**VIRTUAL SCRUTINY PANEL (VSP) – REPORT TO ROSEBERY BOARD**
**APPENDIX 1 – VACANT PROPERTY MANAGEMENT**

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">INITIAL FINDINGS: From evidence provided by a review of documents such as the Void Management Policy (September 2018), Decorating Allowance Guidance, forms used in the process, the Recharge Procedure, Revised Lettable Standard 2020, the Leaveable Standard, Voids Process Document, Good Practice Paper from Independent Mentor, KPI information, together with a New Tenant Survey and interview of key members of staff.<br><br>The scope of this Scrutiny was to investigate the effectiveness of Vacant Property Management, both processes and new tenant satisfaction. ‘Key to Key’.</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.0<br><br>Services, Policy & Regulatory Standards</td><td>This part of the Scrutiny was initiated by a review of documentation called for and reviewed by the VSP. Regarding Rosebery’s Void Management Policy, it was found by the VSP that:<ul><li>The Policy generally meets sector standards and is suited to a Housing Association of Rosebery’s size and nature</li><li>Policy is due for review this year, this Scrutiny is therefore timely</li><li>Regarding Regulatory Standards, the relevant Standard to this Scrutiny is the Home Standard. Within that, in particular, quality of accommodation, and ensuring the health and safety of occupants of Rosebery’s homes. (The Building Safety Bill currently in Parliament and Social Housing White Paper published in November 2020 develop this further.) The VSP consider that it is important Rosebery take these fully into account when updating the policy.</li><li>Central to Rosebery’s practices is the Lettable Standard (supported by the Leaveable Standard). The VSP found that the sign-off role when a property is ready for re-letting is critical to the property being acceptable.</li><li>Regarding services, a survey of tenants let properties under Rosebery’s processes was undertaken to</li></ul></td></tr>
</table>

| | |
|---|---|
| | identify **satisfaction levels**. This is covered in more detail in section 2.0 below, but overall the VSP found that the majority were either very satisfied or satisfied, but that the proportion of respondents who were not should be noted. |
| **1.1**<br>**Management Response** | • |
| **2.0**<br>**Customer Satisfaction** | In order to gauge levels of **Customer Satisfaction**, the VSP undertook a survey of residents who had taken occupation of a Rosebery property in the last 19 months (June 2019 – January 2021). Eighteen residents took part (out of 232 residents who were invited to take part in the survey, so an 8% return has been received)<br>• Regarding the **standard of the property offered**, the majority (72%) were either very satisfied or satisfied. Dissatisfied or very dissatisfied were 22%, (with 6% being neither.) The VSP consider this to be generally pleasing, although this does mean that 5 out the 18 were not satisfied.<br>• Specifically, on the **décor of the property** offered, 67% were either very satisfied or satisfied, with 11% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (22% neither). Again, the VSP consider this to be a pleasing result, but note that this means 5 of the 18 fall outside the satisfactory responses.<br>• Of the 18, 5 (28%) were offered **Decoration Allowances** and 13 (72%) were not. The VSP reflect that it is not clear what the criteria for being offered decoration allowance is and what '*appropriate*' as mentioned in the policy means in practice.<br>• Regarding the **overall experience with the offer and letting process**, 83% were either satisfied or |

| | |
|---|---|
| | very satisfied, 17% being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. However, the VSP recognise that the surveys included residents that participated in mutual exchanges. We consider that Rosebery may have different policies in place in relation to such exchanges compared to other Housing Providers concerning residents accepting a property '*as it is'*. Looking at the survey returns, this factor would have lowered the overall satisfaction level.<br>• A sample of specific comments made by responding tenants included:<br>• "*The process was relatively smooth, although felt a little rushed. Only a week to move doesn't leave much time at all! The house was in generally good condition, felt some jobs were started and not finished or rushed through and we have ended up having them repaired again anyway"*<br>• *"Roseberry have been an excellent landlord and it's a pleasure to be in one of their properties."*<br>• *"After signing for the property, we noticed there was dampness and insulation issues that are now being rectified in due course. There was/is rubbish in the back garden that hadn't/still hasn't been cleared. The communication seems to be really bad so far as I have made 'phone calls without any response and have sent emails without receiving a reply*." |

| | |
|---|---|
| **2.1**<br><br>**Management Response** | • |
| **3.0**<br><br>**Performance Management** | In order to consider **performance management**, the VSP studied Key Performance Indicator (**KPI**) information produced by Rosebery.<br>• **<u>The 2019/20 Monthly Reports</u>** provided run from April 2019 to February 2020 and indicate that voids completed in each of the quarters of the year were 44, 49, 48 and 17 (total 158). The VSP noted that the last quarter with the much reduced completions was when Covid-19 was beginning to take effect, although the Void Report expresses surprise at the low number as 'February is historically one of the busiest months'.<br>• The **average turnaround time** for 138 voids (**with minor repair needs**) in the report was 6.14 days. The VSP consider that this represents good performance, including when compared to other Housing Providers. See below.<br>• The **average turnaround time** including 20 voids (**with major repair needs**) in the report was 8.01 days. Again, the VSP consider that this is good performance.<br>• The KPI Report reflects on the requirement sometimes to **recharge outgoing tenants** because of the need for clearance, cleaning or repair. This is despite all tenants being provided with the required |

| | |
|---|---|
| | ***Leaveable Standard***. Whilst small in number, the costs involved mount up. The VSP consider that this is regrettable expenditure, but it is difficult to improve on this situation given that there will probably always be a small number that cause this expenditure.<br>● The report also provides useful information on the operation of Rosebery's particular practices in Vacant Property Management, for example **relations with Crawley and Guildford Borough Council's** and the **mixed use of Rosebery Repairs DRS and contractors**. The contractors appear to perform well and the formation of the in house team was implemented successfully.<br>● An issue with the two Borough Councils seems to be Rosebery receiving **short notice or no notice from them of voids occurring,** meaning that it is difficult to plan for incoming voids. Also, an issue developed with the use of Rosebery's properties by Crawley Borough Council for **temporary accommodation use** complicating effective vacant property management.<br>● The mixture of using Rosebery Repairs DRS and contractors appears to give flexibility, it being noted that at times the DRS are unable to take any more Voids, with the contractors taking up the work. From the report, there do not seem to be any issues with the contractors.<br>● **The 2020/21 report** provided runs from April 2020 to December 2020 and indicates that voids completed in the three quarters covered were 33, 56, and 44 (total 133). The **average turnaround time for voids with minor repair need** was 7.2 days. The VSP consider that although this is slightly up on the previous year, it still represents a relatively good performance.<br>● The **average turnaround including 15 voids with major repairs** was reported as 14.4 days. The VSP notes that this is a more significant increase on the previous year, but still acceptable.<br>● The **mixed use of the in house team and contractors** continues. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • The **problem of short or no notice** from Crawley and Guildford Borough Councils continues, leading to significant planning issues for Rosebery<br>• Crawley Borough Council continue to use Rosebery properties as **temporary accommodation**, which increases void numbers and costs for Rosebery. The VSP notes that the matter has been escalated with Crawley BC, but there is no report of the matter being progressed<br>• In July 2020, a **zero day turnaround** was achieved on 3 properties, followed by 6 in August and 1 in December. The VSP considers this to be significant.<br>• The VSP notes the **key issues** as the relatively successful combination of the **use of the in house team with contractors**, on the whole they both work well and complement each other, the ongoing issue with short of no notice from Crawley Borough Council, use of voids as temporary accommodation and the impact of Covid<br>**Comparison with Vacant Property Management Performance in the Housing Sector**<br>• In April 2018, HQN published its *Asset Management Network business intelligence report 2016/17,* the latest year for which this has been produced. It includes a consideration of *voids performance*<br>• A number of housing providers took part in a survey to determine a position with void performance. Firstly, in was asked **how many properties became vacant** in 2016/17. Eight organisations responded with an average of 798 (down 1287 from the previous year). Of housing providers of a similar nature to Rosebery, Cheltenham Borough Homes reported 391, East Kent Housing 1,000, Mid Devon District Council 193 and Soha Housing 350<br>• For Rosebery, annualised vacancies were in 2019/20 172 and 177 in 2020/21 |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Regarding **void turnover** as a percentage of stock, the 2017 average was 7.92% (up slightly from 7.82% in 2016). Of housing providers of a similar nature to Rosebery, Cheltenham Borough Homes was 8.54%, East Kent Housing 5.71%, Mid Devon District Council 6.4% and Soha Housing 5.5%. For Rosebery, turnover was 6.88% in 2019/20 and to December 2020 annualised for 2020/21, 7%<br>• Of those responding to the survey (five), all indicated that they **used external contractors to some extent** with no housing provider using a Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) on its own. There had been a decline from the previous year when seven housing providers delivered void works via an internal DLO.<br>• For **void turnaround in calendar days**, the average reported was 22 (with 12.98 in 2016, 12.98 in 2015, 18 in 2014 and 15.05 in 2013). Of housing providers of a similar nature to Rosebery, the 2017 numbers were East Kent Housing 29, Mid Devon District Council 16 and Soha Housing 16.4. Rosebery's average was 7 days in 2019/20 and 10.8 days to December 2020 in 2020/21. (No data for Cheltenham Borough Homes.)<br>• **The time (days) in the main void stages** were in the HQN Asset Management Intelligence Report was:<br>  • Keys in to pre-inspection – 1.86 (9%)<br>  • Pre-inspection to works issue – 1.02 (5%)<br>  • Void works – 9.86 (49%)<br>  • Works complete to tenancy commencement – 7.50 (37%)<br>• The VSP has not seen any comparative data for Rosebery. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | The VSP consider that Rosebery appears to compare well with the data available from comparative housing providers. |
| **3.1**<br>**Management Response** | • |
| **3.2**<br>**Action Plans** | • The VSP notes that there **do not seem to be any action plans** in place to address the key issues referred to above<br>• The long running matter with Crawley Borough Council is said in reports provided to have been **'escalated' but seems to be some while ago and no progress has been made**. This results in an adverse effect on Rosebery's Void Management performance, loss of revenue and homes not being made available as quickly as they could be<br>• The VSP understand that the issue of Rosebery vacancies being **used as Temporary Accommodation** by both the Borough Councils involved is as a result of Covid-19 circumstances. Although outside of the Scope of this Scrutiny, the VSP is concerned regarding the position of households on local Housing Registers that Rosebery support the provision of homes for |

| | |
|---|---|
| **3.3**<br><br>**Management Response** | • |

**2.0 FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS:** In order investigate deeper into Vacant Property Management, **the VSP interviewed three key members of staff strategically and operationally involved** in this part of Rosebery's business. These were Director of Development and New Business with strategic management responsibility for Vacant Property Management, the Project Surveyor concerned with the processes and the Voids Surveyor.

To provide context for the Scrutiny, the VSP requested a **Good Practice paper** from our Independent Mentor

| | |
|---|---|
| **2.1**<br><br>**Vacant Property Management and service improvement**<br><br>**METHOD: Semi Structured Interviews with key members of staff** | Director of Development and New Business<br><br>• The VSP were advised that the Director's role includes overseeing Rosebery's Asset Management Team and Repairs Team. For Vacant Property Management, the VSP noted that void time is a key thing to monitor, ensuring a good standard of property is provided but turned around quickly so a new home can be given to an individual or family<br><br>• Particularly noteworthy to the VSP was the advice that Rosebery has **been number 1 in its *Benchmarking* Peer Group** with *Housemark* for the last four years for letting times. Due to circumstances experienced with Covid-19, it is anticipated that this will not be achieved this year<br><br>• The VSP understand that **challenges faced in taking back a property** after a tenant has left can vary, from the property being abused or having to install a new kitchen/ bathroom when it should not be needed. There can also be occasion when the property key has not been returned to Rosebery or has been dropped off at a random location. Then there is also a flip side when residents provide the requested notice period and leave the property is a very good condition<br><br>• The VSP were interested in **whether the vacant property management process works** well or if there are problems. The response was that the team have got systems working quickly, although something minor may be experienced such as turn-on test not being organised. The board has given challenges for the void team but as the majority of properties had to be converted into temporary accommodation this year, it did not really give a property pilot to review<br><br>• The **Policy is considered to be working well**, with the potential for the Lettable Standard to be improved. The VSP were advised that the Board are very supportive when it comes to making budgets available. Because half the voids are used as Temporary Accommodation at the moment, |

| | |
|---|---|
| | there are additional costs involved.<br>• The VSP were advised that there is scope to improve the Void Management processes, but nothing specific was mentioned<br>Project Surveyor<br>• The Project Surveyor advised the VSP that his role is to oversee the voids process with the team from 'key to key'. The main purpose to provide someone with the home they need<br>• The VSP noted that the **main challenge** to this recently has been the **condition that properties are returned in**, particularly containing rubbish. A recharge procedure is in place. However, the majority of residents are reasonable<br>• The issue of **late notification of a vacancy** was advised to the VSP, but this part of the process is improving. New colleagues joining the team required some adjustment<br>• Likewise, the Policy is considered to be adequate, although improvement can always be achieved. This might include **digitisation**. There are not considered to be particular barriers to making improvements<br>• The VSP were advised of the impact that converting tenancies **for short term use had in terms of pressure on the budgets**. The need to undertake whole makeovers led to an overspend<br>Voids Surveyor<br>• The Void Surveyor advised the VSP that her role is to oversee voids from start to finish. This includes |

| | |
|---|---|
| | to ensure completion of all works and to organise any certificates required. Information on the *Lettable* and *Leaveable* Standards is provided together with recharge policy<br>• The VSP learned that the **main challenge** to be met is to manage to **complex combination of voids at their different stages in the process**<br>• Regarding the mix of **in house and contractor arrangements** for voids work, the VSP learned that the system has turned out to be **a good balance**<br>• **Areas for improvement** in the future potentially could include **digitisation**. The VSP were advised that this would involve being able to specify works on site rather than typing up later<br>• The **main barrier to improvements** is considered to be **time constraints**<br>• The **average turnaround times for Voids** was stated to the VSP. This was around 7.3 days for minor voids and up to 14 days for major voids |

| | |
|---|---|
| **2.2**<br><br>**Measuring satisfaction with Vacant Property Management**<br><br>**METHOD: New tenant survey and interview with key members of staff** | • In his interview with the VSP, the Director of Development and New Business expressed the view that **'90% would be satisfied with the service'**. The VSP noted that, at the moment due to the pandemic surveys are not being undertaken as it would not give realistic feedback. It was said that negative feedback could be because of the area allocated but also expectations of the property<br>• The Project Surveyor in his interview had no specific feedback on satisfaction, but did reflect to the VSP that the **majority of new tenants want to decorate the new home themselves,** whether self-funded or with the aid of a voucher provided by Rosebery<br>• A more detailed analysis of satisfaction with vacant property management is set out arising from VSP survey of new tenants in section 2 of this report |
| **2.3**<br><br>**Context for the Scrutiny**<br><br>**METHOD: Good Practice Paper from the Independent** | The paper from the VSP's Independent Mentor included advising on the **principles of Vacant Property Management**. These being:<br>• Development of a clear and realistic **relet standard**<br>• A **pre-defined pre-termination inspection process** which establishes why the tenant is leaving, what repairs need to be carried out to relet the property and assessing any damage which the outgoing tenant must pay for before the tenancy is ended |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Mentor** | • There should also be a **prompt vacancy inspection**, ideally using a standard checklist which can be used to identify defects, and consequential repair works to address these defects. This should include a list of minor works as this will speed up the relet process<br>• There should be a **pre-defined redecoration standard**, including a specific allowance for these works, as this will reduce the time and administration costs in achieving relet quality<br>• There should also be **standard procedures in place for dealing with statutory services** such as gas, electricity, and water to ensure that these services are safe, and where necessary disconnected. In addition, it is important that prior to reletting that these services are reinstated and certified as required before the property is occupied by the new tenant<br>• There should be a **process for dealing with** and making the repairs that are the **responsibility of the outgoing tenant**<br>• Finally, as soon as the property is vacated there should be a **pre-defined security system** put in place to protect the asset during the void period<br>In **summary**, the paper advised:<br>• Having a **pre-defined set of standards** with respect to void management with clear levels of responsibility, accountability, communication and budget<br>• **Achieving re-lets as efficiently and timely** as possible can be achieved by carrying out the post - tenancy inspection and repair checklist at the same time<br>• Typical **challenges** to void management can be avoided through **effective communication** within the housing association and with the outgoing and incoming tenants |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Producing a home at a **lettable standard** as required by the legislation and adding allowances for decoration where possible to alleviate financial hardship for the tenant<br>• Achieve **value for money** by balancing tenant satisfaction with quality of the property and business commercial objectives<br>• **Effective communication** will provide a good leaving experience for the outgoing tenant and the incoming new tenant<br>The VSP consider that Rosebery's Policies and Practices compare well to such good practice. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **2.3**<br><br>**Management Response** | • |

| **3.0 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS** | |
|---|---|
| **3.1** | **Limitations**<br><br>The VSP found it challenging to undertake this scrutiny with the very limited number of VSP members and the time available to them to participate. It is anticipated this will improve with the recruitment of additional Panel members in time for the next scrutiny, allowing time for training.<br><br>**Conclusions**<br><br>3.1.1. The Building Safety Bill and Social Housing White Paper will have implications for Policies and Procedures on Vacant Property Management (as well as other areas of Rosebery's business)<br><br>3.1.2. In the Resident Satisfaction Survey, a disappointingly high proportion of residents (22%) were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the standard and décor of the property offered. This is too high in relation to the *Lettable Standard*<br><br>3.1.3. However, it is not clear to what extent *Home Swap* respondents to the survey might have depressed the satisfaction outcome<br><br>3.1.4. There is a concern of void turn around time for major property repairs, between the two years to which data was provided, given the rent loss this would result in. The average |

| | |
|---|---|
| **3.2** | increase in void repairs increased by 6.39 days (15 for major repair voids)<br><br>3.1.5. Rosebery's performance in Vacant Property Management appears to be good in terms of turnaround time, both generally and in comparison with other similar providers (given data available). This is reinforced by evidence provided by the Director regarding Rosebery's recent high *Benchmarking* ranking in this regard<br><br>3.1.6. A key part of this conclusion is due to the mixed use of in house and contractor arrangements for Void Property that works on a flexible basis<br><br>3.1.7. There are challenges and questions however, not least new tenant satisfaction levels referred to above. Whilst good, a noteworthy level of residents not being satisfied. Also, issues with the two Borough Councils with little or no notice of voids and the implications of Crawley BC's use of properties as temporary accommodation<br><br>3.1.8. There do not seem to be any action plans to address these beyond the Crawley BC issue being escalated<br><br>3.1.9. The three staff members interviewed in this Scrutiny in general were content with the performance of Vacant Property Management, with key themes running through their interviews. In general, we would support this positive view, but would encourage them to be more questioning, accepting the unusual Covid circumstances, but in readiness for the return of normality<br><br>3.1.10. Rosebery generally accord with Vacant Property Management good practice |

| | |
|---|---|
| | **Recommendations**<br><br>**That**<br><br>3.2.1. Rosebery reviews and updates its Policies and Procedures in response to the Building Safety Bill currently in Parliament and the Social Housing White Paper published in November 2020<br><br>3.2.2. In reviewing the Vacant Property Management Policy and Procedure arising, regard be had to consistently achieving the *Lettable Standard*<br><br>3.2.3. The flexible use of in house and contractor resources for Void Property works being continued, but kept under review to ensure its continued effectiveness<br><br>3.2.4. Action Plans be agreed with Guildford and Crawley Borough Councils regarding notice periods required for Voids and the use of property as temporary accommodation by the latter Council |

| | |
|---|---|
| | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | |