

## **Somerset West and Taunton Council**

### **Tenants' Strategic Group: 25<sup>th</sup> July 2022**

#### **Council housing voids – information report.**

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Member for Housing.

Report Authors: Tony Knight and Oliver Warcup

#### **1. Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report**

This report provides members with information on our void property performance in relation to the council owned housing stock.

Statistical information covering the period 2020 - 2022 is provided, with a specific focus on the month of June 2022.

The Council's approved lettable and returns standard for voids is set out in Appendix 1

#### **2. Recommendations**

The Tenants' Strategic Group is asked to note this report and are invited to ask questions.

#### **3. Background**

##### **Definition of a void**

The term 'void' is used to describe a council house which is currently empty and either available for letting or being prepared for letting.

Normally, a property is officially classified as void at the end of the notice period (when a tenant terminates a tenancy) or where it becomes proven that a tenancy has been abandoned. A property can also become void following the execution of a Warrant for Possession.

It is a condition of the council's tenancy agreement that all tenants give four weeks' notice of their wish to terminate their tenancy. However, some tenants fail to do so and leave the property without giving formal notice.

A council house may be empty for other reasons and not be officially classified as void, for example, where a tenant is in hospital.

The way in which void properties are managed is important for a number of reasons:

- The need to use available council housing for those in housing need;
- The negative impact void properties can have on the local community; and
- The loss of rent, reducing the income to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for management and maintenance spend.

**Void performance information for the period April 2021 to March 2022:**

Total number of new lettings.	350
Average void turnaround time. (major works)	69.3 calendar days
Average void turnaround time. (minor works)	40.6 calendar days
Average void turnaround time overall.	54.9 calendar days
% of new tenants satisfied with the lettable standard of the property.	96%

**A 'snap shot' of our void performance for the month of June 2022**

Total number of voids.	57
Total number of new lettings.	20
Average void turnaround time. (major works)	54.1 calendar days
Average void turnaround time. (minor works)	27 calendar days
Average void turnaround time overall.	39.9 calendar days

% of new tenants satisfied with the lettable standard of the property.	100%
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### ***Average re-let times.***

The average re-let time for council properties was 54.9 days, which exceeded our target of 44 days. The average target was achieved in March and recent months have continued to show an improvement, which is encouraging.

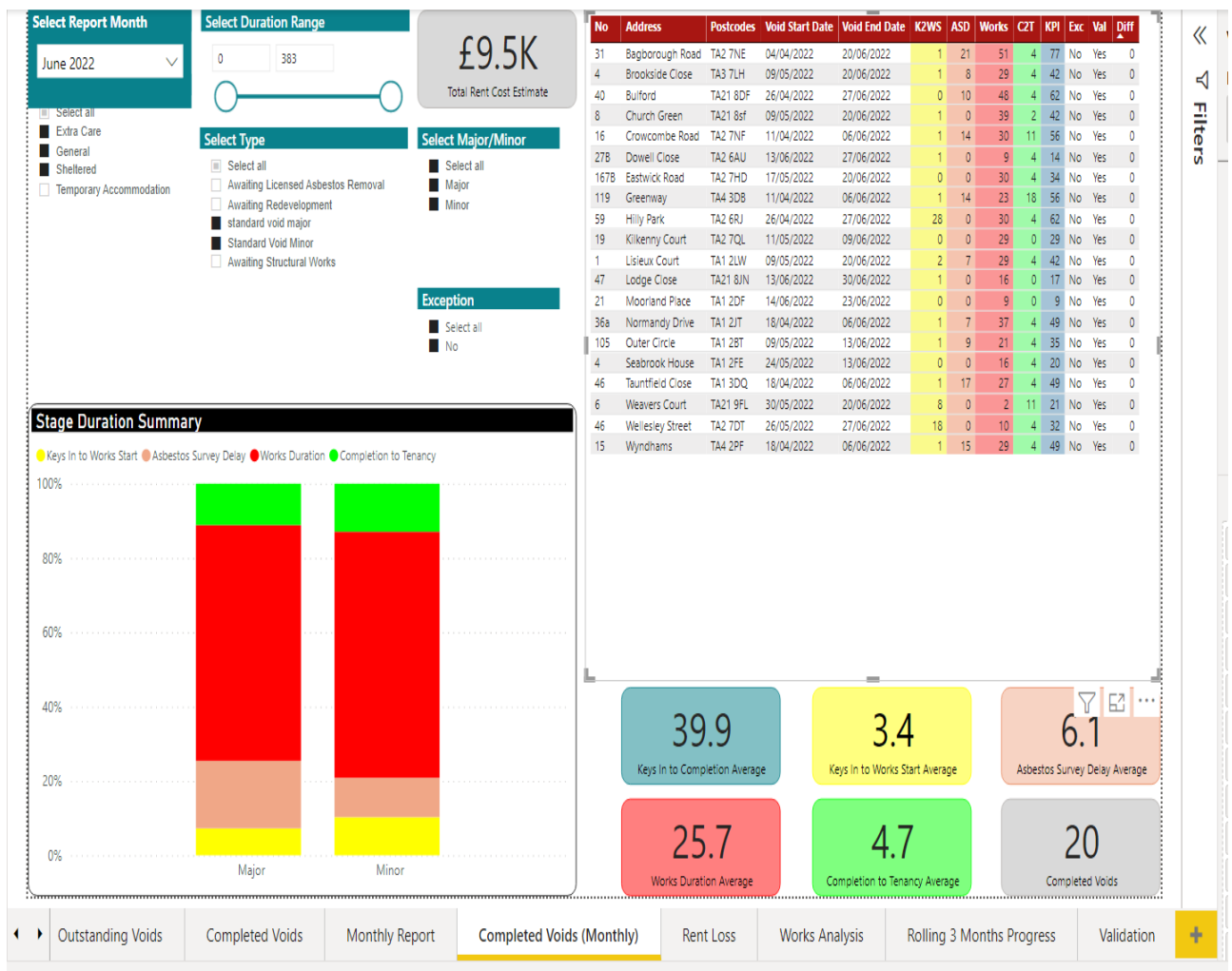
This has been a challenging time for void management and all Housing Providers across Somerset have struggled with increasing void times. Common factors include scarcity of key tradespeople (such as electricians), both in-house and through external contractors, many of whom have been attracted to other work such as Hinkley; Refocussing trades staff to clear repairs backlogs built up during the pandemic; lack of availability of some materials, which inevitably holds up work. For SWT, we have also noted a higher proportion of Major Voids (compared to Minor Voids) which skews our turnaround times higher. That said, we are progressing against our plan to improve void turnaround times. The plan includes:

1. Strengthening our approach with departing tenants to ensure they leave the property clean and tidy
2. Providing decoration packs for qualifying tenants, rather than undertaking full redecoration to let the property quicker
3. Investigating how we streamline the asbestos process to reduce delays due to surveys and works
4. Implementation of the voids module on Open Housing which will allow improved performance management of the overall voids process
5. Look to undertake major capital works as part of the capital programme where possible, after the tenant moves in, rather than during the void. This will also be more cost effective through economies of scale.
6. Explore voids inspections and scheduling software that can lead to a more efficient inspection and scheduling of trades staff into the properties and flag up capacity issues to allow earlier resolution.

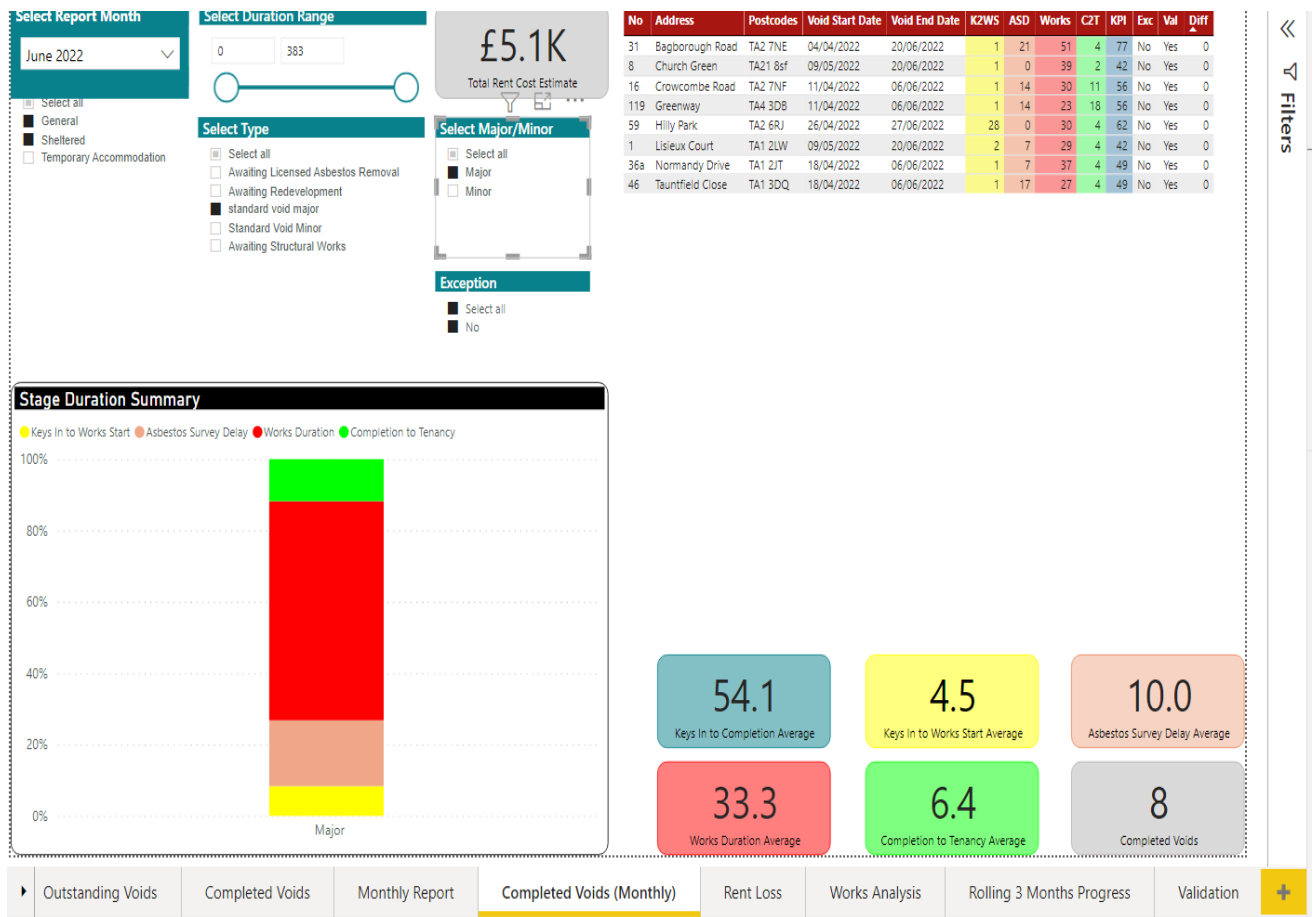
The 44-day target was set in December 2020 and was based on Quarter 2 Housemark metrics that showed a median performance of 44.5 days for District Councils that held housing stock at that time. Housemark data now shows District Council average void turnaround time has increased to 49.8 days by Quarter 4 of 2020/21. Reasons for this increase across the sector are described above.

The Housing Management team monitors wider metrics to give a rounded view of performance with respect to voids. The Pulse data for March 2022 places us in the top quartile for the indicators "Proportion of dwellings vacant, but available to let", and 'Proportion of social homes let", so our performance overall does give confidence that although improvement is required, we are not significantly out of step with other Housing Providers.

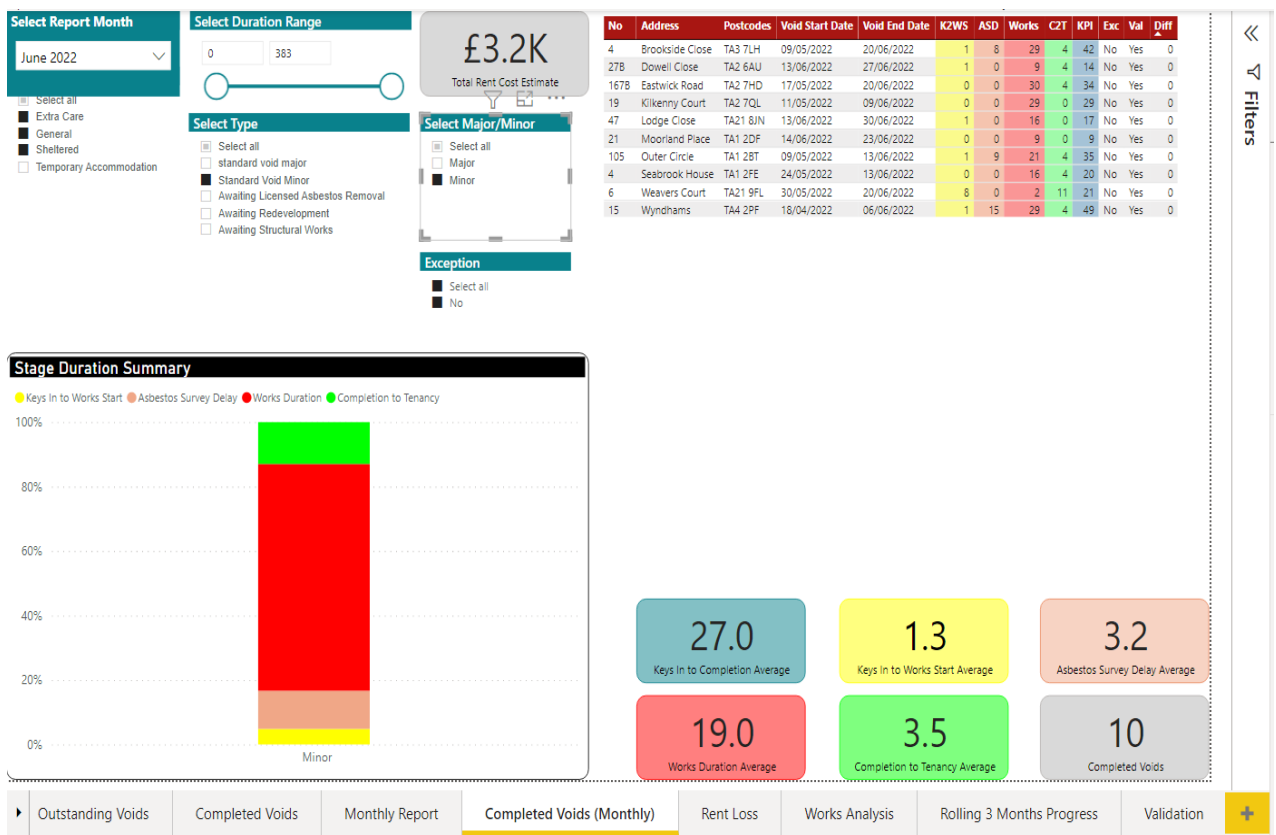
**A dashboard displaying further detail on our void performance for the month of June 2022 – relating to our overall performance for major and minor voids:**



**A dashboard displaying further detail on our void performance for the month of June 2022 relating to major works voids:**

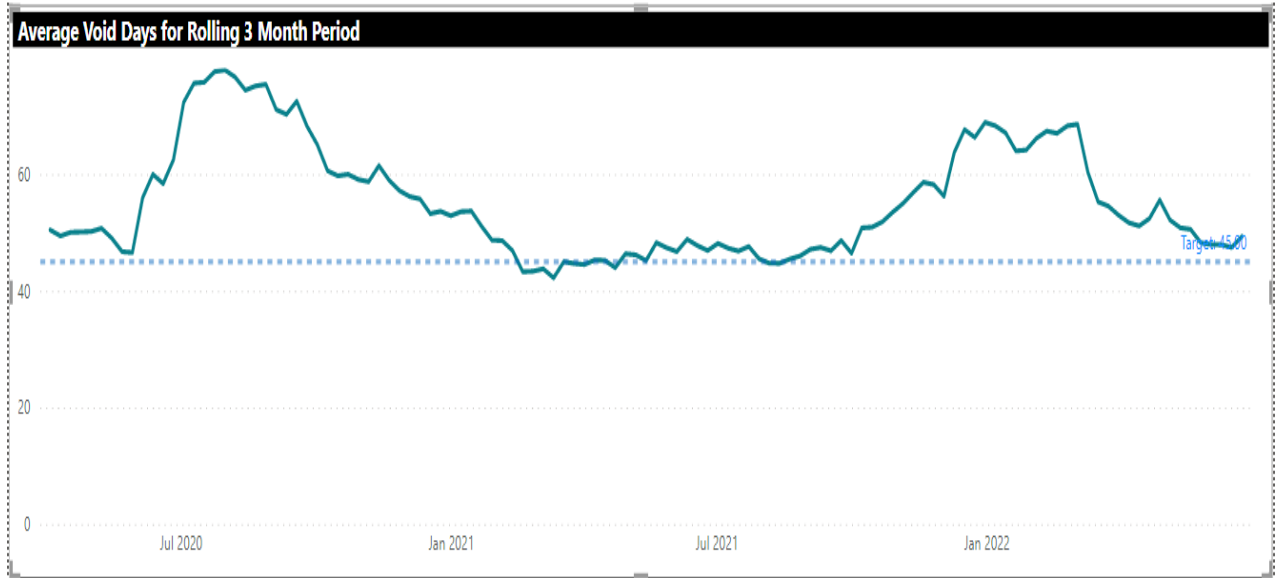


**A dashboard displaying further detail on our void performance for the month of June 2022 relating to minor works voids:**



**A chart displaying our average overall void performance in calendar days throughout 2020 to 2022:**

**Note: The overall performance target throughout the 2020 - 2022 period = ..... 45.00 calendar days.**



**Lettable and Returns Standard**

The council's Lettable and Returns Standard has recently been reviewed with a new standard approved in May 2022. The standard is intended to give our tenant's satisfaction that their new home will meet an agreed standard before it is re-let and ensure the consistent quality of each property. A copy of the lettable and returns standard is attached at Appendix 1.

**4. Risk Assessment**

A risk assessment is not required to accompany this report.

**5. Are there any Finance / Resource, Legal implications directly to do with this report?**

There are no financial implications directly to do with the recommendations in this report

**6: Are there any Equality and Diversity Implications?**

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

7. **Are there any Data Protection Implications?**

There are no equality implications directly to do with this report

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**Appendix 1 – Lettings and returns standard**







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This lettable standard sets out what tenants can expect from Somerset West and Taunton Council when they first move into a new home. This is our **minimum standard**. You can expect to live in a good quality home where you feel safe, warm, and secure and where you can thrive.

Before you move in, we will have checked your new home to make sure it is in good repair and all the installations are in good working order.

Your feedback is important to us and helps us to continue improving our service. Please take a few moments to complete the satisfaction survey, this will be sent to you at the beginning of your tenancy.

## Kitchens

The kitchen will be functional with doors, drawers and worktops that are securely fitted, allowing you to take proper care of them.

- A cooker space will be available for either an electric or gas cooker. **Please note:** You will need to arrange for your cooker to be connected by a qualified electrician or gas safety engineer.



- Where kitchen space is limited, there will be at least a sink unit, a double kitchen floor unit and a double kitchen wall unit.
- Unless communal laundry facilities are provided, a space will be provided for a washing machine. This will include plumbing and drainage. You will need to arrange to have your washer connected to the services by a plumber.

There will be at least a worktop and two electric sockets inaccessible locations.

- There will be at least one row of splash back tiles around the sink and worktop, with no cracks.
- There will be a good seal around the sink and worktops.
- Natural or mechanical ventilation as fitted, will be fully operational.
- All plumbing and drainage will be in good working order and free from blockages or leaks.

## Bathrooms

- At least a toilet, bath or shower and hand wash basin.
- All bathroom fittings will be securely fixed and free from cracks and stains.
- Toilet seats will be chemically cleaned or



renewed.

- There will be at least one row of splash back tiles around the bath and hand wash basin, with no cracks. There will be a good seal around the bath.

- Where a shower is fitted, a shower curtain or screen will be provided. The hose and handset will be clean and defect free.
- All plumbing will be free from defects and leaks and all taps will be in good working order.
- The basin and bath will be surrounded by an intact tiled splash back, with an effective seal.
- Where a shower is to be retained, intact and effectively sealed tiles should be affixed to the whole spray area. Any missing or broken tiles will be replaced in a sympathetic style and colour.
- The washbasin and bath will have a plug and chain attached.
- **Please note:** In our Extra Care properties, a wet floor or level access bathroom will be installed.
- Natural or mechanical ventilation as fitted will be fully operational.

## Windows and doors

- Windows and external doors will be secure, watertight and free from defects.
- A key will be provided for all doors and windows that have locks fitted.
- Internal doors will be free from defects and will function properly.
- All skirting boards, door frames, architraves and moldings will be in place. All woodwork will be wiped down.

## Walls and ceilings

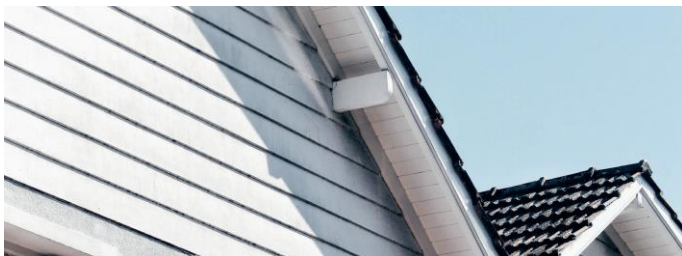
- Walls will be graffiti free, safe and free from large cracks and holes.
- All visible plaster work will be intact and ready for redecoration.

## Exterior

- Roof coverings, chimney stacks, soffits, fascias, rainwater pipes, drains and gutters will be fixed securely and in good working condition - all free from leaks or blockage.
- External walls and roofs will prevent water penetrating your home.
- Footpaths, steps and handrails or other means of access within the boundary of your home will be safe for the purpose of travelling to and from your home.
- Lawns will be cut, and gardens will be free of rubbish. Trees and bushes will be clipped.

## Cleanliness

- Before you move in, all rubbish, furniture and carpets will be removed internally and externally, unless agreed otherwise.
- Kitchen units, kitchen work surfaces, bathroom fittings, cupboard doors and frames, windowsills, skirting boards, fire surrounds, radiators, tiles, floors and the insides of windows will be clean.
- We will resolve any issues with damp or mould growth.
- We will sweep and wash all the floors.
- All tiled surfaces including grout will be cleaned and mould free.



## Floors and stairs

- Floors and staircases will be free from structural defects, holes and trip hazards.
- Bathrooms and kitchens will have securely fitted and fixed washable floor coverings.
- Stairs, balustrades and handrails will be safe, secure and in place before you move in.

## General

- All smoke alarms will be operational in line with current regulations.
- All gas appliances will be supplied with instructions.
- If a property has previously been adapted for customers with individual needs (such as installing a level access shower) then we will retain this feature so that other customers can benefit from it.
- For this reason, this type of adaptation would not be removed and replaced with a bath after you have moved into the property.
- Details on how to find the consumer unit (fuse box) and water stop tap will be present at the property.
- Where fitted, all fire doors will function correctly.
- Control entry systems to blocks of flats will function correctly.
- Loft spaces will be insulated. The loft will be secured.
- Communal television aerials will be maintained in good working order.
- Our newly built homes are built to a high standard set by the Council. A new property will be checked against this standard before being let. Our standards often exceed those set by building regulations (for example, standards relating to space and thermal insulation).
- A newly built home will have a twelve month 'defects period', during which the contractor will be asked to carry out any corrective work required. If you rent a newly built home from the Council, you will continue to report repair and maintenance issues through the normal route.
- **Please note:** Our Temporary Accommodation units come with some additional fittings and furniture.



## Services

- There will be at least one form of heating in good working order.
- There will be access to hot water.
- Any present gas supply will have been safety checked.
- The electrical system and any landlord supplied appliances will have been safety checked. You will receive a copy of the electrical certificate.
- Any present gas supply will be uncapped. You will be given a copy of the gas safety certificate.
- **Please note:** Our Sheltered and Extra Care properties will be decorated throughout.
- **Please note:** Where the surveyor for General Needs properties decides that the decoration is in poor order, we will issue decoration vouchers.

## Returns Standard

We need to let our empty properties quickly to those waiting for a new home. Please help us by making sure your home meets our moving out standard.

If we do have to do work, we will re-charge you for that work. Somerset West and Taunton Council tenants may have an application to transfer internally withheld not be allowed to move until the property meets this standard.

## Clear it

- You must leave the premises (including any Council fixtures) in a reasonable state of repair and decoration.
- You must ensure that the property and garden are left in a clean and tidy condition.
- Under the terms of your tenancy, you must remove all personal possessions, including rubbish and debris. The Council will dispose of any rubbish or items left within the property or garden. We will recharge you for this.
- You should dispose of rubbish and unwanted items responsibly, by using one of the household waste and recycling centers.
- Various local organisations welcome donations of furniture. For example: charity shops, Freecycle or Facebook groups. It is a great way of reducing landfill waste.
- The Council will also collect up to 5 bulky items for a fixed price.  
[www.somersetwaste.gov.uk](http://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk).

**All keys need to be returned by 10 am on the Monday of your departure to avoid another weeks rent. All keys and utility and cards will be collected.**

**The property will be checked, and locks changed.**



## Clean it

- Have a good clean up especially in the bathroom and kitchen which gets the most wear and tear.
- Leave the property clean and how you would like to find it.
- Make sure the garden is well maintained and left tidy. Any trees or hedges should be trimmed back, and the grass cut.
- Clean kitchen units including around the cooker, bath, sink and toilet, sweeping up the floors.

## Repair it

- Contact us so we can arrange to deal with repairs before you move out on 0300 304 8000.
- If you have broken or damaged anything you will need to repair it yourself. If we carry out the repair after you have moved out, you will be re-charged.

## Remove it

Any alterations that you wish to carry out to the property during your tenancy must be approved by a Housing Officer beforehand by completing a Property Alteration Form and submitting it to us. Any alteration must be compliant with building regulations and service standards. The work will be checked by us on completion. Unauthorised alterations will be removed and the cost to reinstate the work will be charged to you.



## More Information

### Accessing our services

Please contact us if you would like to receive this information in an alternative format such as large print, audio, braille or CD. If you have any questions about this leaflet, please contact us.



#### Online

[www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](http://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

[my.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/service/General enquiry](http://my.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/service/General%20enquiry)



#### By Telephone

Somerset West and Taunton Council 0300 304 8000 Emergency Repairs 01823 351411 (outside normal officehours).



#### By Post

Somerset West and Taunton Council, Deane House,  
Belvedere Road, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 1HE

[www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](http://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)