

# OTRA Scrutiny Report

## Lettable Standard



**April 2025**

**In memory of David Haldane, former OTRA Vice Chair and Scrutiny group member**

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Report Produced By | OTRA Scrutiny Group  |
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## **Section 1.01 Introduction**

It was decided by the Tenants Association, Osprey Tenants and Residents Association (OTRA), that in the absence of a dedicated Scrutiny group, that the Association would undertake a Scrutiny Project of its own as these are seen generally as good practice to be conducted routinely. It was felt that as this was a new experience for some of the members that it would be beneficial to revisit previous training that members of OTRA had been provided by TPAS.

The members who volunteered for the project were Doreen Rippol, David Haldane, Wendy Duthie, Susan Thomson, Jenny Whinnett and Elaine Jeffery. Leisha Bishop & Dan Thompson provided administrative support.

## **Section 1.02 Scope**

The OTRA group had been considering a scrutiny project for some time and the topic of the void standard was discussed on multiple occasions. There had been feedback from tenants at settling in visits that there were sometimes inconsistencies with the standard of the voids being relet and that there was a need to review the existing standard through a scrutiny exercise. OTRA agreed that this was a valuable piece of work to be carried out and we were unanimous that this would be the topic of the next scrutiny project.

## **Section 1.03 Aims**

The Scrutiny group established a number of aims to guide the development of the scrutiny exercise.

1. Fully understand the void process (including the Lettable standard)
2. Establish whether the existing void standard is adequate
3. Highlight 'pinch points' in the current void process
4. Identify whether the standard is being delivered consistently
5. Make recommendations for improvements

To answer these questions, the Scrutiny group

- Took account of Osprey Performance Data
- Checked the key policies and information for tenants
- Spoke with key staff involved in the process
- Undertook visits to void properties at various stages of repair

The overarching aim of the project was to determine whether the current void standard was being met and if OTRA felt that this was adequate, or if there were additional considerations that should be included.

## ***Section 1.04 Methodology***

The Scrutiny group requested that the Director of Housing Services and Director of Assets explain the entire void process to the group and that this would form the starting point for the project. In addition to this the Scrutiny group asked to speak with a Housing Officer and an Asset Officer to understand how the process works from day to day perspective. The Scrutiny group felt that this would enable them to identify potential pinch points within the void process and where the void standard could be better understood as works progressed, from the point of the keys being returned, to the property being relet.

- The Scrutiny group were provided with a methodology for scrutiny options from their training which could be utilised during the project
- The Scrutiny group requested that the Void Policy be distributed to all members
- A clear timeline of the required actions was provided to allow for a better understanding of how the process flowed
- The Scrutiny group were shown the current key performance indicators relevant to the void process
- The Scrutiny group requested to visit a number of current voids over the following weeks to understand how the void standard was being implemented

The Scrutiny group decided that if additional research were required after these steps were complete that we would revise the methodology. It was possible that we would need to speak to applicants, tenants, other members of staff and contractors as required.

## **Section 1.05 Our findings**

### **(1) Landlord Performance (Overview)**

During an OTRA meeting the group reviewed the Annual Return of Charter outcomes and the following void related performance was discussed.

| Indicator  | Osprey 21/22 | Scottish Average 21/22 | Osprey 22/23 | Scottish Average 22/23 | Osprey 23/24 | Scottish Average 23/24 |
|--|--------------|------------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Percentage of tenants satisfied with the quality of their home (Indicator 7) | 90.87%       | 84.16%                 | 90.87%       | 85.44%                 | 90.76%       | 83.98%                 |
| Percentage of tenancy offers refused during the year (Indicator 14)          | 16.67%       | 32.93%                 | 5.80%        | 30.87%                 | 11.63%       | 30.50%                 |
| Average length of time to re-let properties in the last year (Indicator 30)  | 34 days      | 51 days                | 31 days      | 56 days                | 26 days      | 57 days                |

Whilst there are no indicators specific to the void standard, it was felt that the indicators above were those most relevant to the scrutiny project. The quality of tenants homes, rate of refusal and average time to re-let a property are all directly related to the void process and provide a clear point of reference. OTRA review the charter outcomes on an annual basis and produce a report to share our own views on how Osprey have performed, so we are familiar with trends and Ospreys performance against the national average.

Ospreys performance across all indicators is strong but that there is always room for keeping improving. The Scrutiny group hope that through the implementation of our recommendations, tenant satisfaction will improve along with overall performance.

### **(2) Void inspections – Outcomes**

#### **- First day of inspections**

The Scrutiny group met at the Osprey offices in Westhill during the morning of 16<sup>th</sup> January. A briefing was provided to make the group aware of the plans for the day, with an indicative timescale for the various visits.

Scoring sheets were distributed to allow Scrutiny group members to evaluate and record their findings for consideration later. Lists of the works orders that had been raised were provided to the Scrutiny group along with the void standard which would be used to compare the condition of the voids against the current standard set by Osprey.

The Scrutiny group's first visit was to a two-bedroom terraced house at **14 Countesswells Park Avenue, Countesswells**. This property was of modern construction and considered to be ready to be relet. An applicant had already viewed the property and had accepted it based on its current condition.

The overall impression of this property was that it was generally in a good condition but that the cleaning hadn't been completed to a high standard, the decoration was poor in certain areas and that the flooring installed by the tenant was high quality and should be left. However, the Scrutiny group felt that Osprey should have made the flooring good by providing some edging and a metal strip between the lounge and downstairs toilet. This would limit any potential trips and falls for the incoming tenant.

The decoration in this property wasn't felt to be adequate.

- Various marks on walls throughout the property
- One area of particular concern was an attempt to fill and paint an area where the tv cables had been 'tracked' into the wall. This was very poor, and the Scrutiny group were not happy with the finish. Whilst the remedial repair had been completed by the former tenant, the Scrutiny group felt that it should have been made good by Osprey.
- Stickers 'tiles' on kitchen wall were coming away and in a poor condition

The door frame and the front door did not align, and the Scrutiny group felt that the door had shrunk and that this would result in a significant draft. This didn't appear to have been addressed during the void.

### **Overall impression and additional comments**

- Only one comment made "**would not approve as ready to let**".

The second property that the Scrutiny group visited was **2 Corren Road, Alford**. This was a four-bedroom semidetached home, also of modern construction and was considered to be ready to be relet at the time of the visit with a prospective tenant having viewed and accepted the property already.

The overall impression of this property was much better and the scores for each of the questions was higher than the previous property. There were some minor repairs and areas that needed further cleaning, but the Scrutiny group agreed that this property was in a condition to relet.

### **Overall impression and additional comments**

- Good property overall with a couple of snags
- Lovely property with a couple of minor snags

The Scrutiny group were due to look at a 'trickle transfer' property in Inverurie which was a first floor flat of traditional construction which was close to be completed ready to be relet.

Unfortunately, we were unable to gain access on the day to undertake the inspection as we could not access the communal area to get into the property.

The Scrutiny group felt that they had seen enough and that they were generally satisfied with the voids that they had seen on the day.

#### **- Second day of inspections**

A further two void inspections took place on 20<sup>th</sup> March with a similar briefing and scoring sheets were distributed again with a list of work orders that had been raised.

The group visited **2C Broadshade Drive, Westhill** which was a two-bedroom, ground floor flat of modern construction and due to be allocated. The property was still undergoing some final repairs and the final clean was yet to be completed.

The group felt that this property was in a poorer condition than the properties that they had visited previously but they were also aware of the works that had been arranged and felt that were these repairs to be completed to a high standard that the property would be suitable to be relet. However, given that they were viewing the property part way through the works it was difficult to provide definitive scores for some aspects of the void standard.

### **Overall impression and additional comments**

- Radiators were old looking
- In reasonable condition

The final property that the group visited was **4 Beech Tree House, Countesswells**. This property is a new build three-bedroom house that was handed over to Osprey in November 2024. The property had already been allocated, and the incoming tenants were eager to move into the home.

The condition of the property was relatively poor given the properties age of less than six months since handover; the previous tenant had clearly left in a hurry.

Despite the poor level of cleanliness and decoration, the required works were relatively minimal and in theory could have been completed in a far shorter timeframe than the anticipated two-week void period.

The Scrutiny group were all in agreement that with more emphasis on a quick turnaround this property could have been relet more quickly and therefore reduced the void loss and cost to the wider tenant base.

### **Overall impression and additional comments**

- Would suggest that the new tenant be invited to view the remaining contents to see if they would like to take ownership of any of the items of furniture and appliances that had been left
- Needs a good clean and the carpets should be removed
- Should be a quick turnaround for Osprey
- Grass needs to be looked at

### **Overall and average scores across the four void visits**

| Average score across the fifteen void standards | 14 Countesswells Park Avenue, Countesswells | 2 Coreen Road, Alford | 2C Broadshade Drive, Westhill | 4 Beech Tree Mews, Countesswells | Average  |
|---|---|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|
| 1 - Cleanliness                                 | 6   | 8.8                   | Yet to be cleaned             | Yet to be cleaned                | 7        |
| 2 - Decoration                                  | 4.6   | 8.8                   | 9.25                          | 8.5                              | 7.8      |
| 3 - Electrical                                  | 9.6   | 10                    | 7.75                          | 10                               | 9.3      |
| 4 - Internal doors                              | 8.2   | 10                    | 7.25                          | 10                               | 8.9      |
| 5 - External doors                              | 5.4   | 10                    | 8.75                          | 10                               | 8.5      |
| 6 - Floors                                      | 7.6   | 9.6                   | 8.25                          | 9                                | 8.6      |
| 7 - Windows                                     | 9.6   | 10                    | 8.75                          | 10                               | 9.6      |
| 8 - Glass                                       | 9.8   | 10                    | 10                            | 10                               | 9.9      |
| 9 - Asbestos                                    | 10  | 10                    | 10                            | 10                               | 10       |
| 10 - Kitchen                                    | 7.8   | 8.5                   | 7.75                          | 9.8                              | 8.5      |
| 11 - Bathroom facilities                        | 8.6   | 9.3                   | Being worked on               | 10                               | 9.3      |
| 12 - Heating system                             | 8   | 10                    | 8                             | 10                               | 9        |
| 13 - External                                   | 9.2   | 8                     | 9.5                           | 8.5                              | 8.8      |
| 14 - Rainwater goods                            | 10  | 9.2                   | 10                            | 10                               | 9.8      |
| 15 - Rot & Dampness                             | 10  | 10                    | 10                            | 10                               | 10       |
| <b>Average score</b>                            | <b>8</b>                                    | <b>9.5</b>            | <b>8.9</b>                    | <b>9.7</b>                       | <b>9</b> |

Many of our comments and observations are subjective, and others may have had a different opinion to those of the Scrutiny panel. However, from the four visits that we completed it was clear that the general standard of the voids was good and that most tenants would be happy to accept these properties assuming that any of the outstanding repairs listed on the works order sheets were completed to a suitable standard, along with the final clean, where this hadn't already been undertaken. It

was disappointing that we were unable to inspect a trickle transfer but due to time constraints and a lack of access this was not possible.

Despite two of the four voids not having had their final cleans completed, it is clear from the Scrutiny groups scoring that cleanliness was the key area that is letting Osprey down currently. Decoration was highlighted as another area for consideration as it also received a lower score than other areas on the void standard scoring sheet.

### **Section 1.06 Conclusion**

Osprey Housing's Vision is supported by 4 strategic Aims, 2 of which have implication on repairs services of the group:

- TO MAKE OUR CUSTOMERS THE FOCUS OF EVERYTHING WE DO
- PROVIDE MORE AND BETTER HOMES

Overall, we consider that Osprey Housing offers incoming tenants a good lettable standard. However, whilst noting many strengths and positives in the delivery of the service, we have noted areas where improvements could be made. We do not consider these to be unachievable.

Because our recommendations (Section 1.07 Our Recommendations) align themselves to the standards and outcomes of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, we have deliberately tried not to be prescriptive in our recommendations.

We hope however, that Osprey will engage with the tenants through OTRA to explore appropriate solutions and means to meet these recommendations.

### **Section 1.07 Our Recommendations**

The Scottish Social Housing Charter sets the standards and outcomes that all social landlords should aim to achieve when performing their housing activities. We will therefore report our recommendations using a framework based on the Scottish Social Housing Charter for all our scrutiny activity.

- **1: Equalities**

Social landlords perform all aspects of their housing services so that:

- they support the right to adequate housing
- every tenant and other customer has their individual needs and rights recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

This outcome describes what social landlords, by meeting their statutory duties on equalities should achieve for all tenants and other customers regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. This includes the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity. It includes landlords' responsibility for finding ways of understanding the rights and needs of different customers, for example victims/survivors of domestic abuse and delivering services that recognise and meet these. This may include making reasonable adjustments.

**Recommendation:** None

## **2: Communication**

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

This **outcome** covers all aspects of landlords' communication with tenants and other customers. This includes using a range of non-digital and digital communications in accessible formats that meet individual needs. It also covers making it easy for tenants and other customers to make complaints and provide feedback on services, using that information to improve services and performance, and letting people know what they have done in response to complaints and feedback. It does not require landlords to provide legally protected, personal or commercial information.

**Recommendation 1**

Provide an option for flooring and other items that are good quality to be left for incoming tenants. If necessary to make minor alterations and improvements to make flooring safe and usable for the incoming tenant.

**Recommendation 2**

Provide the direct contact information for the Asset Officer who undertook the void to discuss any further repairs that may be required post void

### **Recommendation 3**

Consider new ways of collecting tenant satisfaction data in relation to the void standard

### **Recommendation 4**

Ensure tenant feedback is reviewed and acted upon

### **Recommendation 5**

The Void Policy and Lettable Standard should be provided to every tenant at the point that a formal offer is made

## **3: Participation**

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- tenants and other customers are offered a range of opportunities that make it easy for them to participate in, and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

• This **outcome** describes what landlords should achieve by meeting their statutory duties on tenant participation. It covers how social landlords gather and take account of the views and priorities of their tenants, other customers, and bodies representing them such as registered tenant organisations; how they shape their services to reflect these views; and how they help tenants and, other customers to become more capable of involvement – this could include supporting them to scrutinise landlord services.

### **Recommendation 7**

Engage with tenants association when reviewing policies where there are changes around the void process

### **Recommendation 8**

Engage with and agree appropriate solutions and measures with the Tenants Association in addressing the recommendations contained in the Lettable Standard Scrutiny Report

## **4: Quality of housing**

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- tenants' homes, as a minimum, when they are allocated are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS), and any other building quality standard in place throughout the tenancy; and also meet the relevant Energy Efficiency and Zero Emission Heat

Standard.

These **standards** describe what landlords achieve in all their properties. They cover all properties that social landlords let, unless a particular property does not have to meet part of the standard.

If, for social or technical reasons, landlords cannot meet any part of these standards, they should regularly review the situation and ensure they make improvements as soon as possible.

#### **Recommendation:** None

### **5: Repairs, maintenance and improvements**

Social landlords manage their businesses so that:

- tenants' homes are well maintained, with repairs and improvements carried out when required, and tenants are given reasonable choices about when work is done.

This **outcome** describes how landlords should meet their statutory duties on repairs and provide repairs, maintenance and improvement services that safeguard the value of their assets and take account of the wishes and preferences of their tenants. This could include setting repair priorities and timescales; setting repair standards such as getting repairs done right, on time, first time; and assessing tenant satisfaction with the quality of the services they receive.

#### **Recommendation 9**

Reconsider the level of decoration at the void stage and whether the current decoration voucher scheme is good value and provided for a long enough period

#### **Recommendation 10**

All adapted properties should receive a deep clean as standard during the void period

#### **Recommendation 11**

Osprey should introduce a tick list to ensure that all aspects of the void are covered and completed to the required standard

### **6: Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance and tenancy disputes**

Social landlords, working in partnership with other agencies, help to ensure as far as reasonably possible that:

- tenants and other customers live in well-maintained neighbourhoods where they feel safe.

This **outcome** covers a range of actions that social landlords can take on their own and in partnership with others. It covers support for victims/survivors of domestic abuse, action to enforce tenancy conditions on estate management and neighbour nuisance, resolving neighbour disputes, and arranging or providing tenancy support where this is needed. It also covers the role of landlords in working with others to tackle anti-social behaviour.

**Recommendation:** None

## 7, 8 and 9: Housing options

Social landlords work together to ensure that:

- people looking for housing get information that helps them make informed choices and decisions about the range of housing options available to them
- tenants and people on housing lists can review their housing options.

Social landlords have a role to prevent homelessness and should ensure that:

- people at risk of losing their homes get advice and information on preventing homelessness.

These **outcomes** cover landlords' duties to provide information to people looking for housing and advice for those at risk of becoming homeless so that homelessness is prevented as early as possible. This could include providing housing 'health checks' for tenants and people on housing lists to help them review their options to move within the social housing sector or to another sector.

**Recommendation:** None

## 10: Access to social housing

Social landlords ensure that:

- people looking for housing find it easy to apply for the widest choice of social housing available and get the information they need on how the landlord allocates homes and on their prospects of being housed.

This **outcome** covers what social landlords can do to make it easy for people to apply for the widest choice of social housing that is available and suitable and that meets their needs. It includes actions that social landlords can take on their own and in partnership with others, for example through Common Housing Registers or

mutual exchange schemes, or through local information and advice schemes.

#### **Recommendation:** None

### **11: Tenancy sustainment**

Social landlords ensure that:

- tenants get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; and ensure suitable support is available, including services provided directly by the landlord and by other organisations.

This **outcome** covers how landlords on their own, or in partnership with others, can help tenants who may need support to maintain their tenancy. This includes tenants who may be at risk of falling into arrears with their rent, and tenants who may need their home adapted to cope with age, disability, health conditions or caring responsibilities.

#### **Recommendation:** None

### **12: Homeless people (Local Authorities Only)**

Councils perform their duties on homelessness so that:

- people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness get prompt and easy access to help, advice and information; are provided with suitable, good-quality temporary or emergency accommodation when this is needed; and are offered continuing support to help them get and keep the home they are entitled to.

This outcome describes what councils should achieve by meeting their statutory duties to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Social landlords should also have measures in place to prevent homelessness as early as possible.

### **13: Value for money**

Social landlords manage all aspects of their businesses so that:

- tenants, owners and other customers receive services that provide continually improving value for the rent and other charges they pay.

This **outcome** covers the efficient and effective management of services. It includes

minimising the time houses are empty; managing arrears and all resources effectively; controlling costs; getting value out of contracts; giving better value for money by increasing the quality of services with minimum extra cost to tenants, owners and other customers; involving tenants and other customers in setting rents and service charges; and in monitoring and reviewing how landlords give value for money.

**Recommendation 12** Osprey should consider allowing applicants access to view properties prior to the ready to let date as standard procedure

**Recommendation 13** Osprey should consider introducing spot checks for final void cleans

#### **Recommendation 14**

Kickplates should be installed as standard to the bottom of doors and to door frames in adapted properties, this would prevent damage/trip hazards

### **14 and 15: Rents and service charges**

Social landlords set rents and service charges in consultation with their tenants and other customers so that:

- a balance is struck between the level of services provided, the cost of the services, and how far current and prospective tenants and service users can afford them
- tenants get clear information on how rent and other money is spent, including details of any individual items of expenditure above thresholds agreed between landlords and tenants.
- 

These **outcomes** reflect a landlord's legal duty to consult tenants about rent setting; the importance of taking account of what current and prospective tenants and other customers are likely to be able to afford; and the importance that many tenants place on being able to find out how their money is spent. For local councils, this includes meeting the Scottish Government's guidance on housing revenue accounts. Each landlord must decide, in discussion with tenants and other customers, whether to publish information about expenditure above a particular level, and in what form and detail. What matters is that discussions take place and the decisions made reflect the views of tenants and other customers.

**Recommendation:** None

**16: Gypsies/Travellers (Not Relevant)**

## **Appendix 1 – sources of evidence**

### **Reality Checks**

- Review of Tenant Satisfaction Feedback

### **Key Documents Reviewed**

- ARC Data Submission: <https://www.housingregulator.gov.scot/landlord-performance/landlords>
- The Scottish Social Housing Charter
- Void Management Policy and void standard