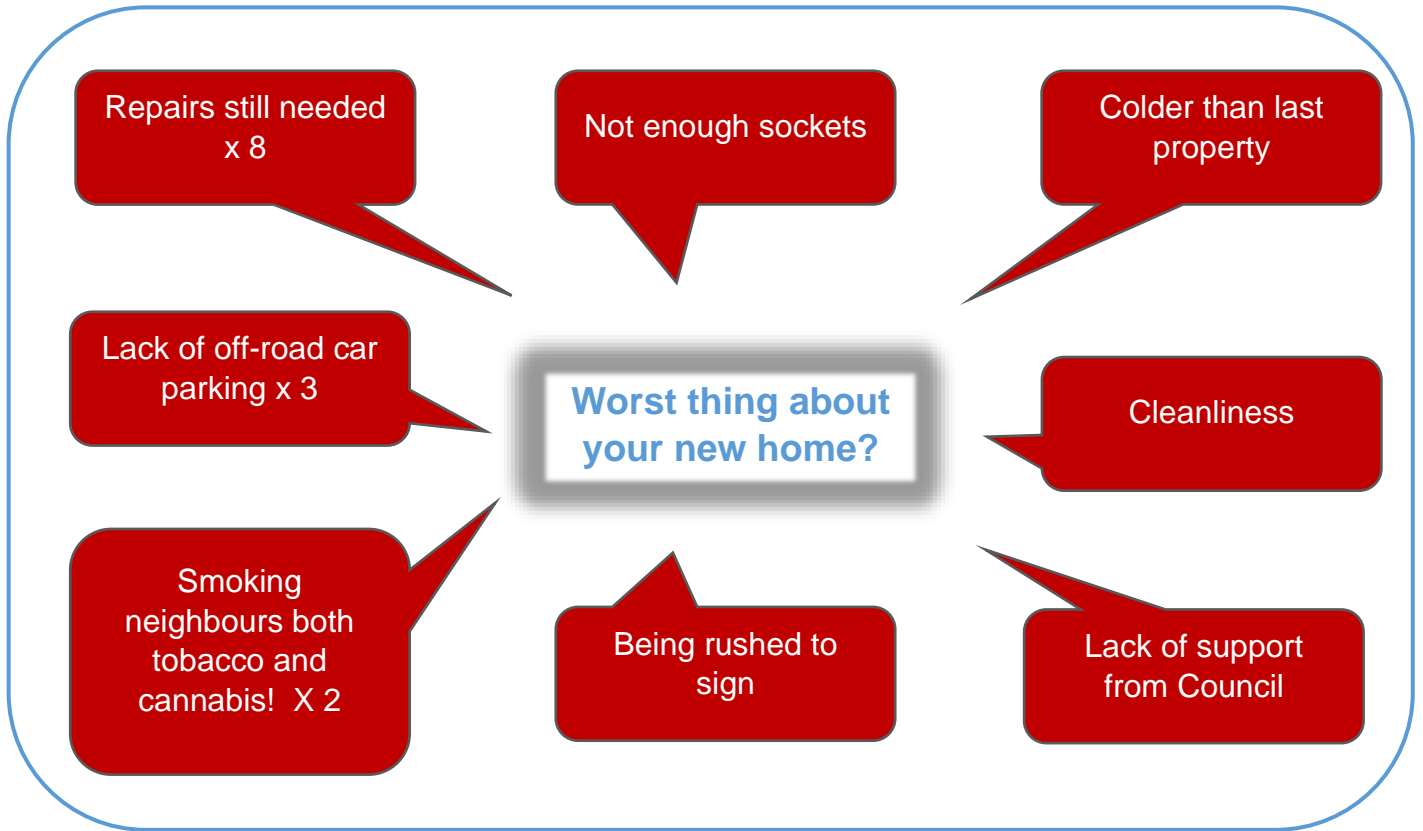
**Best thing about your new home?**

Accessibility x 5

Good size x 5

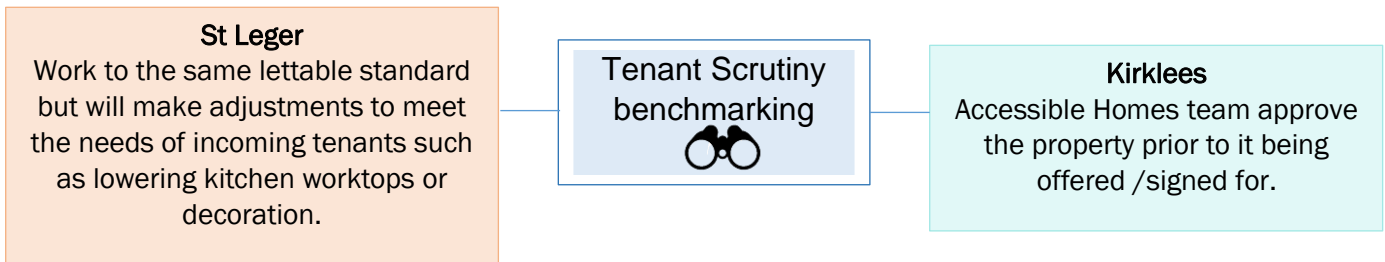
Very impressed with cleanliness

Support from Council e.g. carpet package



*Accessibility needs*

There is not a different version of the lettable standard in Rotherham for them to meet accessibility needs, as these are not generally known at the time of void works taking place. The Aids and Adaptations policy would be applied once it is known if a new tenant has a disability / accessibility needs. The lettings team will try to match to previously adapted properties as far as possible.



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## PANEL VIEWS:

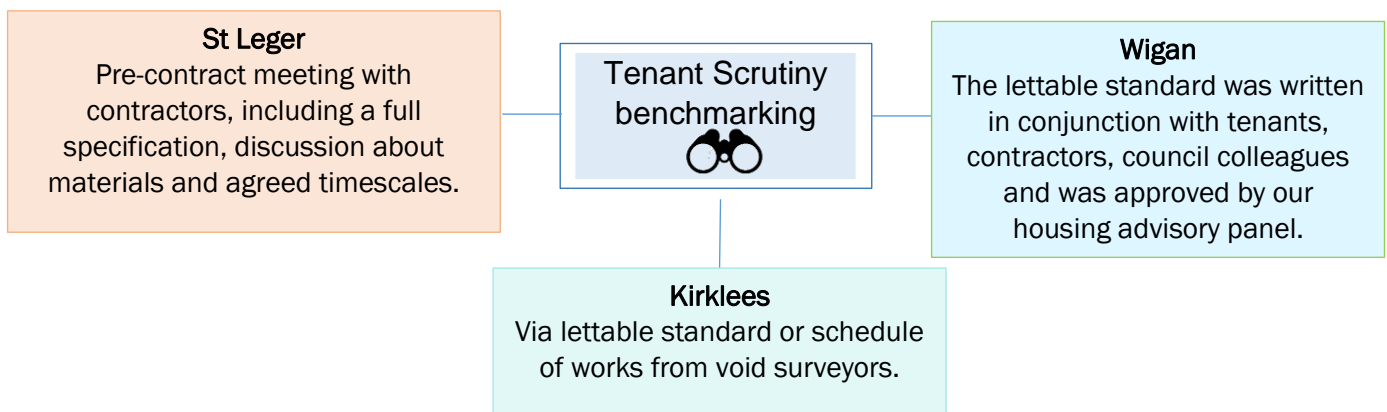
- ✎ The panel found it very useful to compare the lettable standard with that used in other areas, and thought that Rotherham performed well overall.
  - ✎ They did feel though that the areas that the 2020 version requires review, considering the points that other areas perform or explain better e.g. lightbulbs, loft insulation and number of electrical sockets.
  - ✎ Panel members appreciated the comments made about the environment; however couldn't suggest an alternative to disposing of certain items.
  - ✎ It was disappointing that 16% of people were not satisfied with their new homes at all and thought that this could be improved with better completion of repairs or communication with tenants on their expectations.
  - ✎ The panel understood the difficulties around tenants having unknown accessibility needs and would like to explore this further in the next panel investigation (Voids – support for new tenants)
- 

Recommendations

## 5.4 Communications with contractors

For minor works, the initial voids process in Rotherham is contractor-led; they have the standard and decide what works are required in each void. The scope of work is then signed off by the contracts team and a record kept of the initial assessment and costs. For major works, a joint inspections and assessment of works would take place between contractors and the voids team. Contractors are expected to follow a 'right first-time principle' when completing void works.

Other housing providers follow a similar approach apart from St Leger, who specify full details of the works in each void:



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### PANEL VIEWS:

- ✎ The panel recognised that there were pros and cons in the different ways to contract voids work; whilst it would be safer to conduct pre-contract visits to all properties, this is time consuming and costly to the Council.
- ✎ However there is a feeling that closer auditing/ checks on works may be necessary to ensure 'right-first time' and to increase new tenant satisfaction.
- ✎ It would be interesting to know how much it costs for contractors to go back and put things right when reported by new tenants as compared to the cost of pre-contract visits by officers.

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### Recommendations

## 5.5 Cleaning of void properties

### *The process*

Voids cleaning is carried out by the Council's facilities team. Cleaning requests are received from contractors at 4:30pm each day and allocated to cleaning staff ready for the next day. If staff cannot clean the properties the following day, it will roll-over onto the next day. The cleaning team is fairly flexible; staff can be moved around if needed. There are 10 cleaning staff for voids with other cleaning teams that can be pulled in if necessary. Supervisors will also help to clean if needed.

Cleaning is included in the target to turn voids around in 17 days, usually expecting cleaning to take up to two days. On some occasions, the contractor also requires a pre-clean to enable operatives to carry out the necessary repairs. A final clean will still be required at such times.

### *The standard*

Cleaning supervisors make sure that their teams take as long as is required for each void, rather than setting a time limit.

Staff have a cleaning specification checklist (Appendix 4) which is taken from the 2020 lettable standard. Cleaning staff tick the list as they have completed tasks and can make comments on the form if they have difficulties/ notice further areas of disrepair. On some occasions, mobility aids such as hospital beds, remain in the homes that are waiting to be cleaned, which can cause difficulty. These are reported through to the voids team.

There are some issues with contractors not clearing their rubbish away prior to leaving the void, and these are reported back to the contracts team if so. On a number of occasions, contractors are still working when the cleaning team arrives, or come back again after the property has been cleaned. Again these are reported through.

An Assa Cliq electronic lock system is used for all void properties which allows keyless access for various team members and provides a digital record of who is entering and leaving the property. Lettings teams arrange for a new lock to be fitted once works are completed, but this may take several days.

### *Travel times*

The schedule is sent to the cleaning team and may include homes across the whole of the Rotherham district, meaning excessive travel times. Sometimes staff might lose 40-50 minutes with travel time in between visits and this is of particular importance when the contractors are not ready for the cleaners. However the cost of wasted journeys is far outweighed by the cost of empty homes to the Council.

### Feedback/checks on cleaning

Complaints about cleaning standards have not been received by supervisors recently. If a complaint was received the supervisor would visit the property and speak to the new tenant.

Supervisors carry out approximately three spot checks per week to assess the cleaning standard. The cleaning teams are not informed of when/where the spot checks take place. In the past cleaning teams have been brought back in if the standard was not satisfactory.

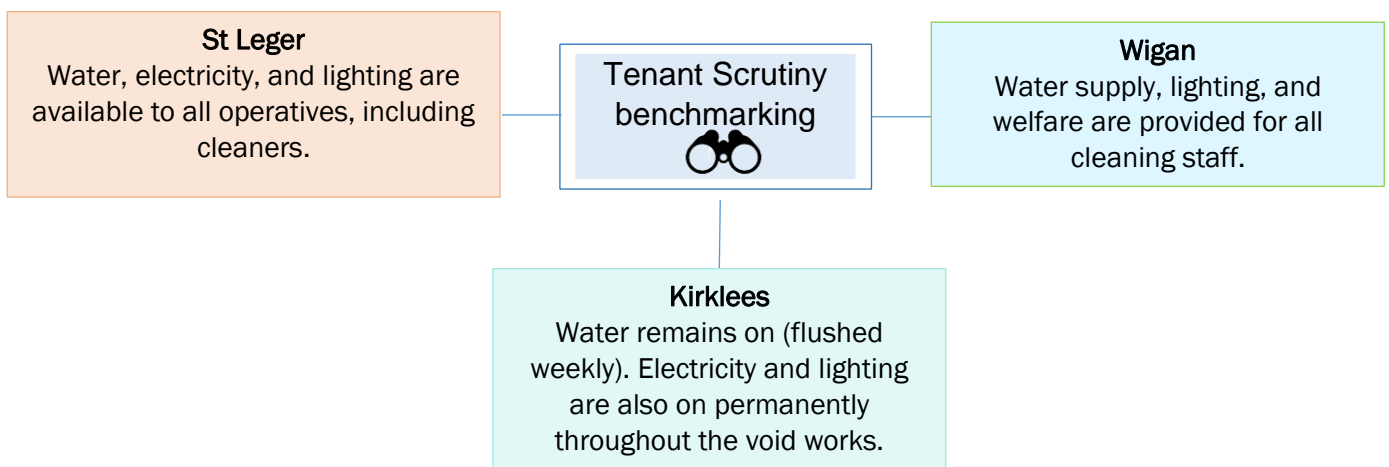
### Arrangements - utilities

#### Water

Water supplies are often turned off and not available, so cleaning teams will bring their own. Cleaning usually takes place with cold water, unless there is a working shower for hot water. The availability of a working shower is the first thing to be checked by cleaning teams when they enter the property.

#### Lighting

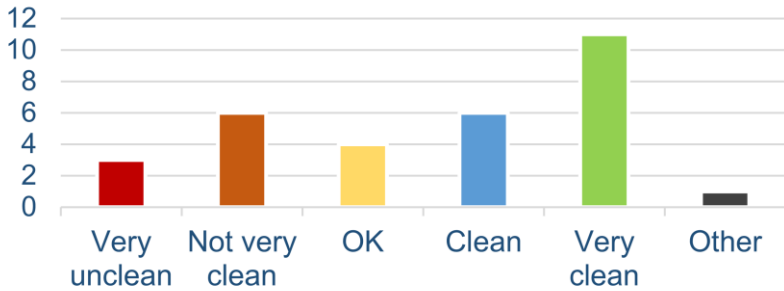
The checklist for each property will state whether electricity is available in the property. There can be an issue with adequate lighting in the winter months. Cleaning staff are provided with both head and hand-held torches for such occasions. Larger pieces of equipment such as floodlights on tripods could be considered, but these would be bulky to store and carry.



*Benchmarking against three other housing providers found that Rotherham was the only Council to not provide lighting and water for cleaning.*

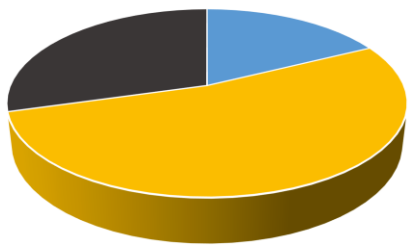
Findings from the survey of new tenants:

### How satisfied with cleanliness in your new home (where 1 is poor and 10 is good)?



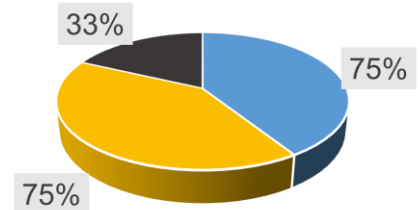
- 29% (9/31) found their new home to be very unclean/not very clean
- 55% (17/31) reported their new home to be clean or very clean

### Very clean/clean by area



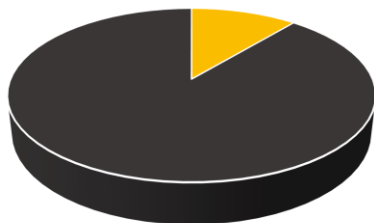
- Rotherham North
- Rotherham South
- Unknown

### Very clean/clean by area (Percentage of responses from that area)



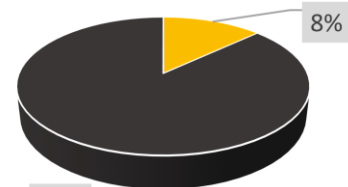
- Rotherham North
- Rotherham South
- Unknown

### Very unclean/Unclean by area



- Rotherham North
- Rotherham South
- Unknown

### Very unclean/Unclean by area (Percentage of responses from that area)

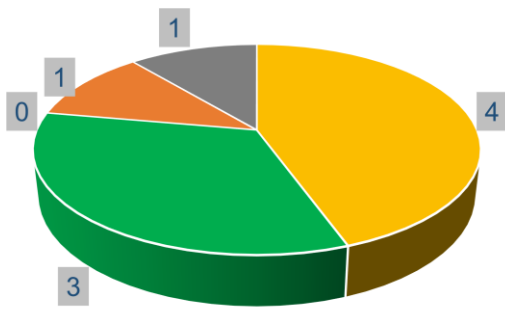


- Rotherham North
- Rotherham South
- Unknown

- 75% of people who stated the area that they lived in were happy with the cleanliness of their new home
- The majority of unclean homes were reported by people who did not want to add which area they lived in.

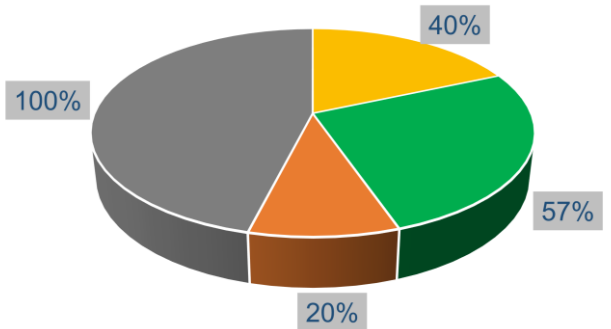


### Very unclean/Unclean by age



■ Under 35 
 ■ 35-44 
 ■ 45-54  
■ 55-64 
 ■ Over 65 
 ■ Unknown

### Very unclean/Unclean by age (Percentage)



■ Under 35 
 ■ 35-44 
 ■ 45-54  
■ 55-64 
 ■ Over 65 
 ■ Unknown

- The majority of people finding their homes unclean were below the age of 44.
- 40% of all under 35s and 57% of all 35–44-year olds were unhappy with the cleaning standard.

### Comments on cleanliness

Sparkled

Very impressed with cleanliness

Perfect

Absolutely disgusting

Glass all over back yard and side grass

Lumps of concrete on floor – needed to be scraped off

Can't clean kitchen floor properly as like a wet-room floor

Cat hairs everywhere particularly behind radiators

Nails, screws, dust and plaster everywhere

Plaster on taps and floor

Pet hair everywhere and dirty toilet

### Comments on cleanliness

Bits of glass everywhere










### *Feedback from visits made by panel members*

Panel members conducting the first visits found some that some properties were in extremely poor order and were impressed that these could be brought up to a lettable standard.

There were mixed results from the tenant scrutiny visits to voids, once they were ready for re-let. Some were found to be satisfactory, whereas others were disappointing as regards the level of cleanliness and did not appear to match the checklist that was available to cleaning staff. In particular, there were instances of nicotine staining to light fittings, pet hairs behind radiators, and dust and dirt stuck in old carpet grippers.

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#### **PANEL VIEWS:**

-  The panel felt that they would like to express their appreciation to cleaning staff having seen the conditions in some of the properties during their first site visits.
-  It was disappointing that contractors sometimes arranged for cleaning staff to visit before they had finished their repairs and/or cleared their rubbish away. The panel wondered if this happened so that the total void time looked better in terms of repairs meeting target days.
-  Panel members were pleased that the cleaning staff show such flexibility across teams in meeting the two-day target.
-  It is important that travel times for cleaners are considered when monitoring the time taken for each void and that grouping of visits is provided as often as possible.
-  It was concerning that 29% of new tenants found the cleaning in their homes to be unsatisfactory, and the list of issues raised.
-  The panel was surprised that there is no target for the number of spot-checks carried out on cleaning standards?
-  It was worrying that cleaning teams are expected to clean with cold water only and torch lighting only, when other Councils say that full electricity and water is provided at their voids for cleaning.
-  Panel members felt that it was important to monitor the use of the Assa Cliq keys and the time taken to fit a new lock, to make sure that contractors are rarely going back to the property once cleaned.
-  There was some concern over the number of issues with cleaning reported in the new tenant survey.

## 5.6 Tenant Expectations

### *Outstanding Repairs*

It was confirmed by officers that it is at great expense to the Council, through loss of rent, if a void is delayed for any longer than is reasonable to carry out the necessary works.

Despite this, at the start of the investigation, officers were asked if people move into their new home with outstanding repairs still to be completed. It was stated that the only repair that should remain when people move in is the replacement of temporary doors. This is due to the order delays, with new doors taking up to three months to arrive. This only happens in a small number of cases and is explained to the tenant at sign-up.

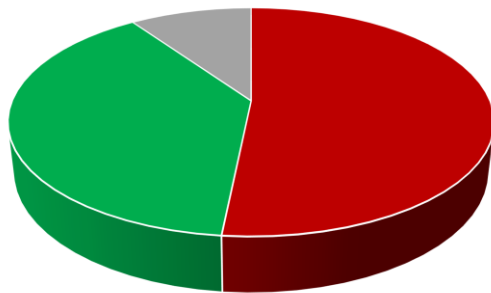
It was expressed by officers that some issues may arise from the lack of 'in -person' viewings so that the standard cannot be discussed and heating and other systems tested.

### *Gas uncapping*

Gas cannot be uncapped until the new tenant has moved in and made arrangements with a gas supplier. The gas will be uncapped within five days of the move-in date.

Findings from the survey of new tenants:

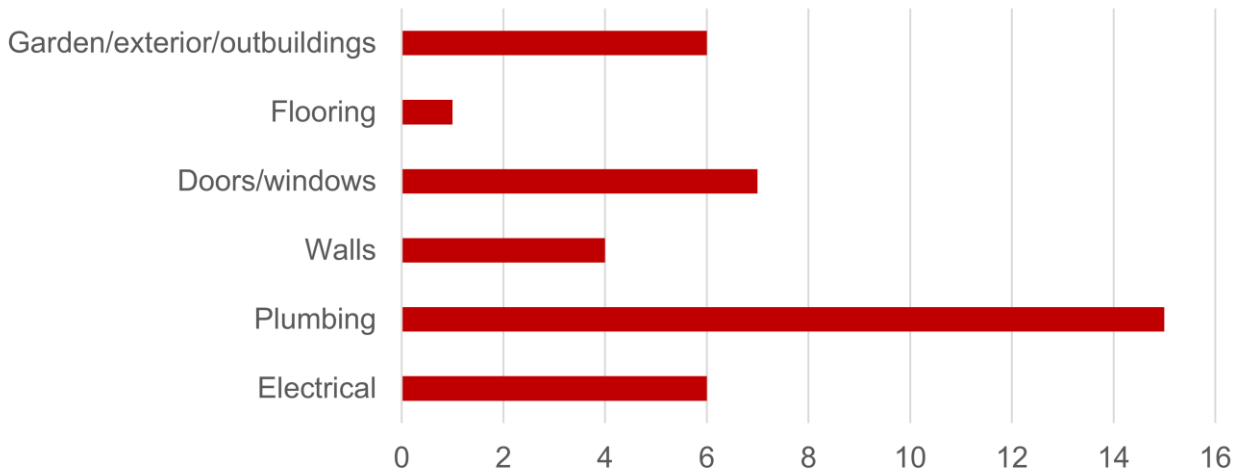
### Were there repairs still to be done?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

- The majority of homes (52%) were reported to still need some repairs to be carried out
- The majority of repairs related to plumbing (39%) and doors/windows (18%). (see below)

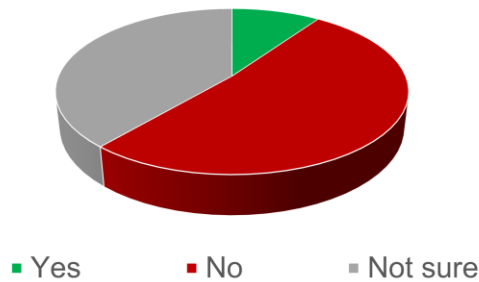
### Repairs needed



### Comments on repairs still required

- Heating on continuously/ thermostat not working x 3
- Window locks stuck/ new windows needed/ metal grids need taking off x3
- Leaking radiators/ showers/ taps x2
- Gas uncapping took 20 days (another one took two weeks)
- Damage from leak never repaired
- Downstairs wiring all wrong
- Drains outside flooded every time the taps ran
- Outhouse collapsing

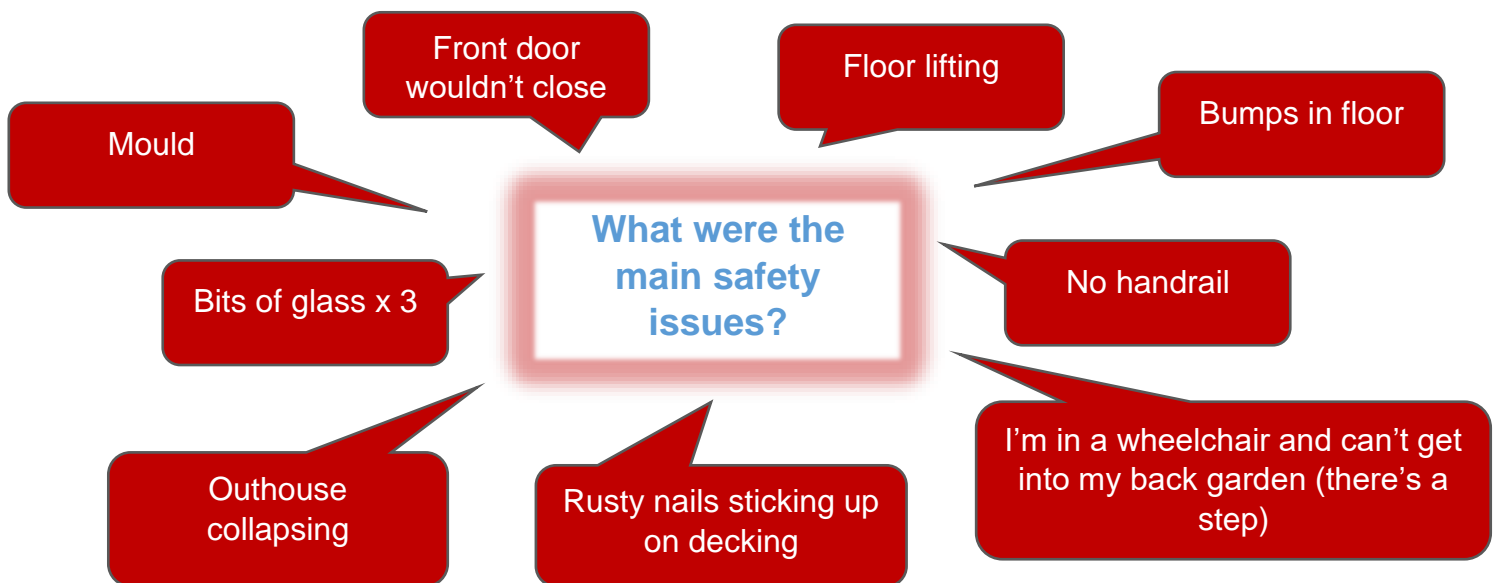
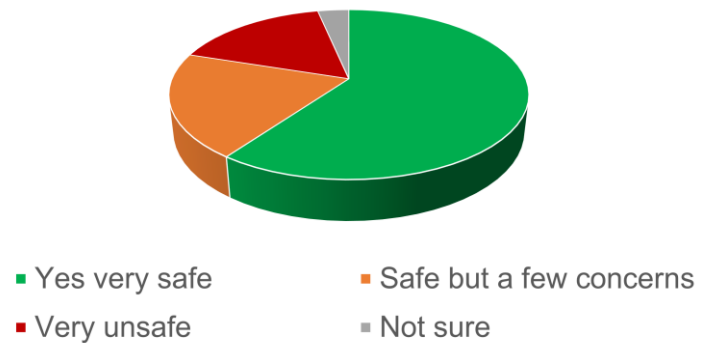
### Were you told about the outstanding repairs?



- Over 50% of new tenants were not told about the outstanding repairs before they moved in

- 16% felt that their home was very unsafe when they moved in
- The most common reason seemed to be pieces of glass being left in the property

### Was your new home safe?



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## PANEL VIEWS:

- ✍ The panel was disappointed with the number of people saying that they had outstanding repairs when they moved into their new home; especially as the panel was previously informed that only doors would remain on the list of works.
- ✍ In particular, there was concern that gas uncapping could take up to five days after moving in; which would be worrying in winter months and if the new tenant was vulnerable in any way.
- ✍ The panel wondered if the number of plumbing issues reported in the survey were due to the water not being turned on and checked prior to repairs being signed off, plus the gas not being uncapped to test heating systems.
- ✍ The reported presence of pieces of glass in several properties was concerning.
- ✍ Panel members thought that feeling safe was a priority when moving into a new home, and were concerned that 16% of survey respondents felt very unsafe.
- ✍ The panel were not keen on the virtual viewings as they didn't feel that this offered a clear picture of the conditions and dimensions in the properties.

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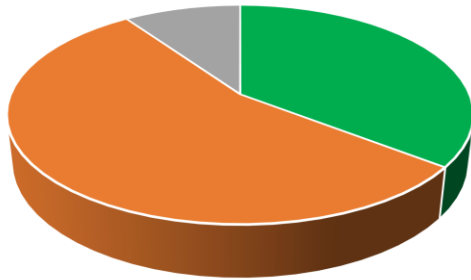
Recommendations

## 5.7 Communications with the new tenant

When all the work has been completed, an online viewing takes place; this makes the turnaround process shorter as all works and cleaning have already taken place and prospective new tenants are shortlisted quickly (previously, prior to the Covid pandemic, properties were advertised at the voids stage). If the tenant does not have internet access they are invited to Riverside House to take part in the online viewing. If adaptations are needed the viewing takes place in person, to ensure that all needs can be met.

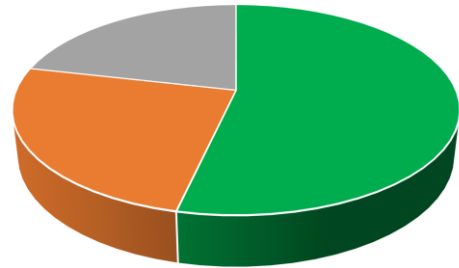
At the viewing stage, the video or visit allows lettings officers to explain the standard that can be expected by the new tenant when moving into their new home.

### Did anyone tell you about the standard?



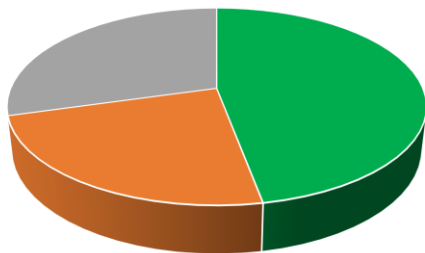
■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

### Would you have liked a list of what things should be like in your new home?



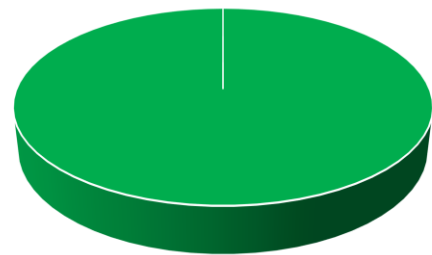
■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

### Not told about standard versus satisfaction



■ Very satisfied/satisfied  
 ■ OK  
 ■ Very dissatisfied/dissatisfied

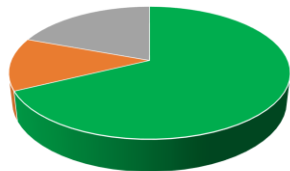
### Told about standard versus satisfaction



■ Very satisfied/satisfied  
 ■ OK  
 ■ Very dissatisfied/dissatisfied

- Only 11/31 (36%) of new tenants were told about the standard
- People were not dissatisfied just because they weren't told about the standard, with 47% of those who hadn't been told saying that they were still very satisfied/satisfied. Dissatisfaction with the voids process did *not* mean that people had not been told about the standard.
- However, everybody that was told about the standard said that they were satisfied with their new home.
- And 54% of new tenants said that they would have liked to have known what their new home would be like (with only 25% saying that they wouldn't).

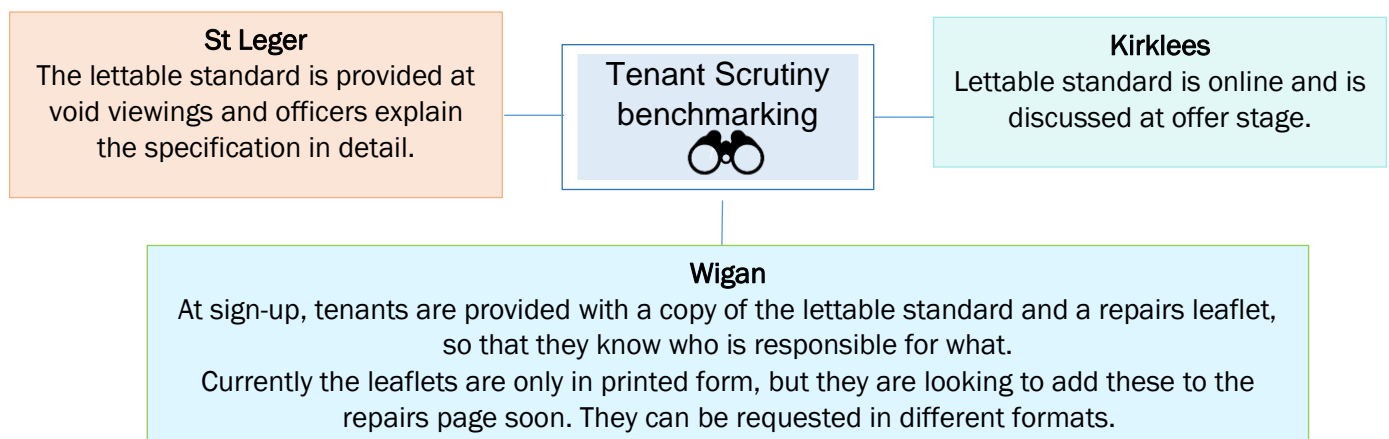
### Did you know who to contact if there was a problem with your new home?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Not sure

- It was reassuring that 68% of respondents knew who to contact with any problems in their new home.

### Information handed to new tenant



### Online information

Rotherham Council has a 'Guide to you Home' document on their website, which has a section on 'moving into your new home. This section includes who to contact e.g. Council Tax, Housing Benefit; Reconnection of utility supplies; tenant responsibilities; Council responsibilities.

The web trawl found that there was no new tenant advice online for five Council housing providers (Hull, Leeds, St Leger, Warrington, Wolverhampton).

Other Councils had some partial information:

- Dudley – Your New Home, which talks all about tenancy visits
- Sheffield – which is very vague and just talks about landlord commitments
- Wigan – just general tabs to follow for snippets of advice.



Three others had full information for new tenants online:

- Berneslai - 'what to expect when moving in', covering rent, insurance etc.
- Kirklees – 'Moving in and moving out', including what you can expect from your new home
- Nottingham – 'Information for Tenants' - tabs on tenants' safety responsibilities, documents required before renting etc.

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### PANEL VIEWS:

It was worrying that only 36% of new tenants reported that they were told about what to expect from the standard during their viewings.

Although a small majority of people (54%) said they would like information on the standard before they moved in, the panel felt that it would be helpful to publish a leaflet or similar to manage new tenant expectations better. This would hopefully increase satisfaction levels with new homes.

Panel members were keen for Rotherham to make improvements to help with benchmarking against other providers, and would prefer both online and printed information for people moving into their new home.

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Recommendations

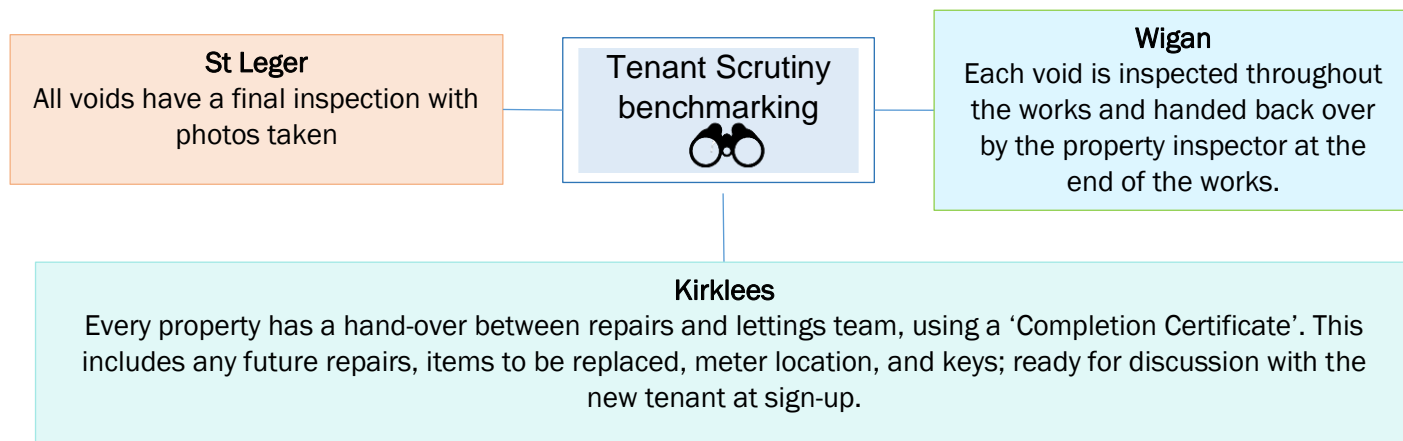
## 5.8 Quality Assurance/ Customer feedback

### Quality checks on void works

Other than the cleaning checks made by supervisors as described in section 5.4, quality audits are also carried out on repairs:

- 100% of all voids are inspected by contract partners before handing back to the voids team
- For all major works, joint handovers take place between contractors and Council officers
- Random spot checks by the voids team for 10% of minor works
- Quality assurance team carry out spot checks on both minor and major works at random.

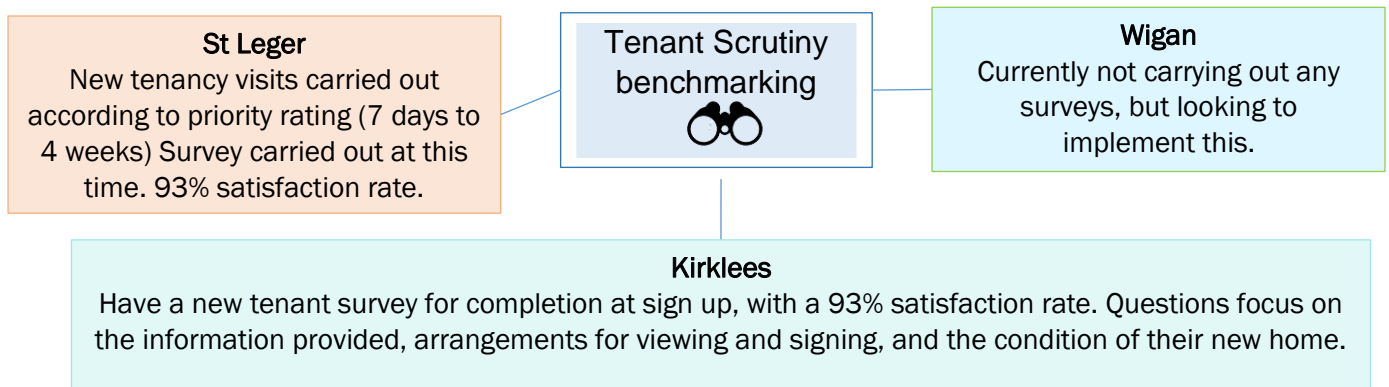
There is a healthy challenge culture across teams (particularly if the same void has been checked) and some items are discussed at contractor meetings.



### Customer feedback

During the virtual viewings, Advice Officers will highlight any issues that potential tenants raise whilst watching the videos and feed these back to the voids team.

For all new tenancies, a welcome visit is made by housing officers after six to eight weeks, allowing the new tenant to settle in first. The welcome visit form includes asking new tenants if there are any issues with their new home. Feedback from new tenants is not requested before this time. At the welcome visit, the officer will report any further repairs and issues through to Key Choices or voids team for them to action. Issues raised on the welcome visits form are not collated anywhere central.



### Customer complaints

Not many complaints are received by the voids team (less than six each year). Of those that were upheld from May 2021 to May 2023, these related to:

- Central heating, boiler, gas uncapping, water leaks x 6
- Flooring defective
- Leaking roof
- External paving
- Plastering
- Old pipework embedded in plaster
- Property not cleared of soiled clothing
- Pieces of broken glass x 2
- Poor high-level cleaning (tops of cupboards)
- Missing skirting boards

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### PANEL VIEWS:

- ✍ The panel acknowledged that it is difficult to carry out an inspection at the conclusion of all works, but were surprised that other areas can achieve this.
  - ✍ Panel members thought that a survey similar to other areas would help to monitor satisfaction levels amongst new tenants and highlight areas that may need improvement in a timelier manner.
  - ✍ It would also be useful to collate information from the Welcome Visits to further support contract management and improve standards in new homes.
  - ✍ There was some concern that the majority of upheld complaints again seemed to focus on heating and plumbing issues (similar to those issues raised by survey respondents).
-

## Recommendations

[Redacted content]

## 6. Recommendations

Recommendations (in order of priority):

Priority ranking	Recommendation	Page Number
<b>A</b>		
<b>B</b>		
<b>C</b>		
<b>D</b>		
<b>E</b>		
<b>F</b>		
<b>G</b>		
<b>H</b>		

## Suggestions

1.

2.

3.

4.

## 7. Appendices

- 1 – Communications with vacating tenant
- 2 – Tenant Scrutiny comments on Rotherham termination letters
- 3 – Summary of full comparison of lettable standards across benchmarking providers
- 4 – Cleaning specification checklist

## Appendix 1 - Communications with vacating tenant

### **Berneslai - online:**

- Ending your tenancy – can notify online
- Moving to another property
- Letting us know someone has died
- After you've given notice:
  - Clearing the property
  - Rent payments
  - Gas, electric, water
  - Post
  - Property condition inside
  - Gardens and outside
  - If you need to extend your notice

### **Kirklees – leaflet:**

- Four weeks' notice and termination online form
- Paying your rent – till tenancy ends
- Belongings left in property – charged for removal/ bulky waste charges/ recycling sites
- Removal of Gas installations – cookers and fires
- Meter readings – on leaving day
- Turning off supplies – gas/electric/water and open taps in winter
- Improvements made during tenancy – list of things that may be reimbursed (charge for removal of unauthorised works)
- Next steps – key safe outside to drop keys in
- Moving Out Checklist – tick boxes



### **St Leger – fact sheet:**

- How to give notice – in person – complete a form
- How much notice – four weeks unless to another Council home or residential care
- Anything I don't want – remove everything or get charged
- Before hand keys in – must be unoccupied, clear of everything and clean. Fill in fish ponds and sand pits in garden.
- Changes made to home – must be replaced/ fixed, or will be charged
- Carpets and curtains – check with Empty Homes team
- Security alarms – hand in keys and codes
- Extending notice period – apply to St Leger
- Retract notice – in writing within four weeks
- Hand in keys – Monday 12 o'clock
- Rent owed – legal action
- Furnished tenancies – furniture collected before they leave
- Unwanted furniture – charged for removal. List of charities that collect
- Bulky waste – phone number (small charge)
- Moving out checklist
- Contacts

### **Wigan – letter**

- Keys – hand-in arrangements
- Gas and Electric – British Gas take over day after move out
- Security (alarms)
- Rent – and recovery of debts
- Housing benefit – cancelled once move out
- Pre-termination inspections and rechargeable repairs – all inspected. Charged for removal of furniture and rubbish left; cleaning if in poor state; putting back things that have been removed; putting right any unsatisfactory alterations; renewing locks if less than two keys handed in.
- Meter Readings – final readings
- Advertisement – advertised in weekly property list
- Further help – if can't settle account

## Appendix 2 – Full list of tenant scrutiny comments on termination letters

### All documents

#### Layout -ve

- Need page numbers

#### Layout +ve

- Clear and straightforward

#### Accessibility -ve

- Is it available in different formats like braille, audio, large print or easy read?
- Needs to be available in different languages
- Lots of Council jargon – see separate slides for lists

#### Content / clarity +ve

- Useful contact numbers are good
- Additional information is clear and makes sense on the whole

### Layout -ve

- Need to be able to tick more than one box for reason to quit

### Accessibility -ve

- Council jargon and phrases that are difficult to understand:
  - Notice to Quit,
  - Tenancy notice period,
  - Legally binding
  - forwarding address
  - fixtures and fittings
  - Put right the damage
- Section six – is very complicated and confusing (would cause anxiety). The panel feel that this could be clearer

### Content / clarity -ve

- Letter - It is not a 'request to end' but a notice
- Letter - Doesn't say where to hand keys in to – needs an address
- Letter - Needs to define 'empty property'
- Section One – the tenancy address may not be the current address if they have moved out already
- Section One – needs more explanation of what happens if only one person leaving

### Content / clarity -ve

- Letter - It is not a 'request to end' but a notice
- Letter - Doesn't say where to hand keys in to – needs an address
- Letter - Needs to define 'empty property'
- Section One – the tenancy address may not be the current address if they have moved out already
- Section One – needs more explanation of what happens if only one person leaving

### Content / clarity -ve

- Section Two - Needs the option of 'prefer not to say' and 'other reason' boxes on reason for leaving
- Section Two - Should you ask for more information about domestic abuse as well as hate crime?
- Section Three – needs to be clear that you mean where you will live after leaving this home (some people may already have left too)

## Term Two Letter and Next Steps

### Layout +ve

- The information is good as it's set out in sections It would be better as a checklist you could tick off

### Accessibility -ve

- Council jargon and phrases that are difficult to understand -
  - Legally binding
  - If applicable
  - Bulky items (needs further description)
  - Fixtures and Fittings
  - Rectified
  - Liable to pay
  - Confirmation
  - Remedy damage

### Content / clarity -ve

- Letter - 'Encourages' tenants to clear – shouldn't this be 'must' or 'expect'
- Letter - No mention of arrangements for leaving items behind – how to get permission
- Letter - Needs to be clear that you are charged for bulky items
- Next steps - Should repeat where to hand keys in to
- Next steps - Furniture package section needs re-wording for clarity. What do you leave and what goes? Don't think 'be left in the property' is needed, as later it says to contact a number.

### Content queries

- If technical officers visit before the tenancy has finished why are they left in such a state?
- If the tenancy is finished early why can't one rent be stopped. Avoiding the tenant from paying two rents.
- Housing Benefit - You aren't allowed housing benefit on two properties at once how does this work when ending one council tenancy and starting another council tenancy.

### Content queries

- Removal service - Who will help disabled people to get items outside for the removal service 'bulky items'?
- Property keys - How does the end of tenancy work if you are moving to another council property? Often you do not get the keys in advance, so you would not be able to get keys at midday Monday and hand keys in on the same midday Monday. Has any council officer followed this process or a customer on the journey?

### Appendix 3 - Summary of the full comparison of lettable standards across benchmark

	Rotherham	Kirklees	St Leger	Wigan	Warrington	Red Kite	STAR
<b>Loft insulation</b>	Existing loft insulation laid equally				Loft insulated to 250mm	270mm	Insulated
<b>Balustrade to stairs</b>	Replaced if missing/damaged				Replaced if missing/damaged	Replaced	
<b>Internal doors</b>	Kitchen door?				Kitchen door half hour fire rated with door closers		
<b>Electric sockets</b>	????	Adequate			4 double sockets in kitchen and living room, 2 doubles in bedrooms, 1 double in hall and landing		Minimum 5 single in kitchen and 4 singles in all other rooms
<b>Removal of gas fires</b>	Removed and wall/flue made good				Removed and fireplace bricked up	Removed and bricked up	

	<b>Rotherham</b>	<b>Kirklees</b>	<b>St Leger</b>	<b>Wigan</b>	<b>Warrington</b>	<b>Red Kite</b>	<b>STAR</b>
<b>Smoke / heat/CO detectors</b>	Test – but no mention of how many CO detector – need to seek authorisation to fit	Heat detector in kitchen Smoke alarms each floor – hall and landing CO detector adjacent to flued gas appliances				Hallway, landing, living room and heat detector in kitchen	
<b>Sink taps</b>	Check that taps on right sides (R cold, Left hot)						
<b>Plumbing</b>	Not sure if flushed?	Any dead legs in pipework removed All pipework flushed					
<b>Heating</b>	Programme not mentioned	Programmable					
<b>Toilets</b>	Limescale removed					Cleaning fluid left in all toilets	
<b>Hot water cylinder</b>	No mention	Compliant			Jacket provided for cylinder		Insulated
<b>Stop tap</b>	No mention			Accessible	Eased		Turns freely

	Rotherham	Kirklees	St Leger	Wigan	Warrington	Red Kite	STAR
<b>Shower head</b>	Replaced shower head and hose every time				Disinfected or replaced		
<b>Shower curtain</b>	New every time						
<b>Missing baths</b>	Not mentioned?					Not replaced if previously removed to fit a shower	
<b>Extractor fan</b>	????	Mechanical extracting in kitchen and bathroom			Serviced		
<b>Polystyrene tiles</b>	Removed			Removed	Removed	Removed	
<b>Plastering</b>	'Smooth for decoration'				Smooth finish		
<b>Internal doors</b>		Any glazed doors replaced					
<b>Decoration Allowance</b>	No mention?				If supported/ sheltered housing	For sheltered homes or elderly/disabled tenants	Decorating packs supplied
<b>Graffiti/ mould</b>	Halophane paint used to cover mould					Decorated	

	Rotherham	Kirklees	St Leger	Wigan	Warrington	Red Kite	STAR
	and other paint for graffiti						
<b>Air fresheners</b>	Yes					All around the house	
<b>Carpet grippers and nails</b>	Unnecessary nails, screws and fixings removed					Removed	
<b>Lightbulbs</b>						Low energy bulbs fitted in entrance, landing, lounge, and bathroom	
<b>Curtain battens</b>							In every room
<b>Behind radiators</b>	Clean as far as possible to rear	As far as possible		Clean behind all radiators			
<b>External Windows</b>	Correctly fixed				Putty replaced if damaged		Cleaned outside at ground floor level
<b>First floor windows</b>	Restrictors fitted				Restrictors fitted		



	Rotherham	Kirklees	St Leger	Wigan	Warrington	Red Kite	STAR
<b>EXTERNAL</b>							
<b>External doors</b>	Number fitted				Spy hole and draught excluder fitted		
<b>Clothes post</b>	No mention?					Not fitted	
<b>Security screen</b>	No mention?					Fitted during void and removed day before occupancy	
<b>Paths</b>	No mention of sweeping, but does say laid so water runs off	Swept					
<b>Outdoor lighting</b>	No mention?	Adequate and suitably located					
<b>Fencing</b>	Repair if possible. Remove if dangerous. Only provide replacement if requested by client.	Fencing to the front of the property will be repaired/replaced where required		Fencing and gates replaced only at the front, not rear unless on to public land			

	Rotherham	Kirklees	St Leger	Wigan	Warrington	Red Kite	STAR
<b>Air bricks</b>	Mention air bricks not obstructed and are vermin/water proof						
<b>Outbuilding</b>	Change the lock						

## Appendix 4 - Cleaning Standard Checklist

Property Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Deep Clean: Yes / No

Electricity in Property: Yes / No

<b>Clean all kitchen work surfaces and grease from, fans, walls and ceilings</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
All work surfaces to be cleaned thoroughly and all traces of food and grease or any other type of stains removed	
Any paint drips to be removed	
Work surfaces to be disinfected	
Shadows caused by heated appliances to be removed	
No wipe marks or smears to be left on the surfaces	
Grease on fans, walls and ceilings to be removed	
<b>Clean all kitchen units and cupboards (internally and externally)</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
All surfaces of the kitchen units to be cleaned thoroughly. Pay particular attention to the sides of the cooker, fridge and washer space	
All door and unit edges to be cleaned and particular attention given to the finger pulls on unit doors.	
All shelving to the kitchen units to be cleaned including the underside of shelves	
The kick boards and any other trims to be thoroughly cleaned and no dirt or rubbish is to be left between kick boards and floor or unit sides and walls	
<b>Clean all wall tiles in property</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
All wall tiles within the property to be thoroughly cleaned to remove all dirt and grease	
All grout, mastic joints and corners to be cleaned	
Tiles to be disinfected	
<b>Clean Bathroom Suite and WC</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
Bath and wash hand basin, including brassware to be thoroughly cleaned	
All stains to be removed including lime residue from the washbasin or bath caused by dripping taps	
Paint splashes to be removed from any items of the suite	
Floor to be disinfected	
Remove/scrape WC pan to remove all lime scale deposits	
Label left attached to WC to confirm clean	
WC to be cleaned to front, rear and all pipework including waste pipe	
<b>Clean down all interior paintwork, doors, skirting boards and architraves</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
Remove all dirt and debris from tops of skirting boards and architraves throughout the property	
Wipe clean skirting boards and architraves throughout the property to remove dirt and grease	
Wipe dirt and stains from all door faces and casings (internal and external) and from any other areas of paintwork within the property	
Clear debris and dirt from door threshold strips (internal and external)	
Remove dirt from the rear of all central heating pipe work	

Clean fronts of all radiators and as far as possible to the rear	
<b>Windows</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
All internal windows to be cleaned and buffed	
All smears to be removed from windows	
<b>Sweep all floors to property including staircase treads</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
Sweep all floors to the property to remove all dirt and debris	
Remove all rubbish from open floor board joints	
Clean dirt and debris from all corners of rooms	
<b>Deodorise rooms as necessary</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
All rooms in property to be deodorised with a suitable agent	
Leave internal doors open for air circulation	
<b>Mop all hard floors</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
All hard floors (including storage cupboards) to be swept, mopped clean and disinfected	
Particular attention should be paid to the removal of scuffmarks and paint splashes	
Mopped/cleaned floors are to be left clear of bad smearing	
<b>Vacuum clean any carpets left in property</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
Carpets which the Void Technical Officer allow to be left in the property will be vacuumed and cleaned to a good standard	
All timber/chip board flooring to be hoovered and cleaned to a good standard without using water/liquids	
<b>Remove all cobwebs from property</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
Sweep all corners, window frames and cupboards to remove all cobwebs from the property	
<b>Leave air freshener in each room of property</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
Deodorise all rooms	
If property is accessed via a communal area, leave deodorising block in communal entrance way	
<b>Clean external doors</b>	<b>Tick when checked/cleaned</b>
External doors are to be free from dirt, dust and cobwebs, including door surround and door cills (inside and outside)	

*To be completed by a member of staff upon completion of cleaning to the property;*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:



Report produced by:



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On behalf of:



**Rotherham Federation**

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