

Saxon Weald Residents' Task and Finish Group

Activity	Resident scrutiny
Title	Report on the review of Saxon Weald's Lettable Standard
Project brief requirements	To review, scrutinise, and influence improvement to the quality of homes Saxon Weald aims to achieve, both at the time of letting and throughout their lifetime, commencing with the Lettable Standard.
Project sponsor	Kath Hicks, Executive Director – Customer Experience
Sought outputs	• A report to Saxon Weald's senior operational team and the Customer Experience Committee, which sets out the TFG's findings and conclusions from the review and makes recommendations for improving the Lettable Standard and influencing the new Saxon Weald Property Standard. • Residents involved in the TFG gain knowledge and understanding of Saxon Weald's existing standards and commitments with regard to property conditions, along with its legal and regulatory obligations as a landlord. • The ability for Saxon Weald to evaluate and evidence the impact and value of this review to its Board, customers, the residents involved in the TFG and other stakeholders.
Report by	Saxon Weald Residents' Task and Finish Group
Report to	Saxon Weald's Executive Team and Customer Experience Committee
Report date	January 2024
Acknowledgements	TFG members: Jacqui Garman, Jill Phillips, Carol Rawlings, Terry Thornton, Adam Curtis, Billy Sinclair Manson, Martin Robertson, Bryn Evans, Jan Daane, Virginia Croft, Nats Cox, and Jim Dean, Independent Chair. Staff members: Kay Simpson, Customer Engagement Manager; Jeremy Oliver-Jones, Customer Experience Manager; Andy Mitchell, Planned Works Manager; Jason Burrridge, Property Surveyor.
Appendices	Appendix I: Project Brief

1.0 Background and Introduction

- 1.1 Saxon Weald's Asset Management Strategy includes an action to *'produce a Saxon Weald Property Standard in consultation with its customers.'*
- 1.1 To achieve this, Saxon Weald intends to amalgamate the following into a single document: The Lettable Standard; requirements of The Decent Homes Standard and the Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) Safety and Quality Standard; and a number of internal policies relating to the maintenance and improvement of its housing stock, including the choices offered to tenants and tenant repair responsibilities.
- 1.3 The *Saxon Weald Property Standard* is considered necessary to set out and clarify the minimum standards that new and existing residents can expect from Saxon Weald, regarding the quality of accommodation it provides. The Property Standard will also help improve consistency of delivery and ensure legal and regulatory compliance.
- 1.4 In August 2024, a Task and Finish Group (TFG) of tenant volunteers was established to *'Review, scrutinise and influence improvement to the quality of homes Saxon Weald aims to achieve, both at the time of letting and throughout their lifetime.'* The timeframe for this review was five months.
- 1.5 It was felt that a good starting point for creating the new Property Standard would be to review Saxon Weald's Lettable Standard, which represents the minimum standard of the association's empty properties before they are re-let. To achieve this, the TFG considered the criteria and specification, application, and fitness for purpose of the Lettable Standard.
- 1.6 The TFG consisted of 11 tenants and an Independent Chair, supported by Saxon Weald's Customer Engagement and Customer Experience Managers, the Planned Works Manager (HomeFix) and a Property Surveyor from the Asset Management Team.
- 1.7 Specific thanks are extended to Saxon Weald tenants; Jacqui Garman, Jill Phillips, Carol Rawlings, Terry Thornton, Adam Curtis, Billy Sinclair Manson, Martin Robertson, Bryn Evans, Jan Daane, Virginia Croft and Nats Cox, who gave up their valuable time to contribute to the success of this review.
- 1.8 The aim of this report is to provide Saxon Weald's Executive Team and Customer Experience Committee with the detailed findings and conclusions of the review, along with the TFG's suggestions for how the Lettable Standard might be improved. The level of detail reflects the depth and quality of the scrutiny carried out by the TFG.
- 1.9 Whilst moving into a new home can be one of life's most costly, frustrating and stressful events, it should be an exciting, happy and positive experience. Moving into a home that looks and feels fresh, clean, safe, and well maintained, not only make things less stressful for tenants, but sends out an important message that Saxon Weald cares about its properties and values the people who live in them. The TFG believes that, in return, tenants are more likely to look after and take pride in their homes.
- 2.0 Taking the above into consideration, when considering this report and its recommendations, the TFG would like the Executive Team and Customer Experience Committee to put themselves in the shoes of a new tenant moving into a Saxon Weald property, which may be their first home and experience of social housing. What message do you want your Lettable Standard to convey to them and what first and lasting impression do you want it to create?

2.0 Executive Summary

- 2.1 The review of Saxon Weald's Lettable Standard took place between August 2024 and January 2025 and followed the approach set out in section 3 of this report.
- 2.2 The Project Brief emphasised that the focus of the review should be on the criteria and specification, application and fitness for purpose of the Lettable Standard, rather than scrutinising the quality of work carried out by the Empty Homes (Voids) Team. However, it was difficult to avoid touching on the quality of work, as it has an obvious impact on the consistency of Lettable Standard delivery.
- 2.3 To avoid overlooking any relevant matters arising that were outside the scope of the review but relate to property conditions, any such observations, concerns and/or areas for improvement were captured and are included in this report for information and action, where appropriate.
- 2.4 Saxon Weald's Lettable Standard Policy states that *'Saxon Weald will offer accommodation which is safe, ready to occupy and meets our minimum standard'*. This is underpinned by 6 criteria, which require that its re-let properties are:

Safe; Secure; Clean and clear of rubbish; Energy efficient; In working order; Ready to decorate.
- 2.5 The suitability and application of the Lettable Standard criteria were tested as part of this review, which included: Visits to newly vacant and ready to let properties; scrutinising performance data; surveying tenants who have moved into re-let properties during the previous year and staff involved in delivering the Lettable Standard and re-letting empty properties; and comparing Saxon Weald's Lettable Standard with that of a number of other housing associations.
- 2.6 The TFG also considered the external operating environment and the legal and regulatory obligations of social housing landlords, with specific regard to property standards, in order to gain a good understanding of the challenges and pressures experienced by Saxon Weald.
- 2.7 The main findings and observations of the review relate to inconsistency in the application of the Lettable Standard Specification, with particular regard to: Decoration; cleanliness/hygiene; the state of gardens; and the condition of flooring, which suggests a lack of clarity, training, and awareness of the minimum standard required, and/or a lack of effective quality assurance arrangements. Saxon Weald's arrangements for replacing misted/blown window units, old and uneconomical WC's and cisterns, and adapted bathrooms were also areas in need of review and better clarification.
- 2.8 It is also possible that the budget and timescales assigned to complete void works are insufficient and unrealistic, which could compromise the consistent achievement of the Lettable Standard. The annual budget (2024-25) for empty homes is £1.4m, with the spend at 30 Sept 2024 being £1.39m.
- 2.9 Scrutiny of the performance data and survey feedback identified that 78% of incoming tenants surveyed were either satisfied or very satisfied with the property condition, with extremely low levels of property refusals (4 out of 378) and complaints (7 out of over 450) relating to the Lettable Standard.
- 2.10 Based on the average costs per property, at £9,818 per property, retirement bedsits are surprisingly among the costliest to make ready for re-letting. Bedsits also achieve a high level of refusals (44 during the year), meaning they stay empty longer and incur Saxon Weald rent loss.
- 2.11 The survey of staff involved in delivering the Lettable Standard and re-letting empty properties received a pleasing 100% response rate (from 27 staff members surveyed). Decoration; condition of gardens; the general state of cleanliness; and flooring conditions were among the main areas of concern highlighted. This supports the findings of the TFG and feedback from the tenants' survey.

- 2.12 The TFG is pleased to report that this review did not highlight any significant issues or concerns with the Lettable Standard, in terms of its criteria, specification, and fitness-for-purpose, which the group felt is generally 'on par' with those of the other housing associations examined. However, there is scope for improvement, particularly with regard to the quality and accessibility of information and the consistency of application, suggestions for which are set out in this report.

3.0 Methodology - Our approach

- 3.1 Saxon Weald promoted opportunities for tenants from across its housing stock to become involved in this review by way of its website, emails, and on social media. High levels of interest were expressed initially, with 24 tenants showing interest; however, for a variety of reasons, not all interested parties were able to become involved and we were fortunate to recruit 11 tenants who were able to fully commit to the review.
- 3.2 The TFG met on six occasions between August 2024 and January 2025, with the opportunity to contribute online provided for those who were unable to attend in person. Meetings of the TFG included:
- An introduction to the review and sought outcomes, including clarifying the role and purpose of the group, agreeing the ground rules, expectations, support, and success measures
 - Understanding the operating environment relating to social housing property standards
 - Identifying and agreeing what a 'decent home' looks and feels like to tenants and comparing the feedback with Saxon Weald's Lettable Standard criteria and specification
 - Scrutinising the Lettable Standard Policy and Specification and empty homes performance data
 - Setting the questions for surveys staff involved in preparing and re-letting empty homes
 - Considering feedback from the empty homes staff survey and that of the new lettings survey issued to all tenants who have moved into Saxon Weald properties during the previous year
 - Comparing and aligning survey feedback with the group's findings and observations, and identifying further scope for improvement
 - Agreeing the structure and content for the final report
 - Considering and agreeing the draft report and preparing to present it
- 3.3 TFG members visited 10 empty properties over three days, consisting of a mixture of flats and houses. Some of the properties visited had recently become empty, which gave group members the opportunity to see and understand the various states of repair of vacated properties and the extent of works required to make them ready to re-let. Other properties visited were ready to let, which enabled members to check, question and challenge compliance with the Standard.
- 3.4 Performance data considered by the TFG included:
- Costs associated with delivering the Lettable Standard
 - The number and reasons for re-let refusals relating to the Lettable Standard
 - The number and nature of Lettable Standard related complaints
 - Tenant satisfaction with new lettings over the previous 12 months
- 3.5 The legal and regulatory tools and requirements governing the social housing property standards considered and discussed by the TFG included:
- The Decent Homes Standard (2000)
 - Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
 - The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

- The Fire Safety Act 2021 and Fire Safety Regulations 2022
- The Building Safety Act 2022
- The Regulator of Social Housing's (RSH) Safety and Quality Standard

3.6 Following the site-visits, consideration of survey feedback, and the scrutiny aspect of the review, the group met to consider its findings and observations, reach its conclusions, and identify areas and suggestions for improvement. The group then agreed the structure and content for this report, along with who would volunteer to present it to Saxon Weald's Customer Experience Committee and respond to any questions arising.

4.0 Why TFG members became involved in this review

4.1 At the first session, TFG members were asked why they had volunteered to be involved in this review. It was important to establish this so that we understood and appreciated each other's reasons and expectations, so that we could be realistic as to whether or not they could be met and what we needed to do to ensure that, as much as possible, they were. This would also enable us to whether TFG members expectations had been met at the wrap-up session.

4.2 TFG members' reasons for becoming involved in this review and their related expectations are:

- To help improve living standards for existing and future tenants
- Improve the service and standard of communications (to ensure tenants are kept informed and updated)
- Improve consistency. So that all homes are let to the same minimum standard
- Hear what other tenants have to say and share my views
- Influence better overall quality of empty homes – better coordination/management of works and better quality control - getting things right first time
- Joined up thinking and working (tenants and SW staff) to achieve a better standard that everyone's happy with and proud of
- Personal satisfaction – knowing I've helped to improve things
- Get a better understanding of how Saxon Weald operates and help them see and understand things from a tenant point of view
- Identify any gaps and scope for improvement in the current standard
- Saxon Weald to listen to and learn from us and use our ideas to improve what it does.

4.1 Our definition of 'a decent home'

4.1 Our starting point was to establish what a 'decent home' looks and feels like from a tenant perspective – what matters most to tenants? While the Government has its own Decent Homes Standard, we wanted to consider what a decent home means to Saxon Weald tenants, not just regarding the Lettable Standard but from a 'Liveable Standard' viewpoint.

4.2 This was discussed prior to the group's scrutiny of the Lettable Standard Policy and Specification and was added to as the review progressed. To members of the TFG, a decent home is:

Priority	What we mean
Safe and secure	• Meets all the safety standards with necessary certificates to prove it • Connections for services and appliances fit for use • Locks changed, of good quality and in working order • Windows have good locks with safety mechanisms • Fixtures and fittings in safe working order • Solid access doors (meeting EU/UK quality and safety standards) • Good lighting – low energy bulbs fitted and all lights working (internal and communal) • No trip hazards inside or outside • Boundary fences/walls, gates etc in place, in decent condition and fit for purpose • Communal doors secure and operational, with intercoms working properly • Clean and well-maintained communal space – no signs of ASB, dumped rubbish etc • Known issues addressed before re-letting
Dry and warm	• Properly insulated – no draughts/areas where heat can escape • Roof in good condition (no leaks or loose tiles) • Free from damp, mould, and/or condensation • An efficient heating system that's affordable to run and easy to operate • Clean, sound and serviceable radiators (not painted over and easy to bleed) • Ability to save on utility costs • Good ventilation and effective extractor fans • No cracked or broken glazing or misted/blown window units • Good sound proofing
Clean and hygienic	• WC and bathroom fixtures and fittings cleaned and disinfected – no cracks, limescale, dirt or soap scum • Worktops clean, disinfected and in useable condition • No cracked or broken wall tiles (with replacements that match the existing) • Grout and mastic clean and in place • Clean and presentable communal areas • Looks and smells fresh • Guttering and downpipes free from obstruction, securely fixed and in working order with no leaks or overflows (no sign of weeds growing in the guttering)
Looks decent, inside and out	• A decent and useable kitchen and bathroom • Sound walls - good surfaces to decorate on

	• Freshly painted – neutral colours • Clean and level flooring – no loose boards, cracked/loose floor tiles or uneven screed • No unsightly pipework (clean it, paint it or box it in) • Woodwork in good condition (doors, skirting boards, architraves, banisters etc) • Tidy garden – grass cut and hedges trimmed, no rubbish • Looks like it's been/being well looked after and cared for • Communal space looks clean, safe and tidy • Make it easy for me to maintain and turn it into 'my home'
Fit for purpose	• Meets personal needs and/or circumstances - suitable for the number of occupants and their personal circumstances (e.g. number of kitchen units) • Has necessary aids and adaptations/adjustments • Adequate parking for people with disabilities • Best use of space • Enough electrical sockets for modern living • Everything in working order and fit-for-purpose works – taps, draws, doors and cupboards • To know where everything is and how to operate it (clear and reliable information)
Gives value for money	• Meets the standards promoted by and expected of Saxon Weald • Good quality, reliable services (repairs, cleaning, grounds maintenance, neighbourhood management) • Saxon Weald is proactive in maintaining, fixing and replacing things (not just when they breakdown or go wrong) • It's worth what I pay to live there • Makes me feel safe, happy and proud to live there • Makes me feel like SW cares about its homes and values the people who live in them.

- 4.3 On comparing TFG members' expectations and aspirations of a decent home with the Lettable Standard, we found common themes and priorities between the two. This helped set the scene for the review as, to a large extent, it was felt that Saxon Weald's Lettable Standard understands and aims to address the expectations and aspirations of its tenants regarding decent homes. Although, the group feels there is plenty of scope to improve the current standard.
- 4.4 The TFG strongly believes that a decent home is not just about the standard of the property, it's also about the feeling of safety and security, the quality and responsiveness of services, the sense of community, and the standard of information Saxon Weald makes available to enable tenants to know what they can expect and hold it to account should it fail to meet its responsibilities.

5.0 Scrutiny - Our findings, observations and suggestions

5.1 Policy compliance

5.1.1 Saxon Weald's Assured Tenancy Agreement (clause 3.5.1), requires the association to: "*Let the property in a reasonable state of repair to the agreed Saxon Weald lettable standard and with all fixtures and fittings in working order*".

5.1.2 The Lettable Standard Policy sets out how Saxon Weald will meet its landlord obligations in this respect. The policy has a clearly explained purpose and identifies the relevant legislation and regulatory measures, along with the internal policies and procedures linked to the Lettable Standard and a written specification for achieving its policy obligations and commitments.

5.1.3 The TFG considered whether the Lettable Standard enabled Saxon Weald to meet its legal and regulatory obligations when re-letting empty homes. We received confident, reliable and helpful feedback from the Saxon Weald managers who attended our meetings to any questions or challenges raised. This helped increase members' understanding and awareness and provided a level of assurance of the association's compliance with its landlord obligations with regard to empty properties.

5.1.4 The following observations were made regarding compliance:

Ref	LS Policy area	Finding / Observation	Suggested Improvement
5.1.5	Legal obligations	The legal requirements section (2.1) does not include reference to the Equality Act 2010, which has relevance regarding '<i>reasonable adjustments</i>.' Reasonable adjustments include alterations to buildings and there is no explanation or examples given under the equality and diversity section (9.0), which would be helpful to potential, new, and existing tenants. The Equality and Diversity section (9.0) of the Policy does not explain Saxon Weald's approach to the provision of '<i>reasonable adjustments</i>' where these would be necessary for a property to meet the specific needs and personal circumstances of prospective tenants.	Update section 2.1 of the Lettable Standard Policy to include reference to the Equality Act 2010. Update the Policy to define <i>reasonable adjustments</i> and provide examples of those that Saxon Weald will consider, along with explaining how new and prospective tenants who need them can go about getting them.
5.1.6	Regulatory requirements	The regulatory requirements section (2.2) refers to the former regulator, the Homes and Communities Agency's (HCA) Home Standard 2012. The HCA has since been	Update the Lettable Standard Policy accordingly.

	(Consumer Standards)	replaced by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), and the Home Standard 2012 has been replaced by the Safety and Quality Standard 2024.	
5.1.7	Provision of information to incoming tenants	The Lettable Standard Policy (4.5) sets out the information Saxon Weald will provide to incoming tenants regarding their new home. However, no evidence was available to demonstrate that this is done consistently, in a timely manner and in accordance with a standard procedure. It was also felt that more detailed property history and local information would be helpful to incoming tenants.	Consider introducing a 'Moving in welcome pack' to include information on: Point of contact; property history; location of utilities, isolation points and operating instructions; relevant energy and safety certifications; details of when any programmed works are due to the property and its communal areas; reference to Saxon Weald's Tenants' Guide and 'My Saxon Weald' portal; local information (e.g. shops, schools, surgeries and transport) and a hard copy of the moving in questionnaire with SAE and a return by date (as well as referring to an online link to the questionnaire). Clearly label and colour code different utilities and isolation points (e.g. blue = water; red = electric and black = gas). Consider including some useful essentials that would be helpful to tenants on their moving in day (e.g. tea bags/coffee, milk, sugar, washing up liquid, toilet roll). To improve consistency, establish and implement a process for collating and providing the welcome packs / property information.
5.1.9	Safety checks and certifications	The group considered each aspect of the information given to incoming tenants set out in 4.5 of the policy and enquired as to what the associated safety checks included. The group received good and clear explanations, which satisfied us that Saxon Weald meets its legal and regulatory responsibilities and policy commitments in this respect.	No improvement action suggested.
5.1.10	Provision of information to incoming tenants	The list in 4.5 of the policy includes providing incoming tenants with ' <i>Information on the location and type of any asbestos-containing materials identified inside or on the property; together with guidance and contact details for further information.</i> '	Reconsider providing tenants with this information, so that they are aware of the location and type of any asbestos in their home in case they intend to carry out DIY work.

		It is understood that this information is no longer provided, as Saxon Weald believes it can cause unnecessary concern to incoming tenants and influence decisions on whether or not to accept a property. This information is recorded on Saxon Weald's property database and is available to tenants on request, as well as to staff and contractors who have cause to carry out works to a property.	If Saxon Weald continues not to provide asbestos information, it should be removed from the list in 4.5 of the Policy. The updated Policy should advise that asbestos information is available to tenants on request.
5.1.11	Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors / alarms	The Policy includes for all properties to have working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors/alarms. These fittings were apparent in the properties visited.	No improvement action suggested.
5.1.12	Quality assurance	The Policy (5.3) states '<i>Quality assurance measures will be put in place to ensure the correct and consistent application of this standard by both HomeFix and contractors.</i>' However, it is not specific about what these measures are, or how they are monitored to ensure they are effective and who performance against them is reported to. Tenants are not currently invited to walk around the property with the member of staff who carries out the final quality check and signs-off the property as ready to let. This would enable incoming tenants to satisfy themselves that the Lettable standard has been met, as well as to pick up on any issues and have them addressed before they move in.	Update the Policy to clarify what quality assurance measures <u>are</u> in place (rather than <i>will be</i>), along with how they are monitored and performance against the Standard is reported. This could include the introduction of some Lettable Standard key performance indicators (KPIs), to help recognise and respond to any trends that may materialise. Such as: • Number and reasons for re-let refusals relating to the Lettable Standard. • The number of Lettable Standard failures and associated reasons (where additional or corrective works are necessary following the ready to let QA checks). • The number and nature of Lettable Standard related complaints. • Tenant satisfaction with the Lettable Standard. Other suggestions are: • Include incoming tenants in the QA checks, inviting them to walk around with the manager or operative responsible for signing off the works and agreeing that the Lettable Standard has been met. The incoming tenant could then

			sign to say they are happy with the property condition or be allowed a set amount of time to assess the quality of their new home against the Lettable Standard and report any related failings to Saxon Weald. • Review the customer experience survey for re-let properties, to ensure that it asks the right questions regarding the delivery and quality of the Lettable Standard. • Consider if there could be a quality assurance/scrutiny role for tenants carrying out random checks on a sample number of ready to let properties each year, to assess and report on compliance with the Lettable Standard.
5.1.13	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	The Lettable Standard Policy does not have an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). The group appreciates that EIAs aren't currently a legal requirement but, as this relates to the standard of property, it is felt that an EIA would be beneficial to ensure and evidence that the Lettable Standard is fair, considerate of its audience and does not present any barriers to new or prospective tenants.	Complete an EIA of the Lettable Standard to help ensure that it doesn't unlawfully disadvantage or discriminate, either directly or indirectly, regarding access to the Policy and Specification and the content of the Specification, including how any barriers identified are to be addressed.

5.2 Quality and content

5.2.1 Saxon Weald has four documents relating to its Lettable Standard:

- Lettable Standard Policy (Nov 2021 – Nov 2024)
- Lettable Standard Specification (Nov 2021 – Nov 2024)
- Lettable Standard Specification Checklist
- Void Works Procedure

5.2.2 The group compared Saxon Weald's Lettable Standard Policy and Specification with those of three other housing associations, including neighbouring association Raven Housing Trust. In comparison, Saxon Weald's specification is clear, concise and generally 'on par' with those examined and there is scope for improvement with specific regard to the standard of cleanliness and decoration, flooring conditions and glazing.

5.2.3 The following observations were made regarding the quality and content of Saxon Weald's Lettable Standard Policy:

Ref	LS Policy area	Finding / Observation	Suggested Improvement
5.2.4	Document linkage	Section 2.4 of the policy lists the internal policies and procedures associated with the Lettable Standard. However, it does not refer to the Lettable Standard Specification or the related checklist, which are crucial to the effective and consistent application of the policy.	Update the Policy to make reference to the Lettable Standard Specification and checklist.
5.2.5	Lettable Standard exceptions	The policy (4.4) states '<i>In some circumstances, we may agree with the incoming tenant to complete works after they have moved in.</i>' There are no examples of what these circumstances could be. The TFG feels that, without this clarity, there is the potential for this clause to be used to get tenants to move in quickly in order to hit re-let targets and reduce rent loss.	Update the Policy to include examples of circumstances in which Saxon Weald may agree with incoming tenants to complete works after they have moved in. The Policy should also include that, where this happens, the incoming tenant will be provided with written clarification of the nature of the works, a date by which they'll be completed and the details of who to contact regarding the works. The group strongly felt that as much work as possible should be carried out when a property is empty to avoid unnecessary disruption to tenants once they have moved in.
5.2.6	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	The Equality and Diversity section (9.0) of the Lettable Standard Policy does not give information on how the Policy and Specification will be made accessible to new and prospective tenants (e.g. on its website). Furthermore, it does not set out the alternative formats that Saxon Weald will make the Policy and Specification available for people who have difficulty reading and/or understanding written information, or for whom English is not their first or preferred language.	Update the Policy to include how to access Lettable Standard information and the alternative formats Saxon Weald will make it available in.
5.2.7	Tenant choice	The Lettable Standard Policy does not include examples of the choices available to incoming tenants, once they have viewed and accepted a property and before any works begin.	Update the Lettable Standard Policy to include how Saxon Weald will enable incoming tenants, wherever feasible, to influence works to their new homes (e.g. choices of colour schemes, fixtures and fittings etc).

5.3 Accessibility

5.3.1 The group tested accessibility of the Lettable Standard Policy and Specification on Saxon Weald's website and compared it to that of the other housing associations examined, resulting in the following observations:

Ref	LS Policy area	Finding / Observation	Suggested Improvement
5.3.1	Access to the policy and specification	The Policy and Specification are not currently available on Saxon Weald's website. The website has a section <i>Services and Support</i>, which has a link to <i>Our service standards</i>. However, the Lettable Standard is neither referred to or mentioned under this section.	Update the website to include a new section on the Lettable Standard, with drop downs for each of the criteria that link to the component detail of the specification and explain what incoming tenants can expect on a room-by-room basis. Consider producing a 'Lettable Standard – What you can expect' video, which can be viewed by new and prospective tenants on Saxon Weald's website and used for staff training. Members of the TFG would be happy to work with Saxon Weald on developing the website page and video.
5.3.2	Timeliness of information provision	The Lettable Standard Policy (5.2) states '<i>Incoming tenants will be issued with a copy of the lettable standard when they move in, which will explain what they can expect and what they should do if they consider that the standard has not been met.</i>' The TFG felt that this does not give incoming tenants sufficient time to digest and understand what to expect and ask any related questions before they move in, which is not only important in helping them prepare for their move but can also influence their decision on whether or not to accept a property.	Amend the Policy to include that incoming tenants will be issued with a copy of the Lettable Standard no later than 7 days before they move in and advising that information on the Lettable Standard can be found on Saxon Weald's website (once the new page is set up).
5.3.3	Website access comparison's	Lettable Standard information on the websites of some of the other housing associations visited was easy to locate, with drop downs for each of their criteria which took the viewer through each aspect of the specification at component level. There was also clear and concise information on what is expected of incoming tenants and what they can do if they feel that the Lettable Standard hasn't been met.	See 5.3.1 above.

5.4 Implementation

5.4.1 The TFG considered each aspect of the Lettable Standard Specification. We compared and contrasted the criteria and standards under each of the six headings against those of the other housing associations we examined, considering their suitability and using the site-visits and survey feedback to test and scrutinise Saxon Weald's performance in their delivery. This stage of the review identified the following:

Ref	LS Specification area	Finding / Observation	Suggested Improvement
5.4.2	Safe	Misted/blown window units: <i>'Windows (including frames) must be - Weatherproof and in sound condition - In good working order (lockable and able to open and close easily, without obstruction).'</i> <i>'Properties will be wind and weatherproof and have appropriate levels of thermal insulation</i> Individual misted/blown double glazed window units are not currently replaced under the Lettable Standard and are referred to Asset Management for inclusion in future replacement programmes. The Lettable Standard lacks clarity on this as <i>'without obstruction'</i> could be misinterpreted as relating to visual obstruction rather than the obstruction of working parts.	The TFG believes that misted/blown window units are not in <i>'sound condition'</i> and are not <i>'without obstruction'</i>, as vision is often obstructed by the misting, meaning that the window isn't fit for purpose. Their thermal effectiveness is also reduced. The group feels that misted/blown window units in empty properties should be replaced under the Lettable Standard, which is the practice of some of the housing associations whose Lettable Standards were considered.
5.4.3	Safe	Access to loft space: <i>'Non-communal loft hatches must be fitted with a combination lock to prevent lofts from being used for storage.'</i> Loft hatches are padlocked, which denies access to tenants in the event of an emergency. The locks used are an eyesore and send out a negative message. The explanations given to the group on this policy decision were reasonable and acceptable; however, it was felt that, based on the personal experiences of some TFG members,	The TFG accepts Saxon Weald's reasons for preventing access to loft space. However, the reason/s for this should be made clear in the Lettable Standard Policy and on the website to ensure consistency of explanation. In addition, Saxon Weald should review the types of locking devices used and replace them with something less conspicuous.

		Saxon Weald does not explain the reasons clearly, consistently and widely to its tenants.	
5.4.4	Secure	Lock changes: <i>‘Entrance doors to individual properties must be fitted with new locks (including access doors, stores and permanent outbuildings).’</i> Feedback from TFG members, based on their personal experiences, indicated that replacing locks on empty properties may not be consistent practice.	There is no compromise on safety and security. The QA checks must ensure that locks have been changed and the keys handed over are brand new.
5.4.5	Clean and clear of rubbish	General cleanliness and hygiene: <i>‘Properties will be cleaned thoroughly and be clear of any rubbish or possessions of the previous tenant.’</i> Feedback from the site visits and surveys identified inconsistent levels of cleanliness and tidiness. (including communal parts, which are not currently included under the Lettable Standard in terms of their upkeep and appearance).	Ensure that operatives and contractors understand what’s expected regarding cleanliness and hygiene, both at induction and via annual refresher sessions. If implemented, the <i>‘What you can expect’</i> video could be used for this.
5.4.6	Clean and clear of rubbish	Garden condition: <i>‘Cut back and free from items or debris that could pose a potential hazard or prevent them from being properly maintained by the incoming tenant.’</i> Feedback from the site visits and surveys identified inconsistency with the levels of safety and tidiness of gardens. This includes communal gardens, which are not currently included under the Lettable Standard in terms of their upkeep and appearance.	Ensure that operatives and contractors understand what’s expected regarding the condition of gardens, both at induction and via annual refresher sessions. If implemented, the <i>‘What you can expect’</i> video could be used for this. Ensure that prospective are able to manage a garden at the offer stage.
5.4.7	Clean and clear of rubbish	Unsightly pipework and electrical conduit: <i>‘Property interiors must be swept, vacuumed, mopped and/or dusted so that they are free from dust, dirt, cobwebs and rubbish.’</i> Some of the properties visited had unsightly pipework and conduit down the walls and across skirting boards, which didn’t match the décor of the room and hadn’t been	The group appreciates that running surface pipework and conduit is often necessary and unavoidable; however, it should be as inconspicuous as possible. The Lettable Standard should include for visible pipework and conduit to be of decent appearance (painted over where necessary or replaced if conduit) and cleaned/dusted/vacuumed,

		dusted down or cleaned. Another example was nicotine-stained conduit, which is even more noticeable after a room has been repainted.	particularly behind pipework when it's run along skirting boards.
5.4.8	Energy efficient	Heating: <i>'The minimum number of radiators or controllable heat emitters must be provided in all habitable rooms.'</i> Neither the Policy nor Lettable Standard Specification identify what the minimum number is for each sized room. This posed the question as to how do tenants know what to expect and operatives know how many there should be?	Update the Lettable Standard to include the minimum number of radiators/heat emitters, electrical sockets and kitchen units etc, so that this information is all in one place and tenants know where to find it.
5.4.9	In working order	Flooring conditions: <i>'Flooring must be in sound condition, free from any obvious trip hazards and appropriate for the room concerned.'</i> The site visits and survey feedback identified inconsistency with the application of this specification. Examples included uneven surfaces as the result of the filling of cracks and gaps where carpet grippers and or tiles had been lifted.	The TFG strongly feels that Saxon Weald should consider providing floor covering as part of its Lettable Standard. Alternatively, it should ensure that floors are fully screeded and made even where floor tiles have been lifted or there is obvious unevenness. The TFG recognises the cost in preparing uneven surfaces to make them fit to lay floor coverings; however, this is an expense that many tenants can't afford, meaning they often do without. Saxon Weald could approach local flooring companies/contractors to negotiate a discount on flooring for tenants.
5.4.10	In working order	General: <i>'Properties must have the appropriate number of kitchen units and working electrical sockets, lights and switches for their size (in accordance with Saxon Weald's specification).'</i> Neither the Policy nor Lettable Standard Specification identify what the minimum number is for each sized room. This posed the question as to how do tenants know what to expect and operatives know how many there should be?	See 5.4.8 above.
5.4.11	In working order	Lighting: The Standard does not include the installation of light bulbs and some properties visited did not have them in every room. This raised questions as to how lights are tested if they don't have bulbs, and whether light bulbs should be provided under the Lettable Standard?	Install energy efficient lightbulbs in each room.

5.4.10	In working order	Blocked/broken/unsecure rainwater gutters and pipes: Some of the properties visited had obvious signs of leaves and moss etc accumulating in the rainwater gutters, causing blockages and overflows and the potential to damage the buildings.	Consider the use of drones or other equipment, as part of the QA checks, to inspect the condition of guttering, ensuring that any blockages are cleared and that pipework is secure and in a good state of repair.
5.4.11	In working order	Kitchens and bathrooms: Are only replaced if they are in a poor state of repair and no longer useable or fit for purpose. If a kitchen or bathroom of an empty property is included in an imminent replacement programme, they are left as is and replaced under that programme, rather than being replaced when the property is empty. While this makes sense to Saxon Weald from an economy of scale and budget control perspective, it doesn't make sense to tenants who will have spent time and money investing in their home, only for it to be disrupted by such major improvement works not long after moving in.	The TFG strongly feels that kitchens and bathrooms scheduled to be replaced in an imminent modernisation programme (e.g. within the coming 3 years), should have the replacements completed while the property is empty.
5.4.11	Ready to decorate	Standard of decoration: <i>'Properties should be prepared ready for the incoming tenant to decorate.'</i> <i>'Decorating, where necessary, will be carried out to all extra care, retirement and general needs properties.'</i> Site visits and survey feedback identified inconsistent standards of decoration. An example being that non-desirable colour schemes are often left as is, unless there are extreme circumstances (e.g. nicotine stains). The group also noted walls that had not been prepared properly ready to be re-painted by incoming tenants. There was a big difference between properties that had and hadn't been painted. Not just because painted properties looked brighter, but the smell of fresh paint gave an additional sense of cleanliness, which created a more positive and welcoming feel.	The TFG strongly feels that, unless in very good condition, all properties should be re-decorated in a neutral colour and to a basic standard, as the state of decoration (and associated smell of freshness) sends out a powerful message to incoming tenants that Saxon Weald cares about its properties. This will also help ensure consistency of decorative order. If decoration vouchers continue to be used, Saxon Weald must ensure their value is reviewed annually to keep up with the cost of inflation. Due consideration must also be given to who they're awarded to as, from an equality and diversity perspective, some tenants may not be able to decorate themselves or have support available to do it for them. The issuing of decorating vouchers should be included in the updated Lettable Standard Policy.

5.5 Additional observations indirectly relating to the Lettable Standard

5.5.1 In carrying out this review, it was inevitable that the TFG would make additional observations which are outside of the project scope but relate to the Lettable Standard in some way. The following table sets out our additional observations:

Ref	Area	Finding / Observation	Suggested Improvement
5.5.2	Communal parts (entrance halls, stairs and landings)	Upkeep and appearance of communal parts: Site visits identified inconsistency in the upkeep and appearance of communal parts. While the condition of communal areas is not currently part of the Lettable Standard, their appearance is a key consideration to tenants when deciding whether or not to accept a property.	The TFG feels that the cleanliness and upkeep of communal areas should be included in an updated Lettable Standard.
5.5.3	Kerb appeal	External appearance: While the Lettable Standard includes for individual gardens, boundaries and internal decoration, apart from structural checks to ensure building safety, there is nothing relating to the external appearance of buildings, which is another key consideration to tenants when deciding whether or not to accept a property. A good point raised was that the external condition and 'kerb appeal' of a property is a major factor to people who buy their own homes or can afford to rent privately and, in doing so, have choice. Also, poor external condition sends out negative messages and creates an impression that Saxon Weald doesn't care about or invest in its homes.	Consider the key elements of 'kerb appeal' and update the Lettable Standard to include what Saxon Weald will do to ensure that, as far as is reasonable and practical, external appearance is appealing and sends out a positive 'we care about our homes' message.
5.5.3	Water efficiency	Dated WCs and cisterns: It was recognised that older WCs and cisterns are larger and have greater water capacity and consumption than modern versions. Unless damaged and in need of replacement, older WCs and cisterns are left in re-let properties. This does not enable incoming tenants to reduce water consumption and associated bills.	Update the Lettable Standard to include the replacement of dated and uneconomical WCs and cisterns.

5.5.4	Adapted bathrooms	Non-replacement of adapted bathrooms: Bathrooms that were adapted to suit the specific needs and circumstances of previous tenants are left in situ until due for replacement in a future programme. This could influence a prospective tenant's decision to decline an otherwise suitable property (e.g. in family-sized accommodation, where the prospective tenant has children for which a wet room without a bath is not suitable). Arrangements for adapted bathrooms are not currently specified in either the Lettable Standard Policy or Specification and the reason for Saxon Weald's stance on this matter is not made clear to tenants.	The feels that, in instances where a family with the need for such adaptations can't be found, adapted bathrooms should be replaced in family sized accommodation while the property concerned is empty.
5.5.5	Ventilation	Location and operation of extractor fans: Extractor fans are not always located in the most suitable places and in good working order. This affects their efficiency and effectiveness, resulting in the buildup of moisture and condensation.	Update the Lettable Standard to include that the operation and effectiveness of extractor fans must be checked to ensure they're free from deposits and in good working order, located in the right place, and are capable of extracting the volume of moisture likely to be created in the room they're in. Inefficient fans should be replaced.
5.5.6	Best use of space	Storage space: Is not always optimised or logically located. The group agreed that the best time to address this (e.g. removing larders or moving kitchen units) is when properties are empty rather than waiting for modernisation and improvement works programmes to address this.	Take a more pragmatic approach to storage, including removing unnecessary cupboards, larders or kitchen units, relocating them or adding new storage where it makes sense to do so and will increase or create the best use of available space.
5.5.7	Affordability and emotional attachment	Expense to tenants: Concern was expressed about the expense incurred by incoming tenants in turning a property into a home, with decoration and flooring being key areas of expense that many tenants can't afford. Also of concern was the crossover and potential dual payment of rent when tenants move from one property to another.	The Lettable Standard should aim to ensure that as little work as possible is required of the incoming tenant, so that any funds they have available can be used to make their home their home. Saxon Weald should also help incoming tenants minimise additional financial burden in instances where they could be required to meet the rental cost of two properties during the course of their move.

5.5.8	The Leaveable Standard	Application and enforcement: Saxon Weald has a Leaveable Standard, which tenants moving from its properties are expected to achieve before they leave. The Leaveable Standard does not appear to be applied and enforced consistently and it is unclear as to how much it is promoted amongst staff and tenants. Failure for outgoing tenants to meet the Leaveable Standard increases the amount of work required in order to make properties ready for re-letting, which, in turn, increases costs and turn-around time, and incurs Saxon Weald additional loss of rental income.	The TFG believes that the Leaveable Standard should be promoted and enforced as much as the Lettable Standard, otherwise, what's the use of having it? If Saxon Weald has confidence in its Lettable Standard and photos to show the condition of a property when it was let, it should be confident in enforcing the Leaveable Standard and any associated penalties if that property isn't handed back in the same or better condition. Consider introducing a reward scheme for properties handed back in excellent condition. Introduce programmed property inspections to help ensure that properties are being looked after by tenants and identify any defects before they escalate further. This would also help Saxon Weald to maintain more accurate records of property conditions, as well as to identify any concerns regarding a tenant's ability to manage and maintain their home.
5.5.9	New tenancy sign-ups	Location of sign-ups: Tenancy sign-ups currently take place in Saxon Weald's offices, rather than in the properties tenants are moving into.	Consider having tenancy sign-ups at the property, so that the incoming tenant can be shown around their new home, explained where things are and how to operate them, and be involved in the final QA checks and sign-off (see 5.1.12).

5.6 Scrutiny of performance data

5.6.1 The TFG considered the following performance data, from which it made the observations and conclusions set out in the table below:

- Costs associated with delivering the Lettable Standard
- The number and reasons for re-let refusals relating to the Lettable Standard
- The number and nature of Lettable Standard related complaints
- Tenant satisfaction with new lettings over the previous 12 months

Ref	Performance Area	Finding / Observation	Suggested Improvement
5.6.2	Sufficiency of the empty homes	The 2024-2025 budget allocated for empty homes is £1.4m, with the spend at 30 Sept 2024 being £1.39m. This raised concern around the sufficiency of the budget and Saxon Weald's ability to maintain consistency in meeting its Lettable Standard in the event that the budget runs out during the year.	Ensure that the annual budget is sufficient and monitor the QA measures to ensure that the Lettable Standard isn't reduced as available funds reduce throughout the year.
5.6.3	Empty homes re-let costs	189 properties were re-let during the first six months of the current financial year 03/04/2024 to 30/09/2025. The average costs per property was: General needs (minor works): 44 properties, averaging £5,103 per property Retirement (minor works): 84 properties, averaging £3,348 per property Major works: 61 properties, averaging £14,500 per property Benchmark data comparing Saxon Weald's empty homes costs against those of its peers was unavailable. We were therefore unable to scrutinise further and assess value for money in this respect.	Benchmark data should be collected to enable better scrutiny and comparison of these costs.
5.6.4	Spend on bedsit accommodation	Surprisingly, at £9,818 per property, retirement bedsit flats are among the costliest to make ready for re-letting, in comparison with 1 bedroom retirement flats (average cost £3,824 per property) and 1-bedroom general needs flats (£5,400 per property). 11 bedsits were re-let during the period, at a total cost of £108,002. Bedsits also achieve a high level of refusals (44 during the year), meaning they are most likely to stay empty longer and incur Saxon Weald rent loss. This raised the question as to why Saxon Weald continues to provide bedsit	Understand why bedsits cost this much to make ready to re-let and consider their future use. If they're not popular with the current client group, is there a suitable alternative (e.g. offering them to armed forces veterans) or should Saxon Weald consider ending its provision of bedsit accommodation.

		accommodation, which the number of refusals suggest isn't preferred by the client group they're offered to.	
5.6.5	Refusals	There were 378 property refusals during the period 01/06/2023 to 25/10/2024, of which, only 4 related to the Lettable Standard. 2 were refused due to their decorative state and the other 2 were due to wrong or insufficient heating.	Continue to monitor refusals as a measure of effectiveness of the Lettable Standard.
5.6.6	Complaints	Saxon Weald received 7 Lettable Standard related complaints between April 2023 and October 2024. These related to: <i>Decorative state; fencing; pest infestation; plumbing and heating; cleaning and general state of repair; security; and state of garden</i> . All 7 were upheld in the tenants' favour.	Continue to monitor complaints as a measure of effectiveness of the Lettable Standard.
5.6.7	Data quality and availability	The data provided for this review was helpful. It enabled the TFG to understand, scrutinise and question Saxon Weald's performance against the Lettable Standard and the associated costs. Unfortunately, the following data was unavailable to help inform and support more detailed scrutiny of the Lettable Standard: • Benchmark data comparing tenant satisfaction with the condition of re-let properties against that of tenants of similar housing associations • Benchmark data comparing Saxon Weald's empty homes costs against those of its peers • Number of compliments received regarding the Lettable Standard • Number and nature of call-back visits carried out, during the preceding 12 months, to address repairs that were not completed under the Lettable Standard when the property was empty • Current turnaround times for empty homes (by property type) from keys returned to re-letting and performance against related targets.	Saxon Weald should consider collecting this data to provide it with a more detailed understanding of its Lettable Standard performance, highlighting any issues, raising curiosity, and informing continuous improvement. This would also aid future tenant scrutiny in this service area.

		Number of properties that failed to meet Saxon Weald's quality assurance measures (S5.3 of the Lettable Standard Policy) at ready to let/sign-off stage, along with the reasons and remedial action taken.	
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5.7 Tenant satisfaction with the Lettable Standard

5.7.1 New lettings survey questionnaires are issued to tenants one month after they have moved in. The following findings were identified from the 109 responses received between 03/04/2024 to 30/09/2025 (representing a 38% response rate):

Ref	Satisfaction area	Finding / Observation	Suggested Improvement
5.7.2	Tenant satisfaction with new lettings	78% of tenants who responded were either satisfied/very satisfied with the property condition. In addition, 80% were satisfied/very satisfied with the cleanliness of the property, while 74% were satisfied with the state of their gardens and 87% with the property's exterior.	Saxon Weald should explore and understand the reasons behind tenant dissatisfaction with these areas and respond to it in its Asset and Neighbourhood Management Strategies and its new Property Standard.
5.7.3	Tenant satisfaction – free text examples	<i>“Very good, was clean from the start only thing that was annoying was no carpet in living room and is very hard because of baby & couldn't afford it straight away but overall good and how I expected it.”</i> <i>“The paint on the walls had been refreshed and the kitchen was in good order.”</i> <i>“The walls and woodwork have been freshly painted.”</i> <i>“Kitchen was clean and nicely refurbished.”</i> <i>“Pleased with how all rooms are empty. A blank canvas!”</i>	Continue to use tenant compliments as a measure of effectiveness of the Lettable Standard and understanding and promoting what Saxon Weald does well and the things tenants like most.

5.7.4	Tenant dissatisfaction with new lettings	While there was high level satisfaction with the state of cleanliness, this area also received the highest level of dissatisfaction (20%). Themes established from the free text questions related to: Decoration; flooring; cleaning; plumbing; garden; kitchen; windows.	Acknowledge this feedback and see the suggested improvements elsewhere in this report.
5.7.5	Tenant dissatisfaction – free text examples	<i>“Nicotine staining painted over, fascia and soffit poor condition, windows could have been cleaned outside.”</i> <i>“Shower doesn't drain, damp patch on the ceiling that is damp. Poor decoration quality. Floors dirty.”</i> <i>“The toilet was leaking and there was rubbish in the garden. The electrics in the kitchen weren't working and there were garden slabs that were loose.”</i> <i>“Metal, dirt, dust, paint and all else all over the floor. Heaters covered in paint and idk what else that I had to scrub off.”</i> <i>“I'm not sure if this relevant but the carpet left behind was not that great as it was glued down and thought Saxon Weald could have replaced it.”</i>	Acknowledge this feedback and see the suggested improvements elsewhere in this report.
5.7.6	What could be better? – free text examples	<i>“Pay attention to detail and leave it how you personally would like to walk into a new flat!”</i> <i>“Check that everything was fixed and working before offering us the place.”</i> <i>“Clean properties properly.”</i> <i>“Flooring should be as standard to allow tenants to move in.”</i> <i>“Got the last tenants to have cleaned it better in regard to the walls and woodwork which had to be scrubbed before painting.”</i>	Acknowledge this feedback and see the suggested improvements elsewhere in this report.

5.7.7	Survey response rate	The TFG understands that a 38% response rate is above average; however, the group questioned whether a reason for low response rates from new tenants might be because they feel uncomfortable giving negative feedback, due to their one-year probationary tenancies.	Survey tenants again once their probationary tenancy has ended to see if those who didn't answer do and whether those who did answer differently.
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5.8 Survey of staff involved in Lettable Standard delivery and re-letting empty properties

5.8.1 The TFG felt it would be helpful to gain the views of staff involved in delivering the Lettable Standard and re-letting empty properties, to gain a rounded perspective and ascertain where staff feel there is scope for improvement.

5.8.2 The group designed three surveys, which were issued to empty homes operatives, the empty homes managers and the lettings team. We received a pleasing 100% response to these surveys, which identified the following:

Ref	LS area / activity	Finding / Observation	Suggested Improvement
5.8.3	Lettings Team (5) thoughts on the Lettable Standard	• Rated the Standard between not good enough to ok. • One team member felt the Standard is unclear. • Priority areas for improvement: Decoration, cleanliness, kitchens & bathrooms gardens, and communal areas. • In answer to the question “<i>Would you live in our properties</i>” On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being definitely), the average answer was 6.2.	Acknowledge this feedback and see the suggested improvements elsewhere in this report. Find out what Saxon Weald would need to do to increase the score relating to the number staff who would live in its properties.
5.8.4	Empty homes managers' (2) thoughts on the Lettable Standard	• Rated the Standard as good. • Priority areas for improvement: Decoration, flooring, garden, better background information on properties, a more detailed version of the Lettable Standard for operatives and a light read version for tenants. • Managers believe that, in principle, operatives understand the Standard; however, the lack of detail leaves it open to misinterpretation. • Managers regularly inspect the quality of ready to let properties (unclear of %).	Acknowledge this feedback and see the suggested improvements elsewhere in this report.

		• In answer to the question “<i>Would you live in our properties</i>” On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being definitely), the average answer was 10.	
5.8.5	Empty homes Operatives (20) thoughts on the Lettable Standard	• Rated the Standard between ok and good. • 85% of staff don’t believe they are given enough time to complete work. • 76% believe there is a joined-up approach to achieving the Lettable Standard. • Majority satisfied that they are empowered in their work. • A mixed understanding/interpretation of the Standard? • Priority areas for improvement: Decoration, flooring, security and ensuring a quality end product. • 55% of operatives would live in our properties.	Review the sufficiency of time allocated to operatives to bring properties up to the Lettable Standard. Ensure that induction training for empty homes operatives fully clarifies the Lettable Standard, including the components of each criteria. Introduce annual refresher training to ensure that understanding of the Standard and tenant expectations are maintained. Investigate further to find out what Saxon Weald would need to do to increase the score relating to the number of operatives who would live in its properties.

5.8.6 The priority areas for improvement identified by the tenant and staff surveys align with those identified by the TFG.

6.0 The positives from this review - What we liked and appreciated most

- The Lettable Standard criteria align with that defined in the TFGs description of a decent home at the start of this review.
- The themes identified from tenant and staff surveys support those identified by the TFG.
- SW has good insight into the reasons for empty property refusals, with very few (4 from 378 over the previous 13 months) relating to the Lettable Standard.
- Only 7 Lettable Standard related complaints were received from over 450 lettings made over the previous 18 months.
- The staff survey achieved a 100% response rate.
- Information asked for was of forthcoming, timely and of good quality, as were the notes of TFG meetings.
- There was good support, openness, transparency and collaboration from all Saxon Weald staff involved in this review.

7.0 Our conclusions

- 7.1 Saxon Weald's Lettable Standard Policy requires a full review and update, to respond to the observations and suggestions for improvement set out in this report.
- 7.2 The 6 Lettable Standard criteria remain suitable and fit for purpose.
- 7.3 The Lettable Standard Specification compares well with those of the other housing associations examined, although more detail at component level would help improve clarity and support improved consistency in the application of the Standard.
- 7.4 Access to the Lettable Standard Policy and Specification should be made available on Saxon Weald's website.
- 7.5 The findings and observations of this review do not suggest a significant problem with the existing Lettable Standard. However, there is scope for improvement if Saxon Weald wants to increase tenant satisfaction.
- 7.6 The Task and Finish Group has completed this review in accordance with the Project Brief and believes that the sought outputs have been achieved.

8.0 Recommendation

- 8.1 If implemented, the suggestions for improvement identified in this report could enhance the quality of Saxon Weald's Lettable Standard, as well as improving access, awareness and understanding, and consistency of its delivery. The suggested improvements could also increase satisfaction amongst tenants moving into re-let properties and enhance Saxon Weald's reputation.
- 8.2 The Task and Finish Group recommends that Saxon Weald's Customer Experience Committee considers this report and supports its suggestions for improving the Lettable Standard.

9.0 The next steps

- 9.1 Following consideration of this report by the Customer Experience Committee, the TFG would welcome the opportunity to meet with the project sponsor and senior staff responsible for the Lettable Standard and re-letting of properties. The purpose of this meeting would be to discuss the report and receive Saxon Weald's formal response.
- 9.2 The TFG anticipates that Saxon Weald's response will be in the form of a clear and detailed improvement plan, which includes the actions to be taken, the person responsible for those actions and the timescales for their completion. The TFG expects that clear and reasonable explanations will be provided in the event that any of its suggestions for improvement cannot be implemented.
- 9.3 The meeting with the project sponsor and senior managers will also agree arrangements for monitoring and reporting on the progress and impact of the action plan to the TFG and Saxon Weald's wider tenant audience, along with how Saxon Weald will be accountable for its delivery.
- 9.4 Following its meeting with senior managers, the independent Chair of the TFG will facilitate a project review/'wrap-up' meeting of the TFG, at which the group will consider the approach and effectiveness of the review and consider arrangements for promoting the outcomes. A summary report will then be provided to the project sponsor on the outcome of this assessment, which will include any lessons learnt that could improve future scrutiny reviews of this kind.