

## SCRUTINY COMMISSION - MONDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2024

### Report of the Director Housing and Wellbeing Lead Member: Executive Member for Public and Private Sector Housing

#### Part A

#### UPDATE ON VOID PROPERTY INFORMATION

##### Purpose of Report

To provide an update on the position in respect of voids (empty properties) at Council accommodation, the recent actions taken, in progress, and planned to reduce both the number of voids and the length of time properties stand empty.

##### Recommendation

That the Scrutiny Commission notes and comments on the update, identifying any further actions which may be taken.

##### Reason

To provide effective scrutiny of actions taken, in progress, and planned to improve void performance.

##### Policy Justification and Previous Decisions

At its meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2023, Scrutiny Commission requested a further update be provided in six months' time (February 2024).

An interim update was provided to the Finance and Performance Committee on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2023.

##### Implementation Timetable including Future Decisions

Not applicable.

##### Report Implications

##### ***Financial Implications***

Not applicable.

##### ***Risk Management***

Not applicable.

##### **Equality and Diversity**

Not applicable.

##### **Climate Change and Carbon Impact**

Not applicable.

### **Crime and Disorder**

Not applicable.

### **Wards Affected**

All Wards.

### **Publicity Arrangements**

Not applicable.

### **Consultations**

Not applicable.

### **Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Caring for the Environment	No
Healthy Communities	Yes
A Thriving Economy	No
Your Council	Yes

Key Decision: N

Background Papers: Scrutiny Commission 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022 - Void Property Information

Cabinet 1<sup>st</sup> June 2023 - Landlord Services Capacity

Scrutiny Commission 7<sup>th</sup> August 2023 - Update on Void properties

Cabinet 10<sup>th</sup> August 2023 Procurement of the Void Repairs Contractor

Officers to contact: Peter Oliver - Director of Housing and Wellbeing  
Email: [peter.oliver@charnwood.gov.uk](mailto:peter.oliver@charnwood.gov.uk)  
Tel: 01509 634666

Katie Moore - Head of Strategic Housing  
Email: [peter.oliver@charnwood.gov.uk](mailto:peter.oliver@charnwood.gov.uk)  
Tel: 01509 634666

Janet Glass - Head of Landlord Services  
Email: [janet.glass@charnwood.gov.uk](mailto:janet.glass@charnwood.gov.uk)  
Tel: 01509 634666

## Part B

### 1. Background and Summary

The reasons for the increase in voids and actions already taken to improve performance can be found in the background papers detailed at Part A of this paper (above).

The total number of voids over time split by category can be found at *Appendix 1 - All Voids by Category 2019-20 to 2023-2024 (end December 2023)*.

The vertical axis shows the number of voids. The horizontal axis shows time. Each bar shows the number of voids by category which make up the total. Categories include:

- *Sheltered accommodation routine repairs*
- *Sheltered accommodation ready to let*
- *Sheltered accommodation major works*
- *Major works general needs*. General needs properties are not sheltered accommodation. Major works includes (for example) where a new kitchen or bathroom, asbestos removal, or utility works is required.
- *Routine repairs general needs*. These properties require a range of minor works to bring them up to a standard.
- *Ready to let general needs*. These properties are ready to let.

NB. Most of these properties are bedsits with shared bathing facilities and may never be let.

The Commission received its first report on voids in December 2022. The position then is marked on the chart. The final bar shows the position at the end of December 2023.

Generally, the chart shows a reduction in the number of voids that are ready to let. This is because of an increase in the number of allocations, due in part to an increase in the number of Housing Allocations Officers.

The number of voids in repair has increased due to insufficient repairs capacity, and this has driven an increase in the overall number of voids over the last 12 months. Several actions have been completed and are in progress which will increase the number of properties being repaired. These include the procurement of additional contractors, and the appointment of a Principal Officer for Voids to manage void repairs. It is therefore expected the overall number of void properties will reduce in the Spring of 2024.

More information is set out in the sections below.

### 2. Allocation of Properties

Following the increase in the number of Allocations Officers (from 0.6 full time equivalent officers to 4.0 full time equivalent officers) the number of properties being let has increased, and the number of properties at ready to let status has therefore reduced. This is positive, however further improvement is needed.

Whilst a permanent Housing Needs Manager is now in post, further performance improvement has been slowed by multiple unsuccessful rounds of recruitment for permanent Housing Allocations Team Leader and a permanent Housing Options Team Leader. This is despite the application of golden hello recruitment incentives and the use of a specialist recruitment agency. Further options are being explored.

### 3. Age Restricted Properties and Sheltered Accommodation

*Appendix 2 - Snapshot of Void Property Position at week 41, ended Sunday 14 January - General Needs* shows there are 50 general needs properties with a status of Ready to Let.

21 (42%) are accessible only to people aged over 45, and 4 (8 %) only to people aged over 60. These age restricted properties are generally hard to let due to lower levels of demand.

Steps have been taken to remove the age restriction from properties designated 45+, and the Commission recently undertook pre-decision scrutiny of a report recommending declassification of just over one thousand properties (20% of the Council's entire housing stock) designated for applicants aged 45 and over. Cabinet has subsequently approved the declassification of these properties. De-classification will take place over a two-year period with the first tranche of properties to be declassified in the Spring of 2024. The data shows these properties will be easier to let when declassified given most applicants on the housing register are aged under 45.

*Appendix 3 - Snapshot of Void Property Position at week 41, ended Sunday 14 January - Sheltered Accommodation* shows there are 66 properties in sheltered accommodation that are ready to let. Many of these properties may never be let given predominantly (albeit not exclusively) they are small bedsits with shared bathing facilities. A wider review of sheltered accommodation is in progress, and a Sheltered Accommodation Strategy Framework setting out a direction of travel in respect of the schemes, is expected to be brought forward to Cabinet in March 2024.

### 4. Void Repairs

#### Contracted Capacity

Major Voids - Jeakins Weir Ltd has been appointed to undertake work at major voids. Mobilisation is in progress, and the contractor has completed works at two properties as pilots. A programme of works to clear the backlog of major void works is expected in January 2024.

Standard Voids - Following Cabinet approval to do so, a procurement process has also taken place for a contractor to deliver works at standard voids. The Contract is likely to be executed before the end of January 2024. A period of mobilisation with the contractor will take place. The Contract specifies (albeit with no minimum guarantee of works) that 10-15 standard voids will be repaired each month to clear the backlog. At an estimated run rate of 12 per month, the backlog is expected to be cleared in 18 months.

#### Internal Capacity

Posts for a dedicated Head of Landlord Services and a Principal Officer for Voids have been created and appointed to with postholders commencing in post just before and after Christmas respectively.

The newly commenced Principal Officer for Voids is working closely with the team to understand challenges, and is focussing on:

- a) Increasing the capacity of the in-house void repairs team.
- b) Contract management arrangements for the in-bound contractor for standard void works.
- c) Maximising productivity.

## 5. Void Processes

A corporate project focussing on improvements to the void process is in progress. The void process has been mapped in detail and a further workshop has taken place to streamline it. Several workshops have been established to focus on detailed areas of the process. Systems will need to be configured to match the new process when finalised, with a new set of process milestones that can be reported on.

Separately an internal Audit of the voids process has taken place, and a *Reasonable* level of assurance was given.

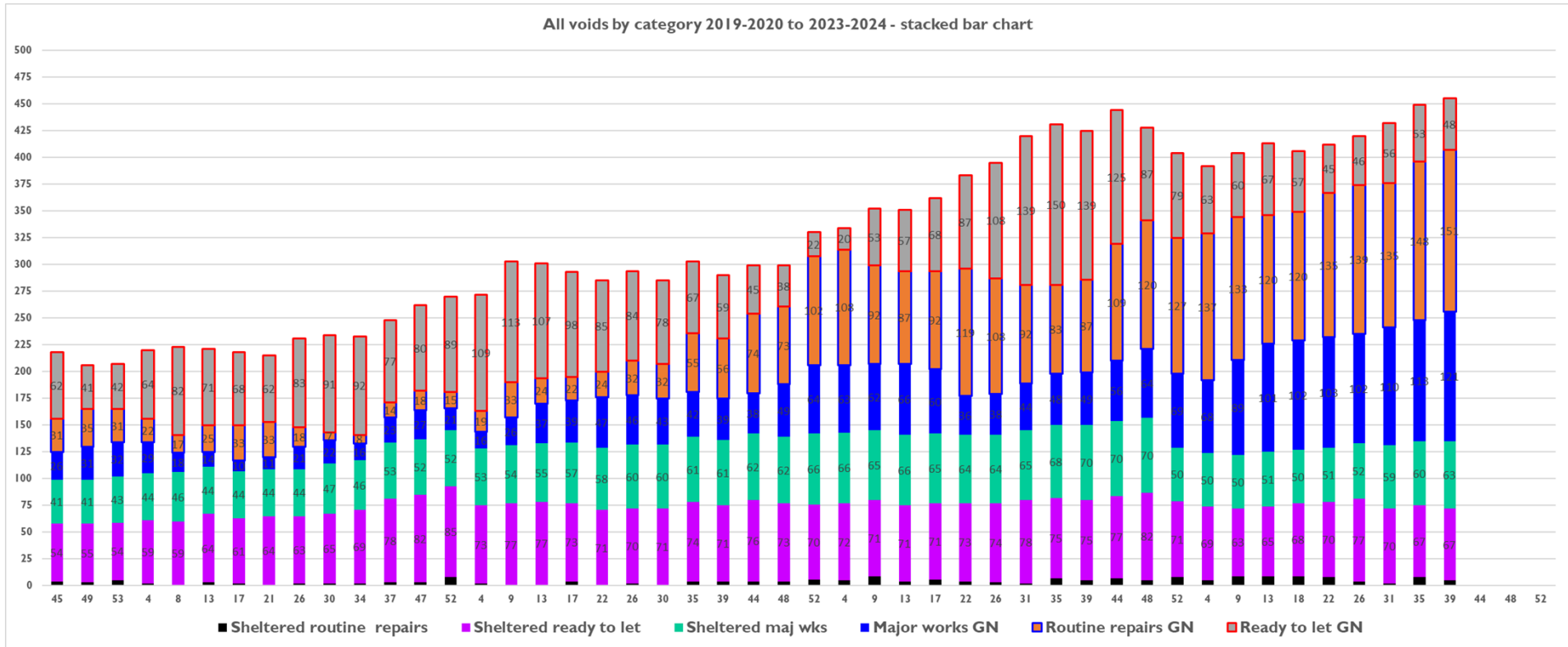
## Appendices

Appendix 1 - All Voids by Category 2019-20 to 2023-2024 (end December 2023)

Appendix 2 - Snapshot of Void Property Position at week 41, ended Sunday 14 January  
- General Needs

Appendix 3 - Snapshot of Void Property Position at week 41, ended Sunday 14 January  
- Sheltered Accommodation

# Appendix 1 - All Voids by Category 2019-2020 to 2023-2024 (end December 2023)



Position at December 2022

## Appendix 2 - Snapshot of Void Property Position at week 41, ended Sunday 14 January - General Needs

Week's summary: general needs																
GN designation	Ready to let		Routine repairs		Major wks in-house		Major wks o'sourced		Decant		Adaptations		Asbestos		Pre-voids	
Property type	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos pre-void	Change on last week
Bedsit	2	0	10	-1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Bungalow	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flat	17	-1	60	-1	10	0	18	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	7	1
House	5	1	25	-4	8	0	30	2	4	0	0	0	1	0	5	1
Maisonette	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
45+ bedsit	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
45+ flat	19	2	33	-6	5	-2	19	6	5	0	0	0	1	0	7	3
60+ bungalow	4	0	7	0	5	0	11	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>-12</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>5</b>

## Appendix 3 - Snapshot of Void Property Position at week 41, ended Sunday 14 January - Sheltered Accommodation

Week's summary: sheltered																
Sheltered designation	Ready to let		Routine repairs		Major wks in-house		Major wks o'sourced		Decant		Adaptations		Asbestos		Pre-voids	
Property type	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos void	Change on last week	Nos pre-void	Change on last week
Bedsit	49	0	3	0	52	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bungalow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flat	17	-1	2	0	1	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>