

Report Title: An Update on the Voids Audit and Improvement Progress

Report for: Audit Committee

Item number: 7

Title: An Update on the Voids Audit and Improvement Progress

Report authorised by: Rachel Sharpe, Interim Director of Housing Services

Lead Officer: Scott Kay, Assistant Director for Repairs and Compliance
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Ward(s) affected: All

**Report for Key/
Non-Key Decision:** For information.

1. Recommendations

1.1 That the report be noted.

2. Describe the issue under consideration.

2.1 This report provides Audit Committee with details of the progress made by Housing Services in progressing the recommendations made by the audit conducted by Mazars, the Council's independent internal auditors, that was undertaken on Voids and Follow Up of Lettings and received a Limited Assurance rating.

2.2 The report also provides a summary of the work that has been undertaken to improve our position and approach to voids, including the key risks that are being managed by the service.

3. Audit recommendations

3.1 An audit of Voids and Follow Up of Lettings was completed in August 2024 by Mazars which provided an overall assurance rating of Limited Assurance.

3.2 The areas reviewed in this audit were:

- Policy and procedure framework
- Adherence to procedure
- Performance monitoring and reporting
- Analysis of voids and performance data

- 3.3 There were six recommendations, with 2 of these being deemed as having fundamental priority and 4 having significant priority.
- 3.4 In respect of the two recommendations with fundamental priority:

3.4.1. Monitoring the End-to-End voids process

It was recommended that reports should be reviewed from the NEC system periodically to identify gaps in data and confirm key activities for voids have taken place. In addition, the Council should also implement automation in the NEC system to highlight when the next stage in the voids/lettings process is ready for completion with notifications in place between the key teams involved in the process.

This recommendation has been partially implemented, where all teams involved in the voids process attend a 2-weekly meeting. This meeting covers the end-to-end process, where each void is tracked through the current process and for how long. This is currently monitored and tracked on a spreadsheet using information from the NEC system. Further work to fully implement this recommendation is reliant on the NEC system development. This requires support from Digital Services to ensure the monitoring is fully automated, where this work will be liaised

3.4.2. Voids Policy and Procedure

This recommendation advised that if the Council is to reduce voids, then there is a need for a considered policy and procedures that staff understand and over time becomes business as usual. This policy should document the entire process and include key milestones and responsibilities.

This recommendation has been partially implemented. We have developed a Repairs Voids Manual and process maps for each relevant service. A Voids Management Policy has been drafted in conjunction with our Repairs Resident Continuous Improvement Group (CIG) where residents worked with us to identify issues which has been factored into the policy.

The Policy will be considered by Cabinet after the local elections in May 2026 and will include any changes arising from the current process review.

- 3.5 In respect of the 4 recommendations that have significant priority:

3.5.1. Voids work being issued

This recommendation was that the Council should ensure all work is booked promptly following the cost inspection.

This recommendation has been implemented. Once the Repairs Service are notified that a property is void and requires work, the void is allocated to the next available resource which is either one of our dedicated in-house teams or a sub-contractor. Voids are also now grouped geographically to ensure the most efficient use of available resources and maximise efficiency from the voids budget. Future development of the voids process in the NEC system and the end-to-end process review will also improve the booking of voids works and overall delivery.

3.5.2. Tenant Satisfaction is not monitored

This recommendation advised that the Council re-introduces tenant satisfaction surveys for new tenants to identify themes to improve the process and should be used as standard for each new tenant.

This recommendation has been implemented. Tenant Satisfaction is collected as part of the sign-up process and as of September 2025 the survey is mandatory for officers to discuss with tenants at the end of the sign-up to increase response rates. The surveys ask questions on the general condition of the property, the lettings, viewing, and sign-up processes, the level of information provided, and the professionalism of staff. This is noted as partially implemented as further work is needed to improve the analysis and reporting of the information gathered through these surveys.

3.5.3. Timescales for key voids stages

It was recommended that the Council should set timescales for each part of the voids process and monitor against these, to help improve underperforming stages that should be included in the new improvement plan. It also recommended that the Council should investigate whether NEC can automatically populate target dates.

This recommendation is partially implemented. Timescales for void turnaround by the Repairs Service is measured and can be reported upon in terms of average turnaround times for each stage. We have introduced a Voids Power BI dashboard showing real time performance across the end-to-end process helping to provide detailed oversight at an operational level. The end-to-end review and the development of the NEC system will allow for more transparent and immediate reporting of figures direct from system generated source data that can be used for formal reporting.

3.5.4. Pre-Inspection properties

This recommendation was that the Council should seek to use the pre-inspection process to help reduce the time taken to complete the voids process, considering automating the pre-inspection

process through use of the NEC system instead of individual forms and spreadsheets.

This recommendation has not been implemented. The automation of the NEC system has not been completed as previously referenced. However, the pre-inspection part of the process will be included as part of the end-to-end process review so that resources can be aligned to ensure efficiencies can be realised as per the audit recommendation.

4. Improvements

- 4.1 Since the audit was undertaken, there has also been significant work to improve our approach to voids more generally.
- 4.2 Housing Services exceeded the 2024/25 Corporate Delivery Plan target of 400 voids being made ready for let per annum, with 464 made ready for let in 2024/25.
- 4.3 For lettings for the 2024/25 period, 754 lets were carried out which was made up of 451 new build properties, 207 Re-lets, and 96 for Sheltered Housing.
- 4.4 From April 2025 to 25th January 2026 there have been 536 General Need and Sheltered Housing lets:
 - 68 Sheltered Housing
 - 317 Re-lets
 - 151 New build properties.
- 4.5 We will be moving the oversight of the overall voids process to Housing Management, where this previously sat entirely with Repairs and Compliance. This now reflects the entirety of the end-to-end process, and not just the voids works. However, Repairs and Compliance still have a significant part in the process and so both services will continue to work together.
- 4.6 Our Repairs Service, who complete the majority of the works required to voids, have restructured allowing for better management and efficiencies overall within the service, including voids. As referenced in the audit recommendation update, voids are also now grouped geographically which allows for the most efficient use of available resources and voids budgets.
- 4.7 We have also introduced a Senior Voids, Lettings and Decants Manager who is within Tenancy Services and manages a new viewings and sign-ups team. This team have supported the introduction of the surveys completed at sign-ups and have helped to coordinate and standardise the lettings process, in addition to added efficiency by having a dedicated team. The higher volume of sign-up activity is being tracked, with standard voids, neighbourhood moves, and new builds to ensure resources match demand

for viewings, lettings and tenancy sign up once properties are repaired and made ready for let.

- 4.8 As referenced in the audit recommendation update, we have drafted our Voids Management Policy in conjunction with our repairs Resident Continuous Improvement Group (CIG) where residents worked with us to identify issues which has been factored into the policy. This is due to go to Cabinet after the local elections in May 2026.
- 4.9 In addition to the Policy, we have developed a Repairs Voids Manual which sets out the expectations of Housing Services from when first notification a property has become voids to the handover of keys when a property is marked ready for let. This manual allows new and existing members who deliver the service to work to a clear and consistent approach, understanding responsibilities and taking accountability.
- 4.10 We have also introduced a Voids Power BI dashboard showing real time performance across the end-to-end process allowing for each stage and across different tenures, helping to provide detailed oversight at an operational level. The long-term intention is to move to using this for our formal performance reporting.
- 4.11 In October 2024, an end-to-end voids managements stakeholders group was established to review and improve the process from an operational standpoint, including develop the new Voids Policy. This includes staff members from repairs, customer services, lettings, tenancy services, the sign-up team, rent accounts, asset management, and our repairs CIG through resident engagement. This group helped to review the end-to-end process and develop a process map across all teams involved.
- 4.12 In addition, the Housing Service Management Team have launched a comprehensive review of the end-to-end voids process, establishing a new strategic voids working group to oversee this with the first meeting held in February 2026.
- 4.13 The strategic voids working group is comprised of the Director of Housing, AD for Housing Management, AD for Repairs and Compliance, AD for Asset Management, Head of Repairs, and the Head of Lettings & Rehousing. They will oversee:
 - 4.13.1. A deep dive review of the end-to-end voids management process across the Housing Revenue Account and Temporary Accommodation, including General Needs, Sheltered, Haringey Community Benefit Society (HCBS), Private Sector Lettings (PSLs), and hostels/lodges.
 - 4.13.2. Work to address poor quality systems data on voids with the identified need to improve data governance, ownership and reconciliation of voids data across housing, repairs, and finance systems, reducing the reliance on spreadsheet-based monitoring in several areas.

- 4.13.3. Analysis of whether the management arranges for different tenure types are working effectively.
 - 4.13.4. Analysis of the current causes of voids, including reviewing the impact of Move On and the Neighbourhood Moves Scheme.
 - 4.13.5. As assessment of current plans in place, financial impacts and work with other Council teams to oversee improvements to voids management in all areas.
 - 4.13.6. A proposed change in reporting focus from the overall number of voids to a focus on turnaround times at each stage of the process.
- 4.14 The Resident Voice Board regularly receive Housing Services' Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on a quarterly basis, where General Needs and Sheltered Housing voids as a percentage of stock are reported. These KPIs are also shared with the Housing, Planning and Development Scrutiny Panel and our internal Housing Improvement Board as a standard agenda item.
- 4.15 Whilst there is still work to be done, structures have been set up at different levels that allow us to retain better oversight of performance, identify issues, and drive improvements. Housing Board, chaired by the Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health, is also receiving regular updates on progress of the voids review and the work of the new Strategic Working Group.

5. Key Risks

Different types of voids and contracts

- 5.1 There are a number of types of voids, managed across various teams both within Housing Services and the wider Council with differing allocations, lettings, works, contracts and management processes. This allows for different approaches and service levels with no complete oversight across all types of property. Voids, regardless of type could be managed in a more streamlined and standardised way that also provides better value for money.
- 5.2 We are developing longer term plans to try and refocus the management of voids within the Housing Service and to harmonise contracts and standards that will ensure consistent service delivery of all void properties.

Growth of Housing Supply

- 5.3 Haringey has seen a growth in housing supply, through purchased and new-build property. Whilst this is essential and positive movement, it generates more lettings and thereby more voids through the Neighbourhood Moves Scheme (NMS).

- 5.4 As a result, demand for void works can exceed resource availability during spikes which will affect average turn-around times.

Neighbourhood Moves Scheme (NMS)

- 5.5 As referenced above, because of the growth in housing supply the NMS poses a risk to the voids process.
- 5.6 For General Needs and Sheltered Housing, the expected annual turnover of voids is approximately 500 per year. Within this number, there are seasonal variations and this number can fluctuate depending on both internal and external circumstances.
- 5.7 One factor in this fluctuation is the NMS, that enables local residents with a tenancy to move to new build developments within a certain proximity of their existing home providing that certain criteria is met.
- 5.8 Whilst there are benefits, the scheme does mean there are more void properties than if the new build properties had only been let to those on the housing register. This extra level of stock turnover increases void numbers and additional pressures on the overall voids process and therefore there is an associated impact on performance.
- 5.9 The risk is that the service may not have the level of resource needed when it is over the expected annual turnover and will ultimately impact on the length of time properties are left void. However, this risk is being assessed as part of the working group to ensure they can manage an increase in voids effectively and as part of business as usual.

Data and Systems

- 5.10 It is clear from an operational standpoint and from the audit recommendations, that development on our systems and data is required. Whilst we have made improvements, such as implementing the Power BI Dashboard, there is still work to be done and therefore this remains a risk to the voids process.
- 5.11 We intend to develop our systems to have clearer reporting categories so that we can record and report the different and more detailed stages of the voids process on and through the system, and as per the audit recommendation, better understand the areas in which there is specific delay and need for improvement.
- 5.12 These system improvements would help improve efficiency and oversight but will need to be informed by the end-to-end process review. This will then allow the intended NEC system developments to be completed with support from Digital Services, which will provide improved configuration, workflows, and reporting.

Financial Impact

- 5.13 There is always an ever-present financial risk around voids. Void properties means there is a loss of rental income, in addition to the cost of the works to return them to a lettable standard. Whilst this is accounted for with assumptions in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan and budget, there is always a risk that we have a higher level of voids than estimated and therefore a lower level of rental income which is potentially compounded by the other risks noted above.
- 5.14 In addition, there is an increased cost of works owing to the historical lack of investment in our properties and the condition in which properties are left void. This risk will be reduced by the future major works programme due to commence in 2026 supporting our Asset Management Strategy 2023-2028, however this risk will continue until the investment in our stock has been realised.
- 5.15 Current regeneration programmes will also increase void numbers due to the need to decant buildings in time for demolition or other major works. The risk can be mitigated to a limited extent through appropriate use of properties for temporary accommodation where feasibly and cost effective to do so. However, it can also increase demand on the existing resources available to deal with void properties so will need to be appropriately forecast and managed.
- 5.16 Budgets continued to be monitored to manage this risk, and it will inform the work of the Strategic Voids Working Group.

6. Contribution to the Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-2026 and High Level Strategic Outcomes

By delivering improvements to housing conditions, supply, and services, Housing Services are contributing to meeting Theme 5 of the Corporate Delivery Plan – Homes for the future.

7. Carbon and Climate Change

N/A

8. Statutory Officers comments (Finance, Procurement, Legal and Governance, Equalities)

8.1 Finance and Procurement

Finance

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Procurement

Not required.

8.2 Head of Legal & Governance

There are no legal implications arising from the content of this report.

8.3 Equality

The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.

Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristic.

The voids process is an internal process in how we return our properties to a lettable standard, to which the impact on residents is limited in respect of protected characteristics. However, by reducing the number of voids this would increase housing supply and would in turn have a positive impact on those waiting on the housing register and therefore those with protected characteristics.

9. Use of Appendices

None.

10. Background papers

None.