

**HOUSING IMPROVEMENT BOARD**

**13<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2025**

**VOID PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

**Void Performance**

Measure	Previous Performance	Current Performance
Month	January 2024	January 2025
Void Turnaround Time	86 days	44 days
Key to Key (quarterly)	123 days	95 days (if long term voids are removed) Figure with long term voids is 135 – this is made up of 9 capital works voids

**1. Purpose of the report**

The report seeks to update the Housing Improvement Board on void performance and steps being taken to reduce:

- Void around time between January 2024 and January 2025

**2. Background**

2.1 Croydon Council are committed to managing void turnaround times effectively and efficiently.

2.2 The above table outlines performance between January 2024 and January 2025

**3. Performance**

3.1 Performance in the last twelve months has improved with both void turnaround and the key-to-key performance.

3.2 The improvements have been driven by:

- Improvements in contract management

Up until August 2023, void works were carried out by up to six contractors in addition to the main contractor. The changes in contracts have allowed Croydon to focus on the management of just two contractors.

The contract form is governed via two tiers of contract management:

- Monthly operational core groups which are made up of operational teams from Croydon, Wates and Mears
- Monthly strategic core groups which are made up of Executive Officers from Croydon, Wates and Mears

Operational meetings are used to identify and address risks, we are also working to deliver a void service improvement plan which focuses on improving our key-to-key targets, customer satisfaction and cost control.

- **Reduction in long term capital voids**

Whilst the number of long-term capital voids have reduced to ten , we will continue to see the impact this has on the key-to-key figure for the rest of the year. We did however let our longest capital works void in October 2024 following the successful completion of a roof renewal programme, which allowed us to let five of our six longest voids. This impacted key to key performance by over 10,000 days.

- **Sign up Pack.**

The update of the signup pack included bin collection dates, council tax information and internal communications contact numbers. This has improved our customer survey feedback in this area increasing over the last year from 72% to 76 % and reduced calls from resident's post signup requesting this type of information.

## **4. Challenges**

4.1 Whilst challenges remain, early recognition of these have allowed issues to be identified and addressed:

### **4.2 Utilities**

The impact of utilities debts left on meters when a property has become void cannot be underestimated. Whilst we entered into an agreement with a utilities management company, their failure to remove debts in a timely fashion led to delays in compliance works being carried out. The problem was being exacerbated when meters had been tampered with.

In September alone, 16 properties were affected by meter issues, (each of which contributed an average of 20 days delay), performance for September was also negatively impacted by 6 properties that were refused by applicants for various reasons (approx. 11% of our total lets). The average re-let time for these six properties was in excess of 100 days, which, alongside the meter issues experienced, led to a significant decrease in performance from August. To combat this: We will shortly be signing a new agreement with a void energy management company to resolve the issues with debts on meters in a more rapid and efficient manner. One of our two

contractors is now raising issues directly associated with large debts and meters and or tampered meters

The Allocations and lettings team have implemented a process of pre-allocated viewings, which allows prospective tenants to view their new homes while works are ongoing to ensure that any issues that may lead to a refusal are picked up earlier in the process and allow us to increase the number of properties accepted while works are ongoing

#### **4.3 Contractors**

At the beginning of the year, Wates and Mears had struggled to resource the contract adequately which had an impact on works completion in time and quality of work. We have been working on an annual improvement plan and reviewed the delivery model to effectively resource the work demand. We are reviewing the contract model to ensure we have aligned our client function to complete 100% post inspections to ensure quality. This focus has improved our overall performance of completing minor and major voids

#### **4.4 . Voids returned**

Currently, too many homes are returned by tenants in a very poor condition with large amounts of furniture/personal belongings left behind and gardens in a poor state of repair which is leading to increased void costs. This has become an increased issue across the sector since Covid. Voids and Tenancy Management are working together to introduce pre-termination visits to remind residents of their obligation in clearing their homes and addressing any disrepair. Residents who leave their properties in a satisfactory condition will be given a £50 voucher

We are also reviewing the options of developing an inhouse clearance service to reduce costs further and will be introducing a void clearance incentive scheme next month.

#### **4.5 Extra care voids and turnover**

Following the appointment of an officer in allocations to oversee offers and a review of the referral process 18 months ago, which promoted a more timely, efficient and person-centred process, the number of extra care voids reduced. However, some of our six schemes are not in demand resulting in an increase in refusal and/ or difficulties in identifying potential residents. There are also issues with:

- Inappropriate referrals with misleading information which delays appropriate nominations.
- Prospective tenant changes their mind at the point of tenancy signing.
- Occasional concern with quality of voids work
- Several properties have a bathtub in situ, as opposed to a shower/wet room. It is difficult to identify a suitable tenant given the vulnerable nature of referred individuals, who tend to have mobility issues.

#### **4.6 Adapting properties**

The need to adapt properties from wet room conversion to a shower room due to properties attracting low bids as well as properties requiring adaptation from general needs bathroom to a wet room is being closely monitored. Whilst this has impacted upon both our void budget and performance, when properties have been adapted, they have been accepted by applicants with little or no further delay.

## **5. Service / successes and improvements.**

### **5.1 Pre-allocation of properties**

Properties continue to be pre- allocated; this has allowed steps to be proactively taken to address an increase in refusals. Changes have been made to this process in order that viewings take place during voids works. This has minimised the impact of refusals and 2<sup>nd</sup> viewings, which have impacted on our key-to-key performance.

### **5.2 Enhanced Offer for Care Leavers**

Housing have developed an enhanced offer for care leavers. In doing so, we have committed to providing 20 bedsits/one-bedroom properties to these residents, with additional DIY support provided by a handyman from the Major Aids and Adaptions Team. In addition to this the care leavers receive support from Tenancy Support Officers for a period of six months. To date five care leavers have moved into new properties and works are ongoing to ensure that a further five care leavers can move into properties in the next month.

### **5.3 Regina Road**

Following ongoing collaborations across (the teams, properties have been identified and accepted by the final two tenants in ' block two' at Regina Road. ( One block having been successfully emptied last year)

### **5.4. Housing and Allocations**

#### **(a) Harnessing the power of data and insights**

The Housing Register & Allocations Team have taken important steps to encourage the team to harness their combined access to data and insight obtained from working more closely with teams across the entire Housing Directorate. The Team are now better able to target our properties to those most in need, by becoming more responsive to the tenants and supporting with a transfer due to Housing Management reasons, by knowing when the properties are becoming closer to being available to let. Thus, are able to target the void and pre-allocate properties more efficiently.

#### **(b) Listening**

Most importantly, the Housing Register and Allocations Team have been listening to our applicants and tenants. Rather than simply matching a prospective tenant to a property, the team now make direct contact with the prospective tenant to discuss the potential offer to ensure their new home will be suitable to their entire household in all aspects, e.g. affordability, location, commuting times etc., This reduces the refusal rates, manages expectations and improves overall customer satisfaction

## **6 Void Reporting**

Steps have been taken to create a suite of reports which should meet our void reporting requirements.

Three reports have been created to date and are refreshed on a weekly basis.

1	<b>Properties &amp; People Report</b>	This report lists all properties recorded on NEC Housing, and a wide range of information about them and their current tenants or leaseholders. It includes columns regarding the current void status for void properties.	
2	<b>Current Voids Report</b>	This report lists all properties which are currently void, with all details required about them, and how many there are, in each category.	
3	<b>Void Repairs Report</b>	This report lists all void works orders raised or completed so far this year, with all details required about them, including contractor and cost data.	

Teams from the repairs void team, allocations and lettings have had a number of meetings with the NEC Project Manager who is dedicated to working with the teams to configure and design the void management system, which will deliver against the following principles:

- a) **Voids process:** To ensure the NEC Voids functionality matches our agreed processes.
- b) **Easy recording:** To make it easier for staff to record the actions they have taken with respect to each void property.
- c) **Easy searching:** To make it easier to search for void properties of different types, and in each part of the void lifecycle.
- d) **Reporting:** To make it easier to create the reports we need to manage voids.
- e) **Simplicity:** To remove duplicated codes and reduce the number of these to the minimum required (e.g.: We currently have 203 Tenancy Termination Reason codes and aim to reduce this to below 12
- f) Work is also ongoing to review codes used in the NEC Repairs system to remove. to remove obsolete priority and work programme codes.
- g) **Logical Order:** Where possible, we will set up the new codes, so that when voids are listed alphabetically by various criteria, they will be listed in Search results, and in reports, in a logical sequence. We'll do this by adding initial numbers or letters, where possible (e.g.: 1-Pre-Works, 2-Undergoing Works, 3-Post-Works).

The main types of codes used for managing voids in NEC are shown below:

1	<b>Void Classifications</b>	Used to categorise broad classifications of voids. (e.g.: Standard Voids, Major Works Voids, etc)
2	<b>Void Events</b>	Used to define events and actions within void processes. (e.g.: Keys Returned by Tenant, Lock Change, Gas Check)
3	<b>Void Paths</b>	Used to group together the events and actions within void processes.

4	<b>Void Statuses</b>	Used to define the current status of a property within the void process. (e.g.: Pre-Work, Minor Work Underway, Post-Work, etc)
5	<b>Void Stages</b>	Used to link two Void Events and define a target time between them.
6	<b>Void Reasons</b>	Used to categorise the reason a tenancy has ended. (e.g.: Transfer, Deceased, Arrears Eviction) There are currently 203 current void reasons on NEC Housing, which are currently being reviewed.