

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET HOUSING PANEL – 31 JULY 2023
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR (RESIDENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD)

REVIEW OF VOIDS PERFORMANCE FOR KPI BPI 37– THE AVERAGE VOID PROPERTY RE-LET TIME IN DAYS FOR NORMAL GENERAL NEEDS HOUSING AND BPI 88 - MAJOR VOIDS

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Neighbourhood and Enforcement Manager reports on the key-to-key void times for the Council owned housing stock. This is from the point that the previous tenant hands in their keys to the point of the start date for the new tenant.
- 1.2 In between the key-to-key times the following teams play a part in the getting the void property ready and these include: Neighbourhoods, Property Services and associated contractors, Housing Allocations and Housing Options.
- 1.3 The KPI's for key-to-key times are broken down into 3 categories:
 - *Major voids*; which includes properties which have more time consuming repair elements to be fulfilled during the void period, such as new kitchens, windows or electrical re-wires, expected to take less than 25 days by the voids contractor.
 - *Normal voids (General Needs)*; which are general needs properties with fewer repairs, expected to take less than 10 days by the contractor, and
 - *Normal Voids (Sheltered)* as before, but for sheltered properties only.
- 1.4 This report analyses the reasons for the unmet target for voids in the Q4 2022/23 and Q1 2023/24. It highlights the low number of voids that met the criteria for short-term re-letting and identifies challenges faced during the period. Additionally, it emphasises the importance of streamlining processes and addressing issues related to property conditions and planned works to improve future void management.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Cabinet Housing Panel is asked to note the report and the recommended management actions to improve the voids management process and performance.

3 Explanation

3.1 Q4 2022/23 – BPI 37 (normal voids re-let times)

3.1.1 In Q4 (January to March 2023), the performance for normal voids (BPI 37) was exceeded (25.74 days on average against a target of 18 days). Please see the table below.

Q4 (January – March 2023):

Key Performance Indicators Red - Out of target Amber - Within tolerance Green - On target

BusinessUnit	Description	Target	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD	Last Year
<input type="checkbox"/> Housing Tenancy								
BPI 37	The average void property re-let time in days for normal general needs housing (YTD)	18.00	22.00	22.50	28.13	35.00	25.74	24
BPI 88	Average void relet time (days) for 'Major' voids (SH & GN)	45.00	36.90	52.36	52.18	46.50	46.99	45

3.1.2 Analysis of the voids and re-let times for Q4 has found a number of factors that contributed towards the target being exceeded. These included:

- Poorer conditions of the voids being returned:** The analysis suggests that the primary reason for the low number of normal voids is the condition in which properties are returned. We are finding that many properties being returned are requiring more extensive maintenance and repairs, thus extending the void periods.
- Rejection of Void Applications:** Due to an administrative error, one void faced three rejections before successful allocation. There were two refusals of a property due to the applicant’s preference for a different location and the mismatch between their top preference (one-bedroom flat) and the available property (bedsit).
- Extended Allocation Time Due to Christmas Period:** One of the voids took longer to allocate due to the Christmas period and an assessment required from an Occupational Therapist.

3.2 Q4 2022/23 – BPI 88 (major voids re-let times)

3.2.1 Although the target was marginally exceeded in quarter 4 (46.99 days on average against a target of 45 days), and there were other quarters where the target was exceeded, the target was met overall for 2022/23. Please see the table above.

3.3 Q1 2023/24 - BPI 37 (normal voids re-let times)

3.3.1 In Q1 (April to June 2023), the performance for normal voids (BPI 37) was exceeded (41.67 days on average against a target of 18 days). Please see the table below. There were 3 normal voids in this period all of which exceeded the 18 day target for the reasons explained below.

Q1 (April-June 2023):

Key Performance Indicators

Red - Out of target Amber - Within tolerance Green - On target

BusinessUnit	Description	Latest Note	Target	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD	Last Year
Housing Tenancy									
BPI 37	The average void property re-let time in days for normal general needs housing (YTD)	The target has been exceeded due to a combination of factors. This is set out in the report to CHP for 31 July 2023. In summary, the factors were delays in getting the properties back from the contractor within the timescale, a delay in obtaining an asbestos report for one property and for another an administrative error which meant there was a delay in advertising the void. These issues are being addressed as detailed in the CHP report. The voids management process is being reviewed to make the process more efficient and to meet timescales and quality standards.	18.00	41.67				41.67	22
BPI 88	Average void relet time (days) for 'Major' voids (SH & GN)	The target has been exceeded due to a combination of factors. This is set out in the report to CHP for 31 July 2023. In summary, the factors were the condition of the properties when vacated, delays before commencement of works, and unsatisfactory workmanship. These issues are being addressed as detailed in the CHP report. The voids management process is being reviewed to make the process more efficient and to meet timescales and quality standards.	45.00	55.10				55.10	37

3.3.2 Analysis of the voids and re-let times for Q1 has found a number of factors that contributed towards the target being exceeded. These included:

- Void works period exceeding target:** Two of the three voids during Q1 were delivered back from the contractor outside of the target 10-day period and the required works in the properties were not completed to a satisfactory standard which was raised with the contractor. There was also a short delay with one void in obtaining an asbestos report due to resources in the property services team at that time.
- Poorer conditions of the voids being returned:** The analysis suggests that the primary reason for the low number of normal voids is the condition in which properties are returned. We are finding that many properties being returned are requiring more extensive maintenance and repairs, thus extending the void periods.
- Allocation delay:** The third property was delivered back to us by the contractor within the agreed 10-day timeframe. However, there was a delay in advertising this property due to an administrative error. In addition, due to their personal circumstances of the tenant their case had to be handled sensitively to support their move from the home they were under-occupying to moving into their new home. This was an unusual case which did lead to delays in the lettings process.

3.4 Q1 2023/24 - BPI 88 (major voids re-let times)

3.4.1 In Q1 (April to June 2023), the performance for major voids (BPI 88) was exceeded (55.10 days on average against a target of 45 days). Please see the table above. There were 64 major voids in this period of which 31 voids exceeded the 45 day target for the reasons explained below.

3.4.2 Analysis of the voids and re-let times for Q1 has found a number of factors that contributed towards the target being exceeded. These included:

- **Pre-commencement works:** Time taken to complete pre-commencement checks such as asbestos, in some cases as long as 8 days added to the void period.
- **Poor property condition and garden clearances required:** A number of properties were returned from tenants that had lived in the homes for a long period and required more extensive work in the property and gardens leading to extended void periods. For 8 out of 20 voids in April, for example, this was over 60 days which increased the overall average void period.
- **Fire Doors:** Difficulty with supply of some fire doors from the supplier which prolonged the void time.
- **Damp and mould:** some properties with previous damp and mould issues were inspected by specialist contractors. Due to increased demand many of these reports did not come back in time and so Morgan Sindall had to use another contractor. This delayed the process before the required works could be undertaken.
- **Workmanship by contractors:** A number of properties exceeded the target as some of the workmanship by Morgan Sindall at handover was not satisfactory.

3.5 Actions being taken to improve voids management performance:

3.5.1 There are a number of actions that are in progress to make the voids process more efficient, reduce delays and increase the performance. These include:

- **Streamlining the Voids Process:** We are reviewing the voids standards and process maps for all voids (including those that require adaptations). This will help minimise delays and improve performance.
- **Establish Void Process Improvement Plan:** We are currently reviewing the voids process from key-to-key and will create a detailed void process improvement plan specifically tailored for Orchard (our housing database management system). This will identify any bottlenecks and challenges in the void management process and set clear objectives and targets for each stage of the process.
- **Enhanced Performance Monitoring:** Improve the monitoring system to track void property conditions, turnaround times, and reasons for extended void periods. Analyse the data to identify trends, challenges, and areas for improvement, allowing for targeted interventions.
- **Pre Void-Inspections:** Pre void inspections will be carried out with the void surveyor and the neighbourhood officers to highlight required works prior to the property becoming void. This will also enable officers to take action against tenants who have caused damage to our properties.

- **Continue with current contract monitoring arrangements:** We undertake weekly monitoring meetings with our contractor; Morgan Sindall, to address any delays or shortfalls in the quality of work in our void properties. Morgan Sindall is held to account for these and the sanctions within the contract are enforced.
- **Asbestos contract:** Property services have now procured a new contractor for this, and the new contract will have a 48-hour timeframe to return the reports. The contract is due to commence on 1 August 2023.
- **Damp and Mould surveys:** Morgan Sindall have appointed a new contractor to deal with damp and mould. Experience of these properties and a more standardised approach to dealing with them should also help to improve the speed at which we improve our homes to ensure the chances of them suffering with damp and mould are reduced.
- **Planned Works Strategy:** We have a comprehensive planned works programme to address property maintenance and repair needs and the budgets are in place.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 There are no direct legal implications for these void targets being exceeded. However, we do need to ensure we maximise use of our properties by reducing void time to meet other related statutory obligations in terms of meeting local housing need.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications from this report. All expenditure is within existing budgets.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 Reputational risk of not returning void properties to use as safe, clean accommodation to meet local housing need.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no direct implications from this report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 There are no direct implications from this report.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 There are no direct implications from this report.

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

- 10.1 There are no direct implications from this report

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

11.1 We have a high number of households living in temporary accommodation. This type of accommodation, particularly for families with children, can have a detrimental effect on residents' health and wellbeing if it is not adequate to meet their needs. It is important we bring back into use our void homes as soon as possible to help address housing need and reduce the time residents spend in unsuitable temporary, or other unsuitable housing.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

12.1 There are no direct implications from this report.

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Strategic Aim 'Quality Homes Through Managed Growth', and specifically to the achievement of 'providing high quality housing, thriving neighbourhoods and sustainable communities.

14 Equality and Diversity

14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

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