

COMMITTEE:	Tenants Advisory Group
DATE:	20 th April 2004
SUBJECT:	Anti-Social Behaviour and Voids Performance
REPORT OF:	Senior Housing Officer
Ward(s):	All
Purpose:	To inform Members of the performance of the Area Housing Team
Contact:	John Bartlett, Senior Housing Officer, Telephone 01323 415320 or internally on extension 5320.
Recommendation:	That members note the report.

1.0	<u>Introduction</u>
1.1	This report gives an updated overview of two of the main issues dealt with by the Area Housing Team and Anti-Social Behaviour Officer during the 2003/2004 year.
2.0	<u>Void Properties</u>

2.1	<p>Since April 2003, 424 properties have become vacant. These have all been inspected to identify work needed to bring them up to a relettable standard and the decent homes standard. There is a balance struck between the need to improve them against the need to let them as soon as possible.</p>
2.2	<p>At the close of the year, of those 424, 5 are on offer, 4 are being looked at to locate suitable candidates and 404 have been relet. The remaining 11 are undergoing refurbishment works for reletting within the new financial year. This figure is added to on an ongoing basis as further voids are identified. The number of voids does not follow any set pattern, so is increasingly difficult to predict.</p>
2.3	<p>The average time taken to relet a property not needing major works (i.e. those needed to be brought up to Decent Homes Standard) is 30.4 days as at the end of February 2004. This represents a slight dip in performance from the last report and it is unlikely the year-end target of 25 days will be met.</p>
2.4	<p>The main reason for this is the ongoing difficulty in finding suitable tenants for "hard to let" flats (mainly retirement housing flatlets with shared facilities). Removing these dwellings from the overall relet times shows the average time to relet properties is 24.5 days, 0.5 in front of target.</p> <p>Even with the use of the Homechoice system, matching tenants to these properties is not proving easy. Staff from Tenant Services, Retirement Housing, Housing Needs and Allocations continue to work to identify prospective tenants for these "hard to let" properties.</p>
2.5	<p>It should be noted that the target has also been affected by the unexpected refusal of some Retirement Housing not within the hard to let category, specifically the self-contained units. The refusal reasons have varied but have mainly been due to changes in applicants' circumstances leading to them no longer needing this kind of accommodation.</p>

2.6	<p>The average time taken to relet a property needing major works (i.e the installation of gas central heating, kitchen/bathroom upgrades to meet the decent homes standard etc.) is 53.2 days as at the end of February 2004. This has improved both since January and also over the year. However it is still adrift from the performance target for year-end of 40 days. The figure has been affected by a number of factors, including some of the units being hard to let but mainly by the sheer volume of work required to bring these homes up to the required standard. However plans have been instigated to promote closer working by the contractors and staff involved to reduce the overall times.</p>
2.7	<p>It should be noted that in the last year, the number of void properties has far exceeded the volume expected to be dealt with. With this in mind, officers have been identifying properties and advertising them within the Homechoice system even before they become vacant. Reports of abandoned properties are promptly investigated and where necessary properties recovered to the Council at the earliest opportunity.</p>
2.8	<p>The appointment of a specialist void officer in the coming months, should also have an impact on not only the speed of reletting but also the quality of the end product.</p>
3.0	<p><u>Nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour</u></p>
3.1	<p>The Area Housing Officer team has dealt with a total of 52 nuisance cases between 1/4/03 and 31/3/04. They were able to close 43 of them leaving an active caseload of 9. This shows a reduction over the year of 50%, which had exceeded the target of a 5% reduction. One of those closed was a category one (most serious) case.</p>

3.2	<p>During the same period,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · three tenants were evicted for acts of nuisance or allowing their guests to commit acts of nuisance. · A further property was returned following a court hearing but prior to the actual execution of a warrant. · One further case is being pursued through the court system at this time, while one is being pursued with the help of Social Services. · A further property is being returned to us following the incarceration of the tenant following conviction on a violent crime within the area. · The team also finished the year having successfully applied for and monitored two injunctions.
3.3	<p>In line with forthcoming legislation the Council's Nuisance/Anti-Social Behaviour Policies and Procedures are being further refined, to allow them to be published. These will come in the standard format and also a summary for distribution as required.</p>
3.4	<p>The past few months have seen the further development of very close working between the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer, the Street wardens, the Police and Environmental Health and Housing.</p> <p>Area Housing Officers have been on patrol with the street wardens and attended the local surgeries, which give residents the chance to meet the staff involved.</p>
3.5	<p>The Anti-Social Behaviour Officer has been instrumental in securing 6 Anti-Social behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and putting in place 21 Acceptable Behaviour Contracts since April 2003. This has been possible as a result of partnership working by all of the agencies mentioned.</p>

3.6	<p>In an effort to promote early action, the Anti-Social Behaviour Officer has been working with the Schools Intervention Officer and the schools themselves. This has involved talks to school assemblies and, where necessary, working with the school in drawing up Acceptable Behaviour Contracts with individual pupils. In a number of cases, this has meant that the pupil's behaviour has improved and they have not been excluded from school. Once excluded, a pupil has far more opportunities to act in an anti-social manner. This is one of the first of such schemes in the country and is proving very successful.</p>
3.7	<p>The new Anti-Social Behaviour Act has already brought in a number of new powers for agencies such as the Police to use. Further powers relating to Housing Management will be in force later in the year, There will be a report to a future meeting of this group on the Housing Implications of this Act.</p>
4.0	<p><u>Implications.</u></p>
4.1	<p>Human Resource</p> <p>Additional staff resources are not needed to carry out the work identified.</p>
4.2	<p>Financial</p> <p>All work is funded from existing budgets.</p>
4.3	<p>Environmental, Youth, Community Safety, Human Rights and Anti-Poverty</p> <p>The work of the team has impacts in all these areas.</p>

5.0	Conclusions
5.1	There has been considerable success in dealing with nuisance and anti-social behaviour by the team as part of the Crime Reduction Partnership.
5.2	The problem of “hard to let” properties is having an impact on the average time taken to relet dwellings. Continued efforts are being made to identify tenants for there.
5.3	The work of the Area Housing Team is very much guided by the Actions and targets set by the Best Value Improvement Plan. Housing Management will be subject to inspection by the Audit Commission in September of this year. Continued good progress and improvement will be vital in all areas in order to achieve the best possible result from this process, as well as continuing to provide high quality services to our customers.
6.0	<u>Recommendations</u>
6.1	That Members note the report.
John Bartlett Senior Housing Officer	
Background Papers: The Background Papers used in compiling this report were as follows: Best Value Review of Housing Management Part 2 Improvement Plan Progress report on Improvement Plan (submitted to TAG 22/7/03) To inspect or obtain copies of background papers please refer to the contact officer listed above.	