

Glen Oaks Housing Association

Service Improvement Group

Void Standard

Inspection Report

1st June 2016

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Glen Oaks Housing Association Service Improvement Group (SIG) is pleased to submit our Void Standard Inspection Report to Glen Oaks Corporate Management Team and Board for their information and consideration.
- 1.2 **Tenant Scrutiny in Context:** Tenant scrutiny is about tenants being actively involved in reviewing how housing services are being delivered, and even more importantly, how they can be improved. The concept of scrutiny is not new in Scotland and has existed in other social policy fields such as education for some time. However, the emphasis on tenant scrutiny and self-assessment is new to the social housing sector here in Scotland and represents a very significant opportunity to develop partnership working between tenants and landlords to deliver excellent housing services.
- 1.3 **Understanding Tenant Led Inspections:** Tenant Led Inspections (TLIs) are a popular way of involving tenants in improving housing services. This is a process where tenants independently inspect a housing service to review how well it is working and to identify recommendations for improvements. It is a tangible way of involving tenants where everyone can see positive results at the end of the process.

Tenant Led Inspections provide opportunities to:

- Inspect housing services from a tenant's perspective
- Hold service providers to account
- Contribute to improvement in housing services, whilst ensuring policies and procedures are clearly understood and implemented
- Inform policy development and delivery
- Ensure resources are used effectively and services delivered provide value for money
- Benchmark and share good practice

The benefits of TLIs are far reaching and include:

- Opportunities to involve new people in tenant participation activities
- Building the capacity of organisations and individuals
- Involving tenants in a constructive and practical way
- Enhancing the landlord's customer care focus
- Developing relationships between tenants, tenants' organisations and landlord staff
- Meeting the requirements of the Scottish Housing Regulator and Scottish Social Housing Charter
- Driving forward improvements in housing services.

- 1.4 **Independent Advice and Development Support:** Glen Oaks Housing Association (the Association) bought in the services of the Tenant Information Service (TIS) to provide Independent Tenant Advice and Development

Support to the tenants and staff involved in the Service Improvement Group scrutiny work.

TIS Mission Statement:

“The Tenants Information Service is the leading organisation in Scotland promoting and inspiring innovative tenant participation practice. We achieve this by providing independent advice, support and training for tenants and landlords”.

1.5 Service Improvement Group Membership

The Service Improvement Group is made of tenants who responded to an Association recruitment drive with tenants and applicants interested in participating in tenant scrutiny. SIG members are:

- Eleanor Stewart
- Elizabeth Rice
- Eva Gotowicz
- James Stewart
- Jamie Rice
- William Irvine
- William Monaghan

2. The Void Inspection Process

2.1 The Service Improvement Group worked with GOHA and TIS to:

- a) Understand the Scottish Social Housing Charter (SSHC) requirements in relation to void properties, which states that:

“Tenants’ homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by April 2015 and continue to meet it thereafter, **and when they are allocated, are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair.**”

- b) Review and understand the GOHA Lettable Standard
- c) Review and consider the void paperwork used by inspectors at pre and post void inspections
- d) Review and understand GOHA void cost information
- e) Consider GOHA new tenant satisfaction feedback in relation to property condition when first allocated
- f) Consider new tenant complaints information received by GOHA in relation to new lets
- g) Consider the GOHA revised specification for the void property contract

- h) Visit a selection of void properties with the Technical Officers to see the inspection process in action and understand the condition of properties when tenant moves out, work required to meet the Lettable Standard and whether or not the properties met the Standard pre let
- i) Review of video footage of a property inspected by a staff member
- j) Review and compare the Lettable Standard of other Registered Social Landlords:

3. Findings and Recommendations

3.1 What the Service Improvement Group liked during the inspection process:

- a) SIG members consider we were treated fairly and with respect by the staff we encountered.
- b) Staff responded favourably to requests for information and enabled SIG members to visit void properties during pre and post inspections.
- c) GOHA aims to carry out pre tenancy termination inspections to assess property condition and identify any rechargeable repairs required before tenants move out.
- d) GOHA aims to recoup costs associated with rechargeable repairs, tenant damage and vandalism to properties.
- e) GOHA aims to have work carried out in void properties within 5, 10 or 20 days to keep void rent loss to a minimum. However although the SIG members consider this is admirable, note it may not always be achievable depending on property condition when vacated.
- f) GOHA will try to recycle any good items of furnishings and fittings left behind at the end of tenancies through offering to new tenant, working with Housing Officers to identify other tenants who may benefit from such items or through other furniture recycling and charitable projects
- g) As a minimum Lettable Standard, the GOHA Standard is similar to those of comparative landlords the SIG measured against: Almond HA, Clyde Valley HA, Forth HA and Hillcrest HA. Upon consideration of this information and SIG visits to void properties some recommendation for improvement are included later in this report.
- h) The new void contract specification with Mears is an improvement upon the previous standard and the SIG considers that separating this contract from the general repairs and maintenance contract should provide an improved standard of properties when let and allow improved monitoring of the contract, targets set and achieved and level of work carried out.

3.2 The Lettable Standard

SIG members understand that the GOHA is a minimum standard and that some properties may achieve a higher standard based on the condition of properties when vacated and the level of work carried out pre let.

In order that GOHA achieves the highest standard of properties when allocated, within the finances available, the SIG recommends the following for consideration:

	Glen Oaks Standard	SIG Comments / Recommendation
a.	<p>General All our houses will be wind & watertight, safe & secure. Any additional works required to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) will be logged and programmed at that point.</p>	SIG considers this objective is good.
b.	<p>Cleanliness All houses will be cleared of all previous tenants' belongings including furniture and floor coverings. Outgoing tenants will be charged accordingly for this removal.</p>	<p>SIG recommends that GOHA adds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on their condition curtains/blinds / furniture etc. left by former tenant are left as a security measure and/or for possible use by the new tenant or offered to other tenants or donated to recycling projects.
	All cupboards, kitchens and fittings will be cleaned and washed down.	<p>SIG recommends that GOHA changes this to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kitchen fittings will be washed down inside and out with disinfectant including kitchen units, unit doors and drawers, worktops, tiles, heaters, radiators, sockets and switches.
	All skirting's, doors & facings, windowsills & frames will be cleaned and washed down.	<p>SIG recommends that GOHA changes this to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All skirting's, doors & facings, windowsills & frames will be cleaned and washed down with disinfectant.

	All sanitary ware will be cleaned and washed down.	SIG recommends that GOHA changes this to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All sanitary ware, including tiles and flooring will be washed down with disinfectant.
	All floor coverings will be removed and the floorboards will be cleaned and washed down. Heavily soiled floors may be re-sheeted if required.	SIG recommends that GOHA changes this to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All floor coverings will be removed and the floorboards will be cleaned and washed down with disinfectant. Heavily soiled floors may be re-sheeted if required.
c.	Additional points	SIG recommends that GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every property will have a bin for refuse collection and in blocks of flats a bin will be available for each property.
		SIG recommends that GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All properties will be swept out and cleaned with disinfectant. A “Sparkle Clean” will be carried out where a property is in a very poor condition.
d.	Decoration and Plasterwork Obvious damage to plasterwork will be repaired	SIG considers this objective is good.
	Wallpaper that is graffitied, badly damaged or soiled will be removed.	SIG recommends that GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bare wood work will be painted or varnished.
	Walls and ceilings that have been graffitied, damaged or soiled will be emulsioned.	SIG recommends that GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where the decoration is deemed to be poor and to affect the likelihood of acceptance, the property will be decorated to a good standard using neutral colours. All surfaces will be to a decorable standard. Any disused pipes wiring etc.

		<p>will be removed and the surface repaired.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All ceilings will be free of polystyrene. • GOHA will provide a decoration pack where required for new tenants that will be available at the property when the new tenant moves in. <p>NOTE: the decoration pack is intended as a replacement for decoration vouchers currently issued as per SIG recommendation in 3.8 of this report.</p>
e.	<p>Electrical A full electrical safety inspection (ESI) will be carried out prior to the new tenant moving in. new tenants will be supplied with a copy of the pass certificate</p>	<p>SIG recommends that GOHA changes this to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A full electrical safety inspection will be carried out prior to the new tenant moving in so that all switches, sockets, light fittings and smoke detectors will be safe and fully operational, and all electric heating will be safe, functioning and meet the relevant legislation. New tenants will be supplied with a copy of the pass certificate.
	<p>Any obsolete wiring and electrical equipment will be removed and any resulting damage repaired.</p>	<p>SIG considers this objective is good.</p>
	<p>A hard wire smoke detector will be fitted where there is none and this is appropriate.</p>	<p>SIG recommends that GOHA adds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A hard wired carbon monoxide detector will be fitted where appropriate.
f.	<p>Electrical Additional Points</p>	<p>SIG recommends that GOHA adds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy efficient light bulbs will be fitted in kitchens, bathrooms and hallways.
g.	<p>Gas An annual gas safety inspection (AGSI) will be carried out and the new tenant supplied with a copy of the pass certificate.</p>	<p>SIG considers this objective is good.</p>

		SIG recommends that GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The heating and hot water controls will be demonstrated to the incoming tenant. We will confirm this has been carried out at a new tenant visit.
h.	Gas supply pipe to cooker	SIG recommends that GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where a bayonet fitting is in place, this will be removed, and the supply pipe cut and capped, unless Housing Management advise that this is required by the incoming tenant, in which case this will be left in place.
i.	Carbon Monoxide A carbon monoxide detector (CO) will be fitted where there is none and where this is appropriate	SIG considers this objective is good.
j.	Chimneys A smoke test will be carried out and chimneys swept where appropriate.	SIG considers this objective is good.
k.	Asbestos Full asbestos checks are undertaken on every property and removed if deemed appropriate.	SIG recommends GOHA changes this to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asbestos checks will be carried out on all properties pre let and remedial action taken as appropriate, details will be recorded on the asbestos register and a disclaimer signed by the incoming tenant if appropriate.
l.	Footpaths and Steps All footpaths and steps will be safe and level	SIG recommends GOHA changes this to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All footpaths and steps will be safe and level, reasonably smooth and free from tripping hazards.
m.	Kitchens A fully functioning kitchen will be provided with an appropriate number of units and cupboards for property size and type.	SIG recommends GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worktops damaged due to burning and or water ingress are replaced where appropriate and worktops fully sealed. Kick plates and trims are in a good condition and in place.

	All kitchens will include a cooker connection point.	SIG considers this objective is good.
	All kitchens will have adequate ventilation.	SIG considers this objective is good.
	All Kitchens will include a washing machine connection point.	SIG considers this objective is good.
n.	Joinery - Doors, facings skirtings etc. All internal pass doors will be functioning and undamaged	SIG considers this objective is good.
	All kitchen pass doors will be solid core for fire safety reasons.	SIG considers this objective is good.
	All entrance doors will be secure functioning and undamaged.	SIG considers this objective is good. SIG recommends GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All external property doors will be painted or varnished where appropriate
	All door facings and skirtings will be in good condition.	SIG recommends this is changed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All doors facings and skirtings will be in a good condition. • Missing or badly damaged skirtings / facing are replaced. If possible to repair, they will be re-secured and filled.
	A secure handrail will be provided in close stairwells and houses where there is a flight of internal stairs.	SIG considers this objective is good.
		SIG recommends GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bathrooms and WC doors will have a locking device which can be opened from the outside.

o.	Plumbing Fixtures All plumbing installations will be checked for leaks or damage and repaired as necessary.	SIG considers this objective is good.
	The bath will be resealed as appropriate	SIG considers this objective is good.
	All sanitary ware will be deep cleaned.	SIG recommends GOHA changes this to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All sanitary ware will be deep cleaned with disinfectant.
		SIG recommends GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new toilet seat will be installed • Flushing mechanisms are working satisfactorily and PVC cisterns are replaced if required. • All existing tiling is sound and sealed. • Boxing in under wash hand basins etc. is checked and if in poor condition is removed and the area made good.
p.	Windows All windows will be checked and repaired if necessary to ensure they are safe and functioning properly. This includes all safety catches.	SIG recommends GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Windows will be cleaned and any stickers etc. removed • Window frames are sound and serviceable until next cyclical painting programme where appropriate • There is no cracked glazing and any major failing to double glazing seals are replaced. • Ground floor windows are fitted with locks as standard
q.	Balcony / verandahs Where appropriate, balconies/verandahs will be cleared of any rubbish or bird guano.	SIG considers this objective is good

r.	Outdoor Areas (if appropriate) If garden area is in an exceptionally poor condition, we will arrange for the lawn to be cut and the garden tidied. We will not do this in most new lets.	SIG considers this objective is good
	Fencing and gates (proposed new heading)	SIG recommends GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fencing and gates provided by is will be in reasonably good condition, safe and secure
s.	Energy Performance Certificates	SIG recommends GOHA adds: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Energy performance certificates will be provided to new tenants and performance rating information regarding the property will be provided at viewings

3.3 SIG Void Inspection Visits & Video

Prior to carrying out our inspection visits with the technical officers, SIG members reviewed the inspection paperwork used by the officers to identify and agree what work is required to bring the properties up to the Lettable Standard.

Inspection Visit Findings

	Finding	Recommendation
a.	SIG members understand that the level of work required to properties varies depending on the condition that properties are left in by previous tenants or any outstanding or non – reported repairs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efforts continue to be made to carry out pre termination inspections and agree any rechargeable repairs.
b.	At one of our post inspection visits in particular we consider the standard of cleanliness and condition of property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GOHA ensures that staff receive training and support to ensure all necessary work is identified at the initial inspection and that a high level of assessment is carried out post

	was not as high as we would expect pre let.	<p>inspection and where this is not satisfactory in terms of standard of work or cleanliness the contractor is brought back to rectify this.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA considers using a different technical officer to carry out the pre and post inspections to ensure consistency in approaches. • GOHA senior officer post inspects a percentage of properties without technical officer knowledge pre let to ensure high standards are met.
c.	The inspection paperwork is relatively straight forward and should assist inspectors to identify all work required to meet the standard. However we noted that the same set of paperwork is used for each property and consider this could be streamlined.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA develops different paperwork for each property size to reduce the number of pages that are not necessary and to cut down on print costs. • GOHA ensures paperwork is printed double sided.
d.	We understand that a new specification and contract for voids is in the process of being implemented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA revises paperwork to meet the new specification. • GOHA adds sections in paperwork to reflect our recommendations as per the lettable standard in 3.2 above. • GOHA adds a section that identifies any issues with the condition of gardens or closes and reports this to the housing management team to be addressed.
e.	Some properties are left in a very poor condition in terms of cleanliness, smell and debris left behind.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA issues staff with protective gloves and paper suits (CSI style) to protect them from such hazards and particularly flea infestations. • GOHA provides awareness raising and training for all staff and contractors to enable them to identify any issues with tenancies in terms of cleanliness standards in order that it can be reported to the relevant department and addressed by GOHA and or in partnership with other agencies. • GOHA carries out an annual inspection of tenancies to encourage tenants to maintain a good standard of cleanliness and repair in their homes. This could

		<p>possibly be linked to annual gas servicing as access to properties is required by law to carry out this work or introduced as part of the housing officer roles and responsibilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA continues to charge tenants for damage and removal of debris left behind. • GOHA investigates the potential of providing “tenancy lessons” such as: how to clean and maintain property, how to be a good neighbour etc as well as additional tenancy support such as sign posting to other services and resources that will benefit tenants who may need this.
f.	Staff resources: SIG members consider that the new specification may increase the time required to carry out inspections.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA reviews the staffing compliment in terms of officers responsible for ensuring the new lettable standard is met (both condition and cleanliness) to ensure staff have adequate time to carry out the job to a very high standard.

3.4 Void Costs

Information provided to the SIG members at the start of this work indicated that the average void repair cost was around £475 plus the cost of gas and electrical checks. This figure seemed very low to us, therefore we requested the figures for the properties we had visited and carried out a comparison with other landlords of Almond HA, Clyde Valley HA, Forth HA and Hillcrest HA. The findings of this research were as follows:

Glen Oaks Properties visited:

Property 1 - Arden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £7.61 x 4 = £30.44 (Security) • £1050.34 – void repair works • Awaiting bill for Artex check throughout roughly £100 • £1180.78 + £475 (Void Standard inc. checks) • TOTAL £1,655.78
Property 2 - Arden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £7.61 x 2 = £15.22 (Security) • £396 – void repair works • £411.22 + £475 (Void Standard inc. checks) • TOTAL £886.22

Property 3 - Arden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £18.47 x 8 = £147.76 (Security) • £2362.00 Chrysotile removal works • £216 – void repair works • £54 – Grass cut • £2779.76 + £475 (Void Standard inc. checks) • TOTAL £3,254.76
Property 4 - Pollok	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No security – Front door lock changed as included in VS • £54 – grass cut • £522 – void repairs • £574 + £475 (Void Standard inc. checks) • TOTAL £1,051
TOTAL COSTS	£6,847.76
AVERAGE COST	£1,711.94

We understand that in some cases full security may be fitted to ground floor flats or in cases of eviction at a cost of:

- £7.61 per week – door only
- £18.47 per week – full fit
- Minimum term of 1 week no matter how long the security doors or full fit is required

In addition from our research of the other landlords indicated above we note the average void costs are between £1,450 and £2,500.

	Recommendations
a.	GOHA reviews the actual overall expenditure on all voids to ensure a more accurate picture of the cost of all associated work including repairs, cleaning, decoration vouchers, gas and electric checks, security measures, removal of debris and insect infestation etc.
b.	GOHA agrees a void budget that reflects the actual costs and is more reflective of the costs of the above comparable landlords as well as GOHA's own actual costs.
c.	GOHA reviews the contracts with suppliers of gas and electric checks to ensure value for money and quality of service.
d.	GOHA reviews the contract for security measures to ensure value for money, including:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consideration of negotiating a daily rather than weekly charge for security doors and full fits and • consideration of alternative measures such as installation of alarms rather than the current method where appropriate and will not cause nuisance to neighbours.
e.	GOHA reviews the grass cutting and removal of rubbish left behind contracts to ensure value for money and reduced costs where possible. This should include consideration of the use of voluntary and community projects or small local businesses or social enterprises.

3.5 Tenant Satisfaction

SIG members reviewed new tenant satisfaction reports with the following findings and recommendations with regard to the standard of homes when let:

	Finding	Recommendation
a.	Cleaning standard at viewing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37.5% – very satisfied • 37.5% – satisfied • 25% - very dissatisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA improves the cleaning standard as indicated above in 3.2. • GOHA provides additional staff training and support for technical officers and housing officers regarding the Lettable Standard to ensure consistency across all properties.
b.	Standard of home when moving in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% - very satisfied • 37.5% - satisfied • 12.5% - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied • 25% - very dissatisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA improves the standard of properties pre let as indicated above in 3.2. • GOHA provides additional staff training and support regarding the Lettable Standard to ensure consistency across all properties, including both technical and housing management staff involved in void and allocation processes. • GOHA develops Lettable Standard Guidance for all staff to ensure consistent standards are achieved. • GOHA increases and improves contract monitoring procedures
c.	Outstanding repairs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16.67% - very satisfied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA ensures that the new void contract specification includes as

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33.33% - satisfied • 33.33% - neither satisfied nor dissatisfied • 16.67% - dissatisfied 	<p>many repairs as possible to be carried out pre let</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA ensures that tenants are clearly advised of any outstanding repairs prior to moving in and has details of the appointment time of when this work will be done • GOHA ensures that all outstanding repairs are carried out within 6 weeks of new tenant moving in, unless otherwise agreed by the tenant
d.	Other SIG comments:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA encourages staff to consider the quality of the properties being let as a “someone’s home” rather than “property they need to let” • GOHA uses a “senses test” for final property inspections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sight – what it looks like ○ Smell – how it smells ○ Touch – what it feels like • GOHA further develops services and standards to “make a good impression” on applicants and new tenants from the start

3.6 New Tenant Repairs

During the inspection process we considered the new tenant reported repairs information from October 2015 – January 2016 where 68 repairs were reported from 23 new lets.

	Findings	Recommendations
a.	12 reports related to heating / hot water / boilers / radiator leaks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA assesses the standard and level of checks carried out by Gas Sure during inspections • GOHA ensures the specification for boilers and heating systems is of a high standard • GOHA carries out an assessment of boilers in all properties to ensure they are effective and efficient and not prone to

		pressure drops
b.	10 reports re water ingress / leaks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA ensures that these repairs are carried out pre let • Inspectors access information on repairs reported at the property in previous 6 months to allow inspectors to pay specific attention to any outstanding issues, especially re. leaks and water damage that may not be immediately evident.
c.	3 reports of stiff locks / lock repairs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA ensures these types of repairs / issues are addressed pre let
d.	3 reports of WC overflowing / leaking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA ensures these repairs are carried out pre let and any associated dampness work carried out.
e.	The majority of the other repairs identified were 1 or 2 instances of various types.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA ensures that the new contract specification allows as many repairs as possible to be carried out pre let.

3.7 Communication with Tenants and Applicants

.	Recommendations
a.	GOHA develops a Lettable Standard information leaflet in partnership with the SIG for distribution to applicants and new tenants and available on web site with housing application paperwork.
b.	GOHA develops an inspection sheet to be signed by housing services staff and tenant when keys given in terms of satisfaction with all aspects of the property or not.
c.	GOHA promotes the high standard of properties let with tenants, applicants and others via web site, social media, newsletters etc.

d.	GOHA continues to seek tenant views on the standard of their new homes on a regular basis and addresses any issues or concerns with the technical team and contractor.
e.	GOHA continues to report tenant satisfaction to tenants, applicants and wider community to promote GOHA as a landlord who provides homes of the highest standard.

3.8 Decoration Vouchers

SIG members understand that decoration of properties is a tenant responsibility and that to assist new tenants with this task, where decoration is identified as an issue at inspections that decoration vouchers will be provided.

SIG considers that bringing the value of decoration vouchers in line with the disturbance allowances is positive. We note that this means expenditure on decoration vouchers has increased from approximately £4,000 for 120 voids from 1st April 2014 - £1st March 2015 to £8,303 for 76 voids between April 2015 and February 2016.

	Recommendations
a.	GOHA investigates the potential of procuring a contract with a decoration supplier to provide good quality paint, brushes, paint trays, dust sheets etc. that would be provided to new tenants on the day keys are given.
b.	GOHA ensures that the costs of decoration vouchers or decoration packs is calculated and added to the void costs budget.
c.	Where properties are refused due to decoration standards GOHA decorates the property or relevant rooms in neutral colours and offers the property again to the applicant who refused it to allow them to reconsider.
d.	GOHA reviews contracts with decoration companies to ensure continued value for money and considers contracts with social enterprises and or community & voluntary organisations where this is more cost effective and available.

3.9 Void timescales

	Findings	Recommendation
a.	<p>SIG members understand that within the current contract GOHA aims to re-let properties within 5, 10 or 15 days to minimise void rent loss.</p> <p>Although we consider this is admirable, we do not consider it will always be achievable. In addition the improved specification should mean that more work and cleaning should be carried out pre let.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA revises the void turnaround timescales to reflect the increased level of work that will be carried out to reflect the new contract specification and SIG improvements to the Lettable Standard. • GOHA monitors and reviews the target timescales and contract delivery monthly.

3.10 Staff feedback

	Findings	Recommendation
a.	<p>Not all housing services staff who responded to the SIG survey are aware of the lettable standard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA provides training to all staff on the standard to ensure clear understanding of its content and how work is agreed, carried out and monitored.
b.	<p>There are inconsistencies in the views expressed by housing services staff and technical services team in terms of the condition and cleanliness standards of properties when let.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GOHA provides training to all staff, along with a lettable standard guidance document that clearly demonstrates the standard that should be achieved across all properties.
c.	<p>There are inconsistencies in views expressed by housing services staff and the technical team regarding property refusals in relation to condition or cleanliness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above • GOHA ensures that housing services team staff are enabled to report issues or concerns in regard to property condition or cleanliness as well as refusal reasons to the technical team and senior manager. • Communication between housing services and technical team is improved to develop a shared understanding of issues,

		concerns, budgets and successes.

3.11 Other Recommendations

	Recommendation
a.	Where properties are scheduled for Capital Programme work such as kitchen and bathroom replacements within 6 months of the new tenant moving in GOHA considers replacing these items pre let to allow the new tenant to decorate and settle into their new home as quickly as possible.

4. Next steps

- 4.1 GOHA considers the findings and recommendations of this report and responds to the SIG during July 2016.
- 4.2 SIG presents findings to the GOHA Board in August 2016.
- 4.3 GOHA develops an action plan to address the recommendations contained within this report.
- 4.4 GOHA provides a report to the SIG on the new contract implementation within 6 months of the contract start date, including tenant satisfaction, complaint reports and new tenant reported repairs as well as void cost information and targets met.

5. Vote of thanks

- 5.1 The SIG would like to thank all staff who assisted us carry out this Scrutiny Project.

Appendix 1

<p style="text-align: center;">Glen Oaks Housing Association Service Improvement Group Voids Technical Team Survey Results Lettable Standard for Void Properties</p>

The technical team response to the SIG survey provided the following responses:

1. The GOHA lettable standard for void properties is considered to be very satisfactory and that it is “as good as it can be within a limited budget albeit increased considerably in 2016 – 2017.
2. Properties are not refused due to their condition.
3. Properties are not refused due to cleanliness standards since the new contract started, but this was previously the reason for some refusals.
4. There are challenges in delivering the lettable standard, particularly where properties are abandoned after years of neglect.
5. The condition of properties when let is very satisfactory.
6. The cleanliness of properties when let is very satisfactory.
7. No suggestions in terms of making changes to the lettable standard were given and the team indicated that the majority of properties are post – war tenements, that limited resources are available for internal fabric works other than kitchens, bathrooms, central heating & electrical installation.

**Glen Oaks Housing Association Service Improvement Group
Housing Services Team Survey Results
Lettable Standard for Void Properties**

The housing services responses to the SIG survey were provided by 5 staff members with the results as follows:

1. Four members of staff (**80%**) advised they are aware of the GOHA lettable standard, with one staff member (**20%**) indicating that they are not aware it.
2. Three members of staff (**60%**) advised that they are aware of what work must be carried out pre-let and two staff members (**40%**) indicating that they are unaware of what must be done. With the following details provided:
 - Safety checks – gas and electricity & energy reports.
 - Safety checks – NIC, EPC, CP12, plumbing check – checking toilets, taps, bath, drainage, and sink etc. joinery checks – changing locks, checking doors and windows. Wash down and clear out property.
 - APS, Eps, safety checks i.e. asbestos, obvious repairs, sparkle clean.
 - Gas check, electric check, lock change, property should be wind and watertight and reasonably fit for human habitation, windows serviced, property cleaned, previous tenants' belongings removed, damage to walls / plaster / doors repaired.
3. All staff (**100%**) advised that properties are refused due to property condition, with issues identified as:
 - Decorative order.
 - Decoration – broken tiles, patchwork plastering, damaged walls and poor paintwork. Some tenants refuse due to extensive aertex in the property.
 - Cleanliness, decoration and odour / smells.
 - Occasional refusal due to work required to decorate and floor property – this can be an issues as tenants also have to find four weeks' rent in advance.
 - Usually the cleanliness, decoration and condition of kitchens and bathrooms.
4. Four members of staff (**80%**) advised that properties are refused due to cleanliness and one staff member (**20%**) advising this is not the case. Issues identified include:
 - If the property has not been cleared of effects this can be a reason for refusal.
 - Sometimes at viewing stage the property has not been cleaned and so can be off putting to tenants, however generally tenants understand that property will

be cleaned before moving in. Smoke stained walls and glass are also off putting even after cleaning.

- Stained toilets, dirty / grimy skirtings' and walls, heavily nicotine stained décor, pet odours.
- Houses have not been cleared of previous tenant belongings or sparkle cleaned before viewing, sometimes sparkle clean not to a good standard.

5. In terms of the condition of properties when let, three staff member **(60%)** consider them to be fairly satisfactory and two members of staff **(40%)** consider they are neither satisfactory nor dissatisfactory.

With regard to improving this staff advised of the following:

- This is dependent on property condition – particularly dependent on how the previous tenant maintained the property.
- Dependent on the condition the previous tenant left the property – some are kept very nice.

6. In terms of the cleanliness of properties when let, two staff members **(40%)** consider the properties are fairly satisfactory, two **(40%)** consider them neither satisfactory nor dissatisfactory and one **(20%)** considers it fairly unsatisfactory.

With regard to improving this staff advised of the following:

- Sparkle clean as standard.
- Scrub skirting boards and if they do not clean up or are damaged, should be replaced.
- A proper high standard deep clean to the whole property is needed. Eliminate pet odours where present.

7. In terms of suggested changes to the lettable standard two staff members **(50%)** advised of this, with one **(25%)** indicating don't know and one **(25%)** indicating they had none and one giving no response.

Comments on this are:

- The standard will be linked to budget and any alterations would require this to be considered.
- Although decoration vouchers are awarded, I feel that sometimes the properties should be brought to a reasonable standard before they are let as there are often badly stained walls, which is not a result of poor decoration, but as a result of the previous tenants' abuse or lifestyle. However I understand that there are financial constraints due to budgets.

- Comments previously indicated require to be considered, however the new contractor for reactive repairs may already practice this level of service. We would need to monitor this. Where properties require a lot of decorating (even if decoration vouchers are issued) we should consider removing wallpaper and painting thorough tout. This would give the impression of a bright, clean and well cared for property that could be moved into straight away and that could be decorated to tenant's taste over time.
- As I am not aware of the detail of the lettable standard, I would be unable to comment