

# **Renfrewshire Tenant Scrutiny Panel**

## **Lettings Standard Review**

**March 2014**

---

## **Acknowledgements**

The Tenants Scrutiny Panel would like to thank the following people for their help and support in putting together this report

- The eight tenants who took the time to complete and return the postal survey.
- Alasdair Miller and Carol Burt
- The council staff whom we interviewed
- Raj Kumar and Lorraine McLaren independent consultants with Housemark Scotland

## **Index**

1. Introductions
2. Why we selected the Lettings Standard
3. Our Approach
4. Our Findings
  - Things We Liked
  - Things Which Need Improving
5. Key Recommendations

## **Introductions**

Following the introduction of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, tenant-led scrutiny is now a key aspect of external appraisal to landlords regarding the delivery of housing services.

Renfrewshire Council is an early adopter of this tenant-led scrutiny and the following tenants make up their inaugural Tenants Scrutiny Panel

Chris Gilzean {Chair}  
Margaret Dymond {Vice-chair}  
Pauline Trevarthen  
Gordon Lethorn

The Tenants Scrutiny Panel will be independent of housing, supported by the Tenants Consultation Officer, it will

- Scrutinise housing's landlord services only
- Look at high level long term service planning
- Monitor performance
- Challenge weakness
- Undertake one off in depth examination of specific service aspects
- Prioritise work on services which show low tenant satisfaction

## **2. Why we selected the Lettings Standard**

**-2.1** Firstly the voids performance on turnaround times has been disappointing, with a steady decline in lettings times. Renfrewshire Council's average relet time is 51 days compared to their peer group average of 35 days. This represents a substantial loss of income to the Council.

**-2.2** As noted in the Customer Satisfaction Survey 2013, over a quarter of new lettings tenants, who responded, expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of their new home.

**-2.3** The Scottish Social Housing Charter specifically states under outcome 4 Quality of housing:

"Tenants" homes, as a minimum, meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard by April 2015 and continue to meet it thereafter, and when they are allocated, are always clean, tidy and in a good state of repair.

## **3. Our Approach**

**-3.1** We aim to conduct short sharp reviews that offer the landlord constructive challenge. We aim to minimise the cost both to the landlord in terms of supporting the review process and also taking into account the capacity of the volunteer Tenants Scrutiny Panel membership. As this is the first review carried out, we used independent consultants from Housemark Scotland to assist the Panel.

**-3.2** We designed, with the help of council officers, a postal survey which was sent out to a cross-section of seventy new lettings tenants. Whilst only eight were returned completed, it still represents a sample of ten percent which is favourable with like surveys.

**-3.3** We undertook site visits to review the quality of completed voids works on properties due to be reallocated. A list of thirty-five properties falling into this category was provided, of which, five properties were visited on the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2014. The selection of the five properties was determined by the chair of the Tenants Scrutiny Panel and was based on the geographical spread of the stock and the property type tenement, multi-storey or own door.

**-3.4** On the 12<sup>th</sup> February 2014 the Panel interviewed council officers from Allocations/Customer services and the Empty Homes and Repairs Team.

## **4. Our Findings**

### **4.1 Things we liked**

- The present Lettings Standard document offers a no-nonsense, simple and jargon free guide to assess and measure the quality of all homes that are relet.
- The present Lettings Standard document has photographs of the standards that are "acceptable" and "unacceptable" which will greatly assist any prospective tenants.
- Where the SHQS work has been implemented in full in a void property, it has been done to a good standard, enhancing the property in the process.
- All properties were double-glazed and had some kind of central heating.
- All boilers had been inspected where applicable.
- Energy saving light bulbs had been installed
- Hard wired smoke and carbon monoxide detectors installed where SHQS work had been carried out.
- Some of the external environments, gardens and communal areas were in a very good presentable state.
- The sign-up DVD shown to some prospective new tenants.

### **4.2 Things that need improving**

- The Lettings Standard document has not been promoted or made widely available.
- The Lettings Standard has not been applied consistently across the void properties viewed.
- The SHQS has not been applied consistently, with some properties not having a new toilet, sink or shower, whilst the kitchens had been bought up to SHQS.
- Cleanliness both internally and externally varied considerably between the properties visited.
- Problems existed with flooring in properties visited with concrete floors. Floors were found to be cracked, pitted and uneven, which could provide damage to any new tenants' flooring provision.
- Young children may access some electrical consumer units, which may constitute a health and safety risk.
- Not all homes had permanent address numbering, some were handwritten on walls.
- Front, communal, security doors often tired and jaded.
- Pile of mail in evidence behind the front door in every property visited.

## **5. Key Recommendations**

**-5.1** The Lettings Standard to be circulated widely for example on the website and in tenancy pack. Housing officer to make copy available to prospective tenants at any property viewing.

**-5.2** The Lettings Standard to be circulated to all relevant staff and contractors involved in the lettings and voids process, to ensure the consistent application of the standard.

**-5.3** Any new Letting Standard to retain photographic comparisons of what is Standard and what isn't.

**-5.4** The sign-up DVD for new tenancies to be made available countywide.

**-5.5** All void properties to have full SHQS works completed whilst property is still empty.

**-5.6** All " Snagging" work to be done before void property is put up for reallocation.

**-5.7** The externals of a property should be cleaned up prior to new tenant moving in, with the garden tidied and any sheds or outbuildings emptied.

**-5.8** Photographs to be taken of the void property before allocation and once again when it becomes vacant, to ensure tenant neglect or abuse of the property can be easily identified and recharge costs sought.

**-5.9** All properties to have permanent address numbering in place before a property is let.

**-5.10** All electrical consumer units to be secured or boxed off to minimise easy access by young children.

**-5.11** The flooring standard to be reviewed to ensure that concrete floors are of a reasonable standard and fit for a tenants' flooring provision.

**-5.12** It should be standard practise to remove mail from a void property on a regular basis or at least prior to every viewing of that property.

**-5.13** Council does "Cost Benefit" analysis of extending painting and carpeting initiative to more properties, not only those of "Low Demand".

**-5.14** Allocations officers should visit lets before they're reallocated and the pilot scheme in Johnstone should be extended countywide.

### **Report Timetable**

- The report will be presented to the Housing Service Senior Management Team {SMT} on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

- The SMT will be asked to produce an Action Plan in response to the recommendations in the report, in eight weeks from the presentation.

- The recommendations made by the Tenants Scrutiny Panel together with the SMT Action Plan will be published in the Peoples News Magazine, the Annual Report to tenants, the internet and other methods available to the council.

- The Tenants Scrutiny Panel will review the Action Plan in six months time.

### **Report Appendices**

- Tenants' survey results

- Void properties visited on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2014 {Photographs}

- Interview Summary for 12<sup>th</sup> February 2014

- North Lanarkshire Council Letting Standard {Obtained from their website}

### New Tenant Survey

#### 1. What was your first impression of your new house?

Very dissatisfied Very satisfied  
1 2 3 4 5

Comments  
*Very PLEASED*

#### 2. How satisfied were you with the condition of your new house?

Very dissatisfied Very satisfied  
1 2 3 4 5

Comments  
*I WAS READY TO DECORATE ANY PROPERTY I MOVED INTO*

#### 3. Did your new home have:

- (a) New fitted kitchen Yes/No
- (b) New fitted bathroom Yes/No
- (c) Modern heating Yes/No
- (d) Modern Electrics (Re-wiring) Yes/No

## New Tenant Survey

### 1. What was your first impression of your new house?

Very dissatisfied

Very satisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Comments only had a shower in bathroom I prefer having a bath only thing that I wasn't satisfied with

### 2. How satisfied were you with the condition of your new house?

Very dissatisfied

Very satisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Comments had to get repairs done when moved in

### 3. Did your new home have:

- (a) New fitted kitchen  Yes/No
- (b) New fitted bathroom  Yes/No
- (c) Modern heating  Yes/No
- (d) Modern Electrics (Re-wiring)  Yes/No



## New Tenant Survey

### 1. What was your first impression of your new house?

Very dissatisfied

Very satisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Comments

very grateful for the offer

✓

### 2. How satisfied were you with the condition of your new house?

Very dissatisfied

Very satisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Comments

✓

### 3. Did your new home have:

(a) New fitted kitchen Yes/No

(b) New fitted bathroom Yes/No

(c) Modern heating Yes/No

(d) Modern Electrics (Re-wiring) Yes/No

new heating being installed later.

## New Tenant Survey

### 1. What was your first impression of your new house?

Very dissatisfied Very satisfied  
1 2 3 4 5

Comments
----------

### 2. How satisfied were you with the condition of your new house?

Very dissatisfied Very satisfied  
1 2 3 4 5

Comments
----------

### 3. Did your new home have:

- |                                  |                    |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| (a) New fitted kitchen           | Yes/ <del>No</del> |
| (b) New fitted bathroom          | Yes/ <del>No</del> |
| (c) Modern heating               | Yes/ <del>No</del> |
| (d) Modern Electrics (Re-wiring) | Yes/ <del>No</del> |

## New Tenant Survey

### 1. What was your first impression of your new house?

Very dissatisfied

Very satisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Comments

*It was a lovely house.*

### 2. How satisfied were you with the condition of your new house?

Very dissatisfied

Very satisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Comments

*The condition was good, well looked after.*

### 3. Did your new home have:

- |     |                              |        |
|-----|------------------------------|--------|
| (a) | New fitted kitchen           | Yes/No |
| (b) | New fitted bathroom          | Yes/No |
| (c) | Modern heating               | Yes/No |
| (d) | Modern Electrics (Re-wiring) | Yes/No |

## New Tenant Survey

### 1. What was your first impression of your new house?

Very dissatisfied

Very satisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Comments

LOVED IT!

### 2. How satisfied were you with the condition of your new house?

Very dissatisfied

Very satisfied

1

2

3

4

5

Comments

### 3. Did your new home have:

- (a) New fitted kitchen  Yes /  No
- (b) New fitted bathroom  Yes /  No
- (c) Modern heating  Yes /  No
- (d) Modern Electrics (Re-wiring)  Yes /  No

## New Tenant Survey

### 1. What was your first impression of your new house?

Very dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_ Very satisfied

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments *Great Area lovely view Great size for Hall*

### 2. How satisfied were you with the condition of your new house?

Very dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_ Very satisfied

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comments *Some things needed work, still does. No work.*

### 3. Did your new home have:

- (a) New fitted kitchen       Yes  No
- (b) New fitted bathroom     Yes  No
- (c) Modern heating           Yes  No
- (d) Modern Electrics (Re-wiring)  Yes  No

## New Tenant Survey

### 1. What was your first impression of your new house?

Very dissatisfied Very satisfied

1 2 3 4 5

Comments
----------

### 2. How satisfied were you with the condition of your new house?

Very dissatisfied Very satisfied

1 2 3 4 5

Comments
----------

### 3. Did your new home have:

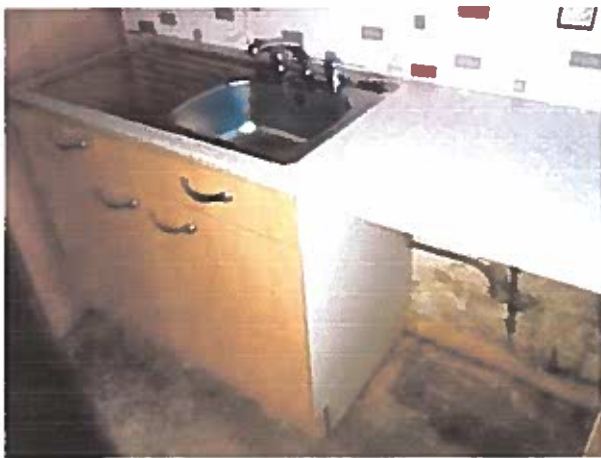
- (a) New fitted kitchen Yes/No
- (b) New fitted bathroom Yes/No
- (c) Modern heating Yes/No
- (d) Modern Electrics (Re-wiring) Yes/No

37 Morar Drive, Foxbar, Paisley {Tenament}



The outside of the property has been renovated, with new security door and garden area at front is tidy. The flat itself however is a different matter, being tired and out of date. No SHQS work has been done internally and concrete floor showing signs of distress with cracking at doorways and the living room floor is pitted with holes the width and circumference of a golf ball. Heating was by old, electric storage heaters.

155 Greenend Ave., Johnstone {Own door}



The outside of the property is unacceptable, the building is dirty and marked significantly. Handrails are distressed with one eaten half away by rust, down pipes are also distressed and in need of some attention. In stark contrast to the outside the inside of this property is in generally good order. SHQS work has been done, rooms are a good size and there is plenty of storage space. Little bit of 'Snagging' still to be done in property.



109E Elm Drive, Johnstone {Tenament}



The outside of the building was tired and unkempt, with the main entrance area distressed and unnumbered, and the close was littered and untidy. The flat itself was of a good size and all the SHQS work had been done. Downside was ceiling in back bedroom which showed signs of water damage and in keeping with all the properties we viewed, although this was the worst, there was a pile of mail behind the door on entry.

170 Gallowhill Road, Gallowhill, Paisley {Own door}



The outside of the property was tidy and well maintained. SHQS work has been done and a good standard of flooring has been left in the hall and living room by the previous tenant, new doors have also been fitted throughout the property. Downside was the uneven concrete floor in the kitchen and uncovered electrics in the hall.

**5C Glencairn Court, Gallowhill, Paisley {Multi-storey}**



The only property we viewed, that once the new front door is fitted, would have passed the Renfrewshire Council Letting Standard we were given access to and which is currently under review. Modernised to a very good standard, particularly the double glazed veranda area.

**SCRUTINY PANEL**

**INTERVIEWS with STAFF**

**WEDNESDAY 12<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2014**

**CLARK STREET, PAISLEY**

**ALLOCATION / CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFICER'S**

**Q1) what is your roll and can you give a very quick summary of the team you work with?**

**(A) There are 8 in the team + a graduate intern who is working on the marketing side. We also have a lead allocation officer and an occupational therapist on mobility issues; all empty houses in Renfrewshire go through her team.**

**(C) They have two teams based between Johnstone and Renfrew. 1<sup>st</sup> Team are Customer Support Team which terminate houses and sign up the voids to new tenants; 2<sup>nd</sup> Team are Option Advice Team who helps new tenants fill in their Housing Allocation form.**

**Q2) from your experience, what works well in terms of managing the voids process?**

**(A) The void client team at Clark Street who sign of the property before handing them the keys. Neither the Allocations nor Customer Support staff see the properties before they are allocated.**

**Q3) what would help the letting process?**

**(A) Gas meter for Voids is very chaotic need to streamline/plan better, though partnership with Scottish Power-is better as we meet regularly. Currently we cannot plan for heating systems.**

**Q4) to what standards are properties let?**

**(A) All voids go through SHQS before they are re-let; agree that the paper 'Housing Standards' is out of date, at the weekly meeting's this has been picked up and will be reviewed but no date set for this to happen. There is however an action plan for updating the letting standard, the timetable will be discussed at this afternoon's meeting and the Scrutiny Group will be informed of any decisions made at the meeting regarding timescales.**

**(C) When new tenants sign for their tenancy and collect their keys they are giving a Tenants pack with details of what to expect to see in their new home**

**Q5) do you think there are difficulties in delivering the letting standard?**

**(A) Yes, depends on the area and type of house/flat**

**Q6) are all void properties brought up to the SHQS?**

**(A) Yes since October. Since October 2013 the new contractor for voids is, Keepmoat though Building Services will do certain void work. Question on sub-contractors the Council have a supervisor who is responsible for making sure the work is up to SHQS**

**Q7) what do you think would help to let low demand properties?**

**(A) We have an initiative on-going in four areas in Renfrewshire and advertise on the website of S1 Homes. They have done 4 show houses and tenants who take houses on these streets have their houses fully decorated and carpeted. 22 (some voids property) out of 100 have been re-let through S1 Homes and these tenancies have all been sustained to date.**

**(C) Both Allocation and Customer Service Teams work together on the lets for the show houses and the S1 initiative. Some of the people who show an interest through S1 or the show flats do not have a current application on file so the teams will work together to progress their applications. The tenants sign their tenancy but do not receive the keys for up to two weeks in case they change their minds**

**Q8) we know that there is an ongoing internal audit report looking into void lettings, do you know if this is anywhere near completion?**

**Both said yes but were not involved; can find out if the report is ready**

**Q9) what do you see as your role in improving void performance?**

**(A) Communication is essential between all the partners; as soon as the property is terminated they start the process of re-letting. The weekly meetings look at where any blockages might be, and Allocations will chase up if a property seems to be taking a long time to be fixed. (Q) Do you think a member of the Allocation team should visit a property before re-letting it! No this is under the Housing Officer's remit, although a pilot is on-going at the Johnstone office, they have an allocation officer which goes on a void visit, if this is successful it could go to all Housing Offices**

**(C) The Void team pick up the keys from them, and they do not get them back till the home is ready for re-letting. When a Tenant terminate their tenancy they arrange an exit survey on the property to identify issues that arise before they hand in their keys.**

**Q10) what measures do you think are needed to improve customer satisfaction with new lettings?**

**(A) 100% of all voids are checked before re-letting to make sure they are up to standard**

**(C) The signing up process takes quite a long time; the new tenants are taken in to the interview room, shown a DVD which gives information on paying rent, repairs, neighbour complaints etc, then they are given a satisfaction card & tenancy pack. This is only done in Renfrew & Johnstone (not in Paisley) On Void standards, the Housing Officer goes to see all the properties ready for re-letting to make sure they are up to standard. On ready available homes, the Option Team promote them at the interview of new tenants**

**Chair C Gilzean thanked them both for attending and their answers**

**Margaret**

**SCRUTINY PANEL**

**INTERVIEWS with STAFF**

**WEDNESDAY 12<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2014**

**CLARK STREET, PAISLEY**

**MAINTENANCE of VOIDS (Empty Homes & Repairs Team)**

**Q1) what is your roll and can you give a very quick summary of the team you work with?**

**(EH) Client (Councils) 5 in repairs, 4 supervisors and 6 operatives in the team; they pre-inspect the property before handing the keys to the void team and do another inspection after the work has been completed**

**(RT) Team consists of 4 supervisors and 6 operatives; they have a 10 day turnaround for normal repairs and SHQS is 28 day's**

**Q2) from your experience, what works well in terms of managing the voids process?**

**(EH) 24 hours to walkthrough the empty property to check that it is ready for the next stage (repairs etc) They have weekly void meetings; communication is great between all partners due to us all being based in the same building**

**(RT) Property Planning: step by step - first they change the locks/keys, clean out the property then do the repairs according to what each void needs**

**Q3) what would help the letting process?**

**Both said DÉCOR as the first one, but cost restraints would be a problem. It's the first impression of a property to a client that is important. They feel that painting front door, hall etc could make a difference**

**(RT) Carpet if possible would also help. They do a first cut of grass for new tenants. Any inspections should indicate maintenance that is needed**

**Q4) to what standards are properties let?**

**Both said they work from the void standard and SHQS, though the void standard is being reviewed. They would be happy for new tenants to receive the Void Standard**

**Q5) do you think there are difficulties in delivering the letting standard?**

**(EH) All houses are different; time is spent on stripping / plastering walls. Community Resources on cleaning up rubbish / gardens where owner occupier stay within Council properties; they might have ways of getting them resolved. There is maybe a case for Housing Officers doing more work on "housekeeping" with existing tenants to prevent property deteriorating and needing more work when it becomes vacant.**

**(RT) Gave us example from 25 properties they have at the moment -- 8 had health & safety issues on which owner occupier's stay within Council properties. Meet with IQA (Scottish Power contractors) every two weeks and go over each property and discuss problems and ways of solving them to get the properties back to standard for re-letting**

**Q6) are all void properties brought up to the SHQS?**

**(EH) As from November 2013 all voids that need SHQS will be done, those before that date will be on the catch-up programme**

**(RT) Building Services have 37 properties and Keepmote have 40 waiting for Gas Meters or Asbestos work**

**Floor in kitchen of a void that is ready for re-letting is uneven (has a new kitchen) both said that the quality officer should have flagged this up**

**Q7 what do you think would help to let low demand properties?**

**Both replied (again) Decorating / Carpet (example of show house in Howwood Road, Johnstone); picking up rubbish in garden or at front door. Might be possible to put something over the letterboxes of empty properties to stop mail piling up behind the door.**

**Q8) we know that there is an ongoing internal audit report looking into void lettings, do you know if this is anywhere near completion?**

**(EH) Not received any outcomes to date**

**(RT) No involvement**

**Q9) what do you see as your role in improving void performance?**

**(EH) There role is identify repairs and pass them to the Repair team. Delays can be caused trying to pin down utilities companies. We should be trying to get agreements with all of them, currently only have agreement with Scottish Gas and Scottish Power.**

**(RT) There role is to make sure all repairs are done and get the property back to Allocation's as quickly as possible. Electric problems are easily solved, as for Asbestos and gas meters they can take up to 3 months to be resolved; the problem of access to owner occupier's property to complete electric work can also delay us in our work**

**Both were asked a question in relation to the % of returning void properties to get re-let.**

**(RT) Target of 28 days for SHQS is 100% except at Xmas is was 92%. On 10 days it is 80% target. Any failures are discussed at the weekly meetings; they also explain the reasons for the failure. We paint the close door where owners stay and take the hit on the cost. On reducing the % target for re-letting they would like the target to be 86% and as time goes on to increase the % target**

**(EH) There % of getting the keys to the void team in 24 hours is 100%. The only problem (if any) would be the Electricity Box if it had been tampered with, they have to contact the power company and fix it before they pass the keys to the void team**

**Q10) what measures do you think are needed to improve customer satisfaction with new lettings?**

**Both stated Decoration of the void (again) though know that the budget is not there to do it.**

**Margaret**

# House Letting Standard

## Scottish Housing Quality + Letting Standard (SHQS+)

As a tenant of North Lanarkshire Council you can expect to move into a home that is clean, wind and water tight with fixtures and fittings working as they should. We have set ourselves a Scottish Housing Quality + letting standard that you can expect from your new home and this standard is set out below.

We aim to complete all the necessary repairs before any tenant occupies a property however we may have to carry out some less urgent external repairs following the acceptance of a property which are added to the appropriate planned/capital programme of works. This is to make sure that we are maximising the occupancy of our properties.

Work undertaken during the void period of a property is to ensure the property is habitable. Normally major upgrading works will be carried out within an agreed programme, however, if it is appropriate to do so certain capital works may be progressed during the period a property is unoccupied.

### Inside Your Home

- We will ensure that your home will be empty, clean and ready for occupancy
- Internal doors will be fully operable
- All walls, skirting and facings will be of an acceptable decorative standard
- Floor areas will be prepared to allow the application of floor coverings

### Kitchen

- The kitchen will have the appropriate space for a cooker, fridge and washing machine
- The kitchen will have 6 electrical output points
- The kitchen layout will be safe and operable
- There will be adequate kitchen storage
- Kitchen will be in a good usable condition

### Bathroom

- All sanitary wear will be in good working order
- Hand washing facilities
- One form of bathing facilities

### Safety

- The electric, gas supplies in the property will be checked and appropriately certified
- Smoke and carbon monoxide detectors will be present and tested
- All locks in the property will be checked and repaired if necessary
- Mechanical ventilation will be provided if there are any historical issues with condensation

### Energy Efficiency

- The heating system will be efficient and in good working order
- The property will have an Energy Performance Certificate
- The property will be appropriately insulated

### Outside Your Home

- The roof structure and roof tiles/ridge tiles will be in a good condition
- All guttering and down pipes will be in good working order
- Drains, including waste outlets, will be clean and free from obstruction
- The external fabric of the building will be in good condition
- Windows and doors will be in good condition and will operate without difficulty and fitted with required locking mechanisms
- Footpaths within the boundary of the property will be in a good/safe condition
- Boundary fences, walls and gates will be in a good condition
- Common areas will be safe and in good condition
- Communal drying areas will be available for all walk up flatted properties
- Adequate lighting outside flats, whether from street lighting or lighting fitted to the common building
- Access decks and balustrades will be safe and in good condition
- Balconies and verandas will be safe and in good condition
- Common windows and roof lights will be in good usable condition
- Door entry system will be in good and fully operable
- Refuse areas will be in good state of repair

\*Please note, external works will be progressed via the appropriate programmed/routine works as required.