

Place Scrutiny Committee	
Portfolio	Cabinet Member for Housing
Area for Scrutiny	Housing Voids
Link to Council Plan	<p>Empty homes matter to local people. Efficient management of lettings contributes to a number of the Council's key priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour – homes that are empty for any length of time are susceptible to theft and vandalism • Cleaner, greener and environmentally friendly – empty homes are an eyesore and can blight neighbourhoods • People being served better – empty Council homes represent lost revenue and long term voids impact on the Council's ability to meet housing needs • Health and wellbeing - empty homes can impact on sense of place & community wellbeing. <p>It also matters to local people how we let Council homes, and who they are let to, and scrutiny will therefore also include the Allocation Policy.</p>
Context	<p>The end to end letting process has been reviewed within the last five years with the aim of reducing costs and improving customer service, and a backlog of high cost voids was cleared.</p> <p>In the past two years, we have had higher levels of difficult to let properties, mostly high rise flats and three bedroom maisonettes, which have adversely affected our overall performance. In 2014/15, Scrutiny Committee considered the sustainability modelling that will be used to determine the future course of action for some of our stock that has low demand, high investment need, or both.</p> <p>The cost of void properties continues to be an issue – in 2014/15 the budget was £17.2m and the expected out turn is £17.1m. There has been some work with tenants' representatives to examine how the costs of a void are built up, and whether the void standard strikes the right balance between cost and letability.</p> <p>The Allocation Policy is subject to ongoing review in response to legislation and government guidance, but the last major review was in 2010, when the points scheme was replaced with a bandings scheme. Since then, a two year residency qualification has been introduced (May 2014), and most recently new government guidance has been issued on a Tenant's Right to Move.</p>

<p>Rationale</p>	<p>There is considerable public and member interest in voids and lettings. The Housing Board has also asked to receive reports, and it would be appropriate to align their scrutiny with political scrutiny.</p> <p>Voids are one area of financial risk to the Housing Revenue Account. There will be additional financial risks from the implementation of Universal Credit (where housing benefits will be included in payments to tenants instead of directly to landlords, and will be paid in arrears) and potentially from further Welfare Reforms. As indicated above, void costs are a balance of interests, and this balance will need political and public support.</p> <p>Proposed new regulations on Housing Allocations will need to be responded to, and policy decisions made. Previous decisions of this nature have been considered by Scrutiny Committee. There is also the opportunity to conduct a review of the Allocations Scheme overall, and to ensure that the policy objectives are clear and that the policy and procedures are capable of delivering the outcomes desired by the Community Council.</p>
<p>What are we asking from the Scrutiny Committee?</p>	<p>The Scrutiny Committee will be asked to consider how the budget on void properties is spent and to review the void standard that is currently applied. This is likely to include further consideration of our response to high cost voids.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee will be asked to consider the policy and process of allocating void properties (the Bandings Scheme and Choice Based Lettings respectively), agreeing key outcomes, looking at alternative methods of dealing with voids, and considering examples of good practice.</p>