

# Report to Safer and Active Communities Committee

**1st November 2022**

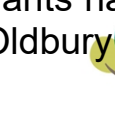
<b>Subject:</b>	Voids Property Review
<b>Director:</b>	Director of Housing Director Gillian Douglas
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Housing Services Manager, Nigel Collumbell <a href="mailto:Nigel_collumbell@sandwell.gov.uk">Nigel_collumbell@sandwell.gov.uk</a>

## 1 Recommendations

- 1.1 To receive comment & recommendation on the scope of the review of the void property process and standards.





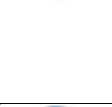

## 2 Background

- 2.1 An end-to-end review of the void process for managing and bringing back into use empty council (housing revenue account) properties has commenced to address increasing turn around times and trends arising from customer complaints about the condition of properties at re-let.
- 2.2 As at the end of September the average turnaround times for voids had increased to 37 days, with an average rent loss of £451 per property. Since the pandemic performance has been adversely affected by the availability of materials and labour, at the end of 2019/20 the average turnaround time was just 24 days, with an average rent loss of £295 per property.
- 2.3 As at the end of September 434 council properties were empty. This includes 76 properties decommissioned as extra care schemes in Smethwick and West Bromwich which are being re-purposed for use as temporary accommodation and 149 properties where tenants have been decanted to complete major refurbishment schemes in Oldbury. A small



number of other properties are been held and not re-let because of structural defects pending decision on their long-term viability.

### 3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	Best start in life for children and young people
	People live well and age well
	Strong resilient communities
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Empty council homes need to be bought back into use as quickly as possible to mitigate the loss of income to the Housing Revenue Account and to address housing need.</li> </ul>
	A strong and inclusive economy
	A connected and accessible Sandwell

### 3 Aims and Objectives of the review

- 3.1 The review will consider action that needs to be taken to reduce the turnaround times for void properties so that rental income is maximised.
- 3.2 The review will consider how the customer journey can be simplified, to reduce the incidences of customers needing to chase progress on void work or seek clarification on the process for letting and moving into the property.
- 3.3 The “void standard” has not been the subject of review or revision for sometime. In refreshing the standard the aim will be to develop a new flexible empty homes standard that meets the needs and expectations of the diverse needs of our customers whilst also representing value for money.
- 3.4 The review will also consider changes that need to be made to our performance management framework, to ensure quality control over the new standards and drive a culture of “right first time” for customers.



3.5 Changes to void process and standards will be captured in an overarching void policy that will set out the strategic objectives for the management of empty properties which in turn will ensure best use of stock and efficient asset management.

**4 Next Steps:**

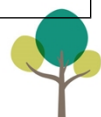
4.1 The review commenced in September and will be completed by April 2023.

**5 Alternative Options**

5.1 We have chosen to undertake this review to address adverse performance, it would not be appropriate to take no action but the scope of the review could be amended to include or exclude some elements set out in section 3. We have chosen to conduct the review making use of internal resources, we could alternatively bring in external support to carry out or assist with the review but this would be at an additional cost and we are confident we have the skills and resources to deliver this within existing resources.

**7. Implications**

<b>Resources:</b>	Financial, staffing, land/building implications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The review and any recommended changes will be delivered within existing resources from the Housing Revenue Account</li> </ul>
<b>Legal and Governance:</b>	Legal implications including regulations/law under which proposals are required/permitted and constitutional provisions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are regulatory standards that must be met when reletting a property. These are set out in the Decent Homes Standard and Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)</li> </ul>
<b>Risk:</b>	Risk implications, including any mitigating measures planned/taken, health and safety, insurance implications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are no risks from conducting the review. Any changes to process will be subject to risk assessments.</li> </ul>



<b>Equality:</b>	<p>Implications for equality (all aspects and characteristics) including how meeting Equality Duty, equality impact assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are no equality matters arising from this report</li> </ul>
<b>Health and Wellbeing:</b>	<p>Implications of the proposals on health and wellbeing of our communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efficient void management reduces the time homeless households may spend in temporary accommodation which will have positive impact on their health and wellbeing.</li> </ul>
<b>Social Value</b>	<p>Implications for social value and how the proposals are meeting this (for e.g. employment of local traders, young people)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are no social value implications arising from this report</li> </ul>

## 8. Appendices

## 9. Background Papers

