

Resident Inspector Report Inspection of 'Ready to Let' Standards

Introduction

This was the first inspection carried out by Westlea resident inspectors and was a pilot for the inspection process. The remit for the inspectors was to check the standards for ready to let homes as described in the Westlea booklet 'Your new home: what you can expect'.

The inspection of ready to let properties had been requested by the Home Movers Manager at Westlea and approved at a joint meeting of OCHA and Westlea resident inspectors as the subject of the first Green Square resident inspection. It was agreed that both teams of inspectors would inspect their own landlord and compare findings on completion.

This subject had the added advantage for a first inspection of having a clear and defined focus which allowed the inspection teams to 'test' the inspection process by carrying out and completing an inspection within a short (3 month) period.

The Inspection team

The inspection was carried out by a team of 6 Westlea residents; Toni Andrews, Patricia Denyer, Alison deSouza, Caralyn Hastings, Barbara Haywood, Sam Turner. They were supported by Julie Bielby, Neighbourhood Involvement Advisor (NIA).

Methods

- The group designed a checklist (**Appendix A**) to use on site which incorporated the standards specified in the booklet, 'Your new home: what you can expect'.
- The NIA liaised with the voids & home mover teams to identify properties that were ready to let and allocated them to the inspectors to view. The inspectors visited the properties in pairs

- The 11 Inspections took place between 21st July and 19th August 2009.
- The inspectors had a debrief session with the NIA after each inspection.
- On 26th August 2009 the inspectors met to review their findings and identify key themes arising from the inspection.

Summary

The inspection team looked at 11 properties in total.

- 6 flats
- 3 bungalows
- 2 houses

Of the 11 properties, the inspectors concluded that ;

- 2 properties fully met the standards. The inspectors who viewed the property at 2 Hooks Hill remarked that it was very well kept inside and out and could be used as a standard.
- 6 properties met the standards overall but had minor work to be done. e.g. some windows unable to unlock or open, door handles loose, doors not shutting, mildew and mould round bath seal, kitchen unit in poor state.
- 3 properties fell below the standard to such an extent that the inspectors felt they failed the standard and were not ready to let, e.g. filthy floors, toilet dirty, kitchen cupboards unclean, walls not ready to decorate, walls need plastering, nappies and rubbish in front garden, polystyrene tiles throughout property (fire hazard?)

Key findings

- While overall the majority of the properties were judged to be an acceptable standard, 9 out of the 11 properties viewed needed some work doing to meet the standards specified by Westlea.
- Standards were not consistent and there was a big difference between the best and worst properties viewed.

- Concerns were raised about the potential fire hazard of not removing polystyrene tiles throughout property (5 The Tynings, Biddestone).
- The areas most frequently not reaching the standard were
 - Cleanliness of properties
 - Decoration of properties
 - Doors/Windows not opening or closing

A summary of the inspections by property can be found in **Appendix B**.

Comments

- First impressions are very important and getting it right at the start of a tenancy is likely to have a lasting effect on a tenant's satisfaction with Westlea.
- Checking the small practical things before a tenant moves in would make a difference.
- The appearance of the outside of the property is important.
- It seems that tenants could 'inherit' problems as a result of the previous tenant's failure to look after the property.
- Is there a need for more workmen specifically for voids?
- Do residents know about incentives for leaving property in a good condition, £150

Queries raised during inspection

- What, if any, negotiations happen before someone moves in, e.g. what happens to carpets? Are new tenants given any choice about what is left or taken out, whether repairs are done after or before they move in?
- What happens to sheds that are taken apart?
- Is there a cleaning team?
- Are the standards of the voids team different to standards specified in residents leaflet?
- Who looks at properties when work has been done and are tenants liable for damages once they move out?

Comments made that are beyond the remit of the inspection

The inspector team enjoyed the process of inspection and found that discussions leading from their findings raised wider issues.

- Would it be possible to carry out check ups/regular reviews to prevent properties being left in a poor condition?
- Is there a role for a local tenant area representative? Their role could involve visiting new tenants and providing local information etc – also might be able to prevent problems by providing a contact point.
- How much information is available for residents when they look at a property through the Homes4Wiltshire bidding system.

What happens next?

The Inspection Team would welcome the opportunity to discuss their findings and would like to be kept apprised of any actions taken as a result of their findings.

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