

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 12TH DECEMBER 2022

Report of the Director of Housing and Wellbeing

Lead Member: Councillor Paul Mercer

VOID PROPERTY INFORMATION

Purpose of the Report

To provide the void property information requested by the Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 4th April 2022 (minute number 125 2021/22).

Action Requested

To consider the information and identify any further actions that should be taken.

Reason

To ensure the Scrutiny Commission progress the issues identified by the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee in the most appropriate way.

Background

At its meeting on 4th April 2022, following a request from the Finance and Performance Scrutiny to do so; the Commission considered information relating to key performance indicator KI11 Rent Loss from Void Properties.

Void Property Data

The data set specified by the commission can be found at Appendix 1, and includes:

- *A breakdown of each void property that has been void for over 28 days, and properties in sheltered accommodation, including;*
 - *The reason for the property remaining void.*
 - *The location of each property (by Ward).*
 - *The number of bedrooms in each property.*
 - *An indication of the total rent lost during the time that each property has been void.*
 - *Reasons why they are hard to let.*

A tabulated bar chart indicating the length of time the property has been void was also requested. This would result in a chart with 388 labelled columns

which is likely not practical. The length of time the property has been void for has been included in the data set, so the data requested is present.

Further Information on Properties Which are Hard to Let

The Commission requested *Further information on properties which are 'hard to let'*. The main categories are set out below.

- **Sheltered accommodation**

140 void properties are in sheltered accommodation. Generally, much of this accommodation does not meet the current aspirations of older people and is therefore very hard to let. It is unlikely a significant proportion of this accommodation will ever be let.

In February 23 a report is expected to be considered by Cabinet setting out the future of St Michael's Court in Thurmaston. A strategy which considers the future of all Council owned sheltered accommodation is expected to be brought forward in 2022-23.

- **Age Designated Accommodation**

96 void properties are age designated, and accessible by people aged over 45 and 60 years old. There is low demand for these properties amongst these cohorts.

Demand data is currently being analysed. It is expected that a Cabinet report will be brought forward recommending a change to the designation of some, if not all these properties.

- **Disposal of Properties that are hard to let**

The Commission asked whether properties that are hard to let could be sold. As set out above, alternative options are available to the Council in respect of identified categories of property which are hard to let.

Where properties are unlettable due to major structural repair issues, and it is economically unviable to undertake repair, then consideration is given to sale of the property. This scenario is generally exceptional.

Factors Affecting Void Performance and Actions Taken

The Commission has asked what the impact on Covid-19 has been on void performance. Issues that might reasonably be attributed to the pandemic include a backlog of repair works, pressures on the Council's supply chain, and a competitive labour market making recruitment to operative (trade) roles challenging.

Generally, the factors affecting void performance, and the actions taken by the Council to date are set out below.

Factor Affecting Performance	Action Taken
<p>The pandemic caused a backlog of repairs. Void operatives were used to work on that backlog.</p>	<p>Reduced the use of voids operatives on responsive repairs works.</p> <p>Moved an operative resource from responsive repairs to void works.</p> <p>Procured new and additional contractors as set out below.</p>
<p>Supply chain issues - our existing contractors have not been able to absorb additional works.</p>	<p>Procured and mobilised T&S Heating to increase capacity for general repair works.</p> <p>Procured and mobilised the Newey Group to increase capacity for void electrical works.</p> <p>Procured and mobilised a new Energy Performance Certificate supplier.</p> <p>Entered in to contract with J Tomlinson Ltd for major void works, kitchens, and bathrooms.</p>
<p>Difficulty in recruiting operatives.</p>	<p>Approved overtime for void operatives to increase capacity.</p> <p>Monitored recruitment processes weekly.</p> <p>Increased pay offer to support recruitment of agency staff.</p>
<p>Issues with energy suppliers - meter issues including debts and faults have taken time to resolve and have impacted on delivery of electrical works.</p>	<p>Procured and mobilised Energy Angels - void energy agency, to support the faster resolution of void energy supply issues - e.g., debts or meters, meter swaps, problems, etc.</p> <p>Equipped the Voids Team Leader and Charge-Hand with the means for</p>

	making payment in shops to enable meter debts to be cleared and topped up to enable works to take place.
Capacity issues within allocations team.	<p>Increased allocations capacity from 25 hours per week to 102.5 from 28th November 22. Officers will take some time to train.</p> <p>An advert is out for more temporary staff to clear the backlog.</p> <p>A permanent increase in officers will be implemented.</p>
A small number of large properties have been purchased requiring major adaptations in the context of an existing high demand for adaptation delivery post pandemic.	Properties have been included in the 2023/24 programme of work.

Impact on Performance of Actions Taken

- Repairs

The backlog of void properties in repair has started to reduce. On 2nd October 2022 there were 148 properties in repair, and on 28th November 2022 this had reduced to 132. It is expected the position will continue to improve as newly appointed contractors mobilise.

The table below shows there has been an increase this year in the number of voids where works have been completed.

April November	- Number of Voids Made Ready to Let
19/20	275
20/21	260
21/22	213
22/23	279

- Allocations

The recent increase in allocations capacity has not yet had time to make a difference. It is expected the overall position in respect of the number of voids will improve over the coming months.

Monitoring

Weekly monitoring is taking place via a cross service voids group. The Council's Strategic Leadership Team is monitoring performance monthly.

Appendices: Appendix 1 - Current Voids

Background Papers: None

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