

## Briefing Note to Budget and Performance Panel.

### 1. Average Time Taken to Relet Local Authority Housing – Definition.

Former BV212 is used to monitor housing management performance. With the present pressure on authority-provided housing it is important that re-let times are kept to a minimum.

The average time taken to re-let housing is the time in calendar days from the day after tenancy is terminated up to and date when the new tenancy agreement starts. Includes all types of letting, however, the following properties are excluded from the calculation:

- Let through mutual exchanges;
- Undergoing 'major works';
- The council intends to sell or demolish.

(A void should be classed as a 'major works void' only if an existing tenant would have had to be decanted in order for the works to take place. This definition can be applied to any void property, not just those in major works programmes – for example, if a property is handed back in such a poor state of repair that the tenant would have to have been decanted for the necessary works to take place).

### 2. Performance Information.

Council Housing Services are a member of the Housemark Benchmarking Club. The table below summarises the overall performance of the stock retained and ALMO landlords and housing association members in the North West for 2008/2009

**HOUSEMARK North West Performance Benchmarking**  
**Stock Retained Landlords, ALMOs, RSLs.**

Former BV212	Average time taken to relet 2008/2009	
	Local Authority/ALMO	Housing Association
Upper quartile	28 days	28.1 days
Median	32.5 days	35.6 days
Lower quartile	41.5 days	45.4 days
Number in Sample	13	26

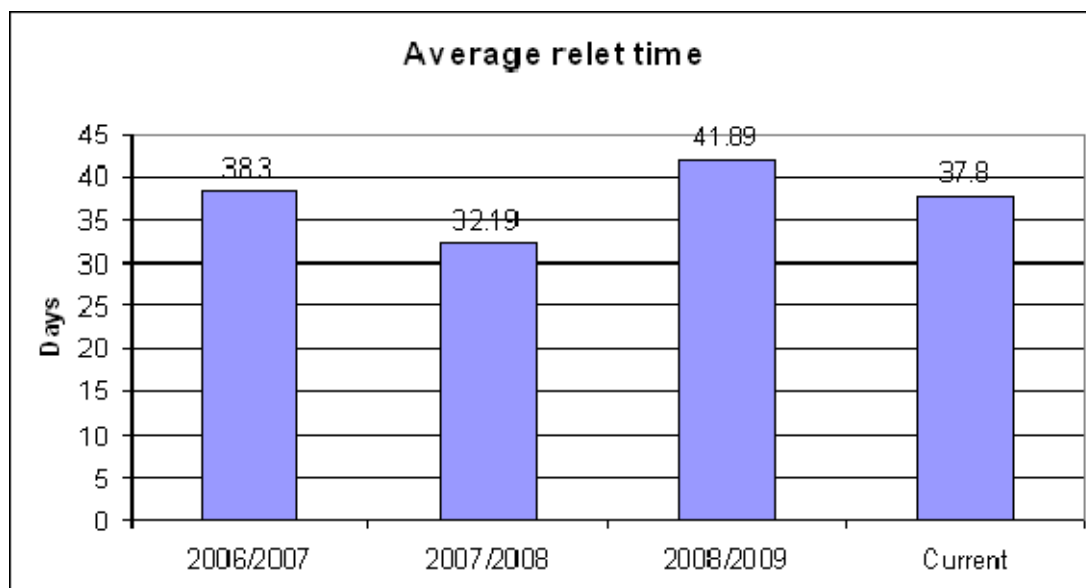
#### Local Performance Monitoring

Our performance against average relet time is monitored weekly and the quarterly performance profile for 2008/2009 is shown below:

Former BV212	Average time taken to relet local authority housing in days (TARGET = 32 days)				
	Year End 2007/08	Q1	Q2	Q3	Year End 2008/09
Lancaster	32.2	45.1	47.53	43	41.89

There had been deterioration in our performance over the first two quarters of 2008/2009. However during Q3 and Q4 we saw an improvement in performance with the cumulative average relet time being reduced to 41.89 days at the year end.

## Historic Performance



### **3. Problems Experienced in 2008/2009 and Actions Taken**

There are two principle reasons for the increase in relet times during 2008/2009:

i). Increase in the number of void properties. In recent years, the number of naturally occurring vacancies has been just over 300 a year. However last year, the figure increased to 375. The increase in numbers meant that both manpower resources (in terms of RMS operatives to undertake the work) and budgets (void work is funded via the responsive repairs budget) were extremely stretched.

ii). Increase in the cost of works to individual void properties. Unfortunately, council housing is, by necessity, having to be allocated to the most vulnerable members of society. In many cases properties are being allocated to applicants who have never previously successfully managed a tenancy. Without question, the condition of many properties being vacated is significantly worse than it has ever been. As a consequence, the council is having to undertake more and more work to bring properties to our "Lettable Standard" before allocation. Each year, the average amount spent per property continues to increase. In 2006/2007, the average spend was £735 per property, and for 2008/2009, that figure had increased to £1,300!

Officers needed to ensure that spending on repairs did not exceed approved budgets, and therefore it was difficult to allocate additional resources to respond to the joint problems of increase in volume and increase in work required per property until the budget issues were resolved. At the Cabinet Meeting of 20 January 2009, members approved additional spending of £185,200 for responsive repairs (with the increase also being carried forward into 2009/2010). As detailed in Section 2, the increased resources did enable performance to improve during the final months of 2008/2009, and the average relet time reduced from 47.53 days to 41.89 days. However, the performance indicator is cumulative for the whole year, and, as such, was unacceptably high.

### **4. The Current Situation – 2009/2010.**

An officer group continues to meet regularly to monitor performance and review working arrangements. The additional resources approved by Cabinet in January 2009 has, without doubt, helped to fund the current level of activity needed for voids.

We have also reviewed the method of working within RMS to ensure the better control and allocation of work. Most importantly, we have also reviewed how we apply our Lettable Standard. Until recently, the standard has been that **all** repairs are undertaken prior to relet (we also ensure that the gardens are in a maintainable condition and, particularly for elderly tenants, that properties are in a good decorative order). These extremely high standards do of course take a considerable amount of time to deliver, which is the main reason why Lancaster's performance for average relet times appears high compared with other landlords (who don't all apply the same lettable standards). Whilst officers feel it is important to retain the "Lancaster Standard", we are now identifying those repairs which clearly need to be undertaken prior to any new tenant moving in, and those more minor repairs which can be undertaken by appointment once the tenancy has commenced.

The combined effect of these measures has been a continued reduction in average relet times. The performance for 2009/2010 to date is as follows:

April	42.4 days
May	44.7 days
June	36.9 days
July	36.1 days
August	30.1 days

Clearly, the measures now in place are delivering significantly improved performance, with the 30.1 day average for August being close to the "top quartile" performance of 28 days. However, as this particular indicator is cumulative, we need to include performance for April/May, when not all the measures were in place. The cumulative performance for the year so far is therefore 37.8 days, although this will continue to reduce over the remainder of the year provided we maintain our current performance levels.

## **5. Possible Future Developments.**

The Council is currently investigating the possibility of introducing "Choice Based Lettings" and, at the Cabinet Meeting of 01 September 2009, officers were authorized to submit a bid for government funding to assist with implementation costs. The main principle of choice based lettings is that all vacancies are openly advertised and applicants have to "bid" for properties they are interested in. As applicants will only bid for specific properties they genuinely want, it should follow that, if someone is offered a property, it is highly unlikely that the offer would be refused. At the moment, only 58% of our vacancies are accepted by the first applicant and nearly one quarter of all vacancies have to be offered out at least three times before they are accepted. Each time a property is refused, it adds several days onto the relet time. Potentially, choice based lettings will mean that most properties are allocated on the first offer and therefore average relet times should reduce even further.