



# Tenant Inspectors' – Quarter Two

## Osborne & DBC – Empty Homes

### Introduction

For their second inspection of 17-18, the tenant inspectors wanted to review the Empty Homes process that Osborne carry out as part of the TAM contract. The tenant inspectors were given our 'Lettable Standards' leaflet for reference during this inspection. This inspection was made up of three visits to empty properties:

- 'Keys in' – when the properties are handed back to Dacorum
- Mid-point – During repair works
- Post inspection/Sign off – When repairs have been completed and the property is ready to let

Below, all aspects of the inspection are summarised with thoughts and recommendations put forward by the four Tenant Inspectors involved (Barry Merridan, Andrea Maloney, Michelle Mitchell and Debbie Barnes).

### 'Keys In' Stage

The tenant inspectors inspected three properties at the keys in stage. There are many different reasons for someone terminating their tenancy; this can either be by previous tenant passing away or moving out, transferring to another dwelling or in the worst-case scenario being evicted for non-payment of rent or anti-social behaviour.

This gave the tenant inspectors an insight into how the properties are given back and what level of repairs are required to meet the lettable standard ready for re-letting to a new tenant. The table below is taken from the Tenant Inspectors notes recorded during the visits.

<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>
Thumpers	2 Bed Flat	Bins overflowing (recharge), ceiling coving damaged in kitchen, broken window in bed won't close. Broken floor tiles to be replaced.
Wheatfield	4 Bed House	Rubbish left outside. Hole in kitchen door (recharge). Ceiling fan left in bedroom, damp in bedroom, banister struts broken.
The Dee	4 Bed Town House	Electric Meter Box broken all taped up. Bannister height on landing to be checked for safety and spindle to be replaced. Jacuzzi to be replaced with regular bath. Overall clean & tidy.

## Recommendations

- Tenants should receive more information given when notice to quit is received, explaining that their domestic waste bin is not for household belongings and that they should dispose of this in the correct manner with details of our waste services within Dacorum.
- Ensure that recharges for damage to the property are enforced and seen through.
- Ensure that tenancy conditions are adhered to when it comes to ending the tenancy. Tenants need to leave their gardens in a reasonable condition as stated in their Tenancy Agreement. This should include lawns being mowed and hedges trimmed, as a couple of properties had quite unkempt gardens.

## **Mid-Point**

The tenant inspectors went to five different properties across the borough whilst they were in the repairs stage with contractors on site. Each property has been categorised with agreed timescales and costs against the schedule of rates (SOR). If extra works are required they can be added to the specification with approval granted for the variation from Osborne to Dacorum that these extra works can be carried out.

Properties are categorised based on how long it is estimated that works will take:

CAT1 = 3 days £350 up to SOR to the value of £550

CAT2 = 5 days £1800 up to SOR to the value of £2500

CAT3 – 10 days £5600 up to SOR to the value of £8500

CAT4 costs and target times to be agreed on a case by case basis.

The below table is taken from the Tenant Inspectors notes recorded during their visits to the properties.

<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>
Rice Close	1 Bed Flat	Smell of wee in hall & bed, flooring will require replacing, cooker & w/Machine left, door off in Kitchen, No sign-in sheet, blown window in living room. 2 doors to be replaced
Stonelea Rd	3 Bed Hse	Dampness in dining room and small front bedroom, Outside tap to be cut-off. Fireplace boarded up, but has chimney been capped? Kitchen is on rolling programme for replacement.
Northend	2 bed Flat	Graffiti. Damaged doors. Sockets in kitchen hanging off. New kitchen cupboards and worktops are scratched.
Bennetts End Rd	2 Flr Flat	Good condition, trades were in working, new kitchen installed and some window repairs under way.
Havelock Rd Kings Langley	Gnd Flr Flat	Worktops in kitchen don't match.

## Recommendations:

- There were no recommendations made at this stage of the inspections as works were in progress. However, things were picked up at the sign off stage (see below).

## Sign Off / Post Inspection Stage

Tenant Inspectors visited some properties that were at the stage of being ready to re-let. The below table is taken from the Tenant Inspectors notes during these visits.

<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>
Chaulden Terrace	3 Bed Hse	No batten for curtain rail in kitchen. Major problem in kitchen, can't open door fully because of badly sited cupboard. Appliances might not go through door. Downstairs bathroom and toilet far too small, no light on stairs, socket on stairs (H&S), Radiator on wrong wall in bedroom, (stops bed being fitted). Garden overgrown, fences in very poor condition. 2 sheds left but are Council taking over fences and sheds? There is ground movement in garden, hard surfaces unstable.  This property has been rejected by Empty Homes Team and Osbornes have been asked to provide new specs.
Adeyfield Rd	1 Bed Bungalow	Toilet cistern hard to pull if you have Arthritis, maybe fit low level on side wall, or electronic push button. Still has old Piper system left. Maybe hall cupboard could be used for Fridge Freezer and side wall knocked out to be a part of kitchen giving more space. Lovely property well looked after. Kitchen on 12 week programme. Window locks and door lock very difficult to undo. Kitchen to be renewed on 12 week programme.
Bathurst Rd	1 Bed Bung	Bolt on meter cupboard door won't lock. New carpets fitted but doors tight on carpets and bottom of doors left very ragged after carpet fitting. Kitchen is on rolling programme. Keys may need to be re cut as difficult to get them to work as possibly not cut correctly, or door out of alignment. Window locks and front door lock very stiff. Old piper alarm not removed.

### Recommendations:

After visiting two of our sheltered properties at the sign off stage it was noted that some items in the property could have been more user friendly for elderly or disabled people, these recommendations are:

- To remove all *pull flush* toilet handles and to replace with *push button* controls or a *paddle lever* flush handle.
- Window opening catches not to have *push button* facilities as these are difficult to use if suffering with various disabilities e.g. arthritis or wheelchair user.
- External door locks are often difficult for some disabled people to *push up* in order to use the locking mechanisms so the door is secure. Also, a number of the doors are very heavy to open and close due to the manufactures specification. Elderly or disabled people do struggle with them.

Perhaps someone with a disability could check these properties out before they are let or work with the contractors when supplying products to use within these types of properties.

- There should be a joint sign off (OPLS and DBC) on all properties

- Ensure that before properties are re-let, if the garden has grown since the void works has been completed that a further clearance is completed as a couple of properties had quite unkempt gardens due to the time frame of works being completed.

### **Additional Thoughts on the Inspection**

This inspection has been really interesting and our thanks go to Lesley Jugoo, Sharon Clayton and Jenny Dickerson for guiding us around and answering lots of our questions. We would be very happy to see more Empty Homes at any time in the future when convenient for the team.