

# LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

**Report to:** Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee

**Date:** 12/11/2024

**Subject:** Voids Update

**Report author:** John Hayden, Assistant Director of Repairs  
Richard Shwe, Director of Housing

**Responsible Director:** Sukvinder Kalsi, Executive Director Finance and  
Corporate Services

---

## SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides an update on the status of empty properties also known as voids in the housing service. This includes information on the current number of voids, improvements made over the past two years and an outline of the ongoing plan to reduce the number of vacant properties.

1.2 Over the past two years, the housing service has reduced the number of voids from 395 in February 2023 to 151 voids across the service, categorised as follows:-

Work Areas	Numbers
Minor voids (repairs)	91
Major voids (complex works)	15
Capital works	45
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>151</b>

1.3 The minor repairs targets for voids is to have 60 in the stock as business as usual by January 2025 and to maintain that number moving forward. Currently the service has 91 voids with a reduction of 31 targeted by December 2024.

1.4 The target dates are 28 days for minor voids (removals, minor decorations) and 90 days+ for major voids (which include structural works and major component replacement works).

1.5 The capital works are more complicated with the majority of the voids having been subject to large insurance claims (Fires etc) in tower blocks and requiring scaffolding to complete the works. These voids are typically repaired during major work projects with large Capital investments on blocks such as window replacements for tower blocks.

1.6 On average the voids team receive 5 new voids a week in addition to the existing voids in the works process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

For the committee to review, feedback and comment on the information set out in this report.

**Wards Affected:** All

---

<b>Our Values</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the <a href="#">H&amp;F Corporate Plan</a> and the H&amp;F Values</b>
Building shared prosperity	Ensuring that all residents have access to a home.
Creating a compassionate and inclusive council	Getting voids completed will enable residents to get into a home.
Doing things with local residents, not to them	A person-centred approach is taken to assess need and reducing the number of voids.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	The housing service is reducing voids and thereby reducing the cost to its HRA and general fund by bringing more homes back into use
Taking pride in H&F	Housing is bringing back homes into operation that are quality controlled. The specification for homes is good quality.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	Where the Council has its housing properties, we are rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency.

---

## Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None.

---

## 2. Finance Implications

2.1 The targeted void loss reduction for 2024 / 2025 was budgeted at 1.5 million across the teams, largely based on the service retaining no more than 150 voids..

2.2 Void rental loss has reduced by £646,142 since January 2024 with a targeted loss reduction of £97,000 by financial year end. A Stretch target for void rental loss has been introduced in October 2024 for a further £250,000 reduction across the stock.

### **3. Voids Audits and reassurance**

3.1 An internal voids audit was carried out between September 2023 and February 2024.

The audit set out issues and recommendations that the housing department need to put in place.

3.2 The main findings of the audit report explained that properties historically were not turned around in a timely manner, resulting in long delays to letting homes.

3.3 Two high risks issues have been identified regarding data input and the use of the NEC housing system. There are seven additional medium risks identified focusing on record management, tenancy agreements and contractor performance.

### **4. Main Void Targets**

4.1 Internal voids improvement project implemented in September 2023 set targets to reduce vacant voids and financial losses across the council. The service has reduced voids from 323 voids in September 2023 to 151 in October 2024.

4.2 All high level and medium risks identified by the audit findings have been addressed and the service has requested a further audit to start in October 2024 to further evidence improvements.

4.3 Void targets have been set for end of Quarter 3 in 2024 including a minor void business as usual target of 60 properties (Minor and major voids) and a reduction of rental recovery to under 1.5 million.

### **5. Audit process and Action Plan for Void Management**

5.1 As part of the Council's internal audit plan for 2023/24, the Housing Services commissioned an internal audit of voids that commenced in September 2023.

5.2 To provide assurance in Housing Services, of the effective management of void properties at all stages, with clear owners and processes. These are essential elements to avoid significant income losses with empty properties but more importantly to assist our residents in obtaining a home.

5.3 The audit focused on the use of time, management of tenancy agreements, the use of resource and resident satisfaction. The audit also reviewed the internal collaboration between teams within the key stages of the void management and allocations processes.

5.4 The outcome is to ensure that all tenancies and voids are managed economically and meet the required standards and set out any High, medium, and low risks which can be adopted into the service to improve the process.

5.5 A voids internal action plan was developed and implemented in September 2023. This included:

- I. Voids performance “Rapid review” completed in September 2023 to understand the current processes that targeted returning 323 voids back to the housing stock. Currently open voids have been reduced to 223 with 177 in the void process and 46 on hold.
- II. The Housing Service has focussed on a deduction of circa £2 million of void losses from empty properties and rental losses over the past year.
- III. The Housing Service has now re-classified voids as minor voids (15 working days), major voids (20 working days) and capital and complex voids (60 days+)
- IV. Weekly void and allocation meetings established with new contractors procured to target and improve all KPI’s for void turnaround times. Voids target business as usual position (BAU) of 60 voids a month by October 2024.
- V. All high and medium risks identified within the audit report have been addressed.
- VI. All key to key and job completion data and monitoring is reported live on the NEC housing system.
- VII. It is planned that Internal Audit reviews the recommendations and the Voids Programme is subject to an updated meeting with Audit in the Autumn 2024.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

6.1 The Housing Service has made significant progress and is focussed on reducing voids across its stock. We have introduced a new tenant satisfaction survey and they are completed 6 weeks after the property has been occupied. The purpose is to assess the property and review residents’ satisfaction so that repairs team can respond in a proactive manner.

6.2 Joint inspections (pre-termination) are now carried out by housing management and repairs teams to support residents and reduce delays to void works. As part of our improvement service plan, we are reviewing the lettable standard for voids on a 12 month basis.

6.3 Housing Repairs is working with sheltered residents in developing a new void standard for sheltered housing. The focus is on additional work elements that includes enhanced items for people living with dementia e.g. “push taps, grab rails”. The rationale for this is to enable residents to live better in our communities.

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

**Appendix A:** Voids Profile 2024.