

HOUSING OPERATIONS BOARD
WEDNESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2024 AT 6.00 PM IN MEETING ROOM 6 - HURTMORE,
MILLMEAD HOUSE, MILLMEAD, GUILDFORD, SURREY GU2 4BB

Members:

Councillor Julia McShane, (Chair)
Councillor Bilal Akhtar
Councillor Philip Brooker
Councillor Amanda Creese
Councillor Vanessa King
Councillor Maddy Redpath
Dale Askew
Patricia Ayling
Pat Conroy
Alan Wood

A G E N D A

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES**
2. **DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**
3. **MINUTES** (Pages 3 - 8)
To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the first meeting of the Board held on 31 July 2024.
4. **TERMS OF REFERENCE UPDATE** (Pages 9 - 12)
5. **HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PLAN PROGRESS** (Pages 13 - 22)
6. **REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING - PROGRESS**
Verbal update.
7. **PERFORMANCE - Q1 REPORT**
To follow.
8. **VOID REPORT** (Pages 23 - 40)
9. **TENANT ENGAGEMENT GROUP FEEDBACK**
Verbal update.
10. **FORWARD PLAN** (Pages 41 - 42)
11. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

12. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS: 2024-25**

Wednesday 20 November 2024 at 6pm in Meeting Room 6, Millmead House

Wednesday 15 January 2025 at 6pm in Meeting Room 6, Millmead House

Wednesday 12 March 2025 at 6pm in Meeting Room 6, Millmead House

Housing Operations Board – EWG

31 July 2024

6:00 to 7:30pm

Present

Cllr Booker

Cllr Creese

Cllr King

Cllr Redpath

Dale Askew - TEG

Patricia Ayling - TEG

Alan Wood - TEG

Julian Higson – Joint Strategic Director Housing, Environment and Communities

Annalisa Howson – Joint Assistant Director for Housing

1. Introductions

Cllr McShane welcomed everyone to the inaugural Housing Operations Board (HOB) and thanked them for their engagement and interest in housing services.

2. Apologies

Cllr Akhtar

Cllr Brooker in part left 6:30pm

Pat Conroy - Tenant Engagement Group (TEG)

Dennis Hughes – Homelessness Representative

Ketan Petal - Homelessness Representative

Siobhan Kennedy – Homelessness, Advice and Allocations Lead

Meena Lota – Housing Insight and Improvement Senior Specialist

Gavin Luke-Deschanel- Complaints Resolution Officer

Hazel Craig- Waller - Housing Insight and Improvement Specialist

Lisa Holt – Housing Performance and Insight Officer

John Armstrong – Democratic Services and Elections Manager

3. Terms of Reference

Annalisa introduced why the Board has been established, with the aim to bring tenants and members closer to the housing decision making process. For the service to be open and transparent. To provide assurance the service is meeting regulatory and legislative requirements and share areas for improvement. Thus, giving the opportunity for stakeholders to hold the service to account.

Annalisa presented the terms of reference for Board discussion:

- Noted that the Board does **not** replace TEG or O&S.
- Noted that the Board may make recommendations and comments to decision makers.
- Agreed to have standing agenda items for Declaration of Interest and AOB.
- Agreed for meeting to be hybrid.
- Agreed to not live stream or record the meeting currently, to support open discussion. To keep under review.
- Agreed agenda, reports, and minutes to be published.

Julian suggested for the Board have an out of office meeting at least once a year – to visit homes, works, development etc

Dale raised concern about the backlog of works and queried costings following the fraud investigation. Confirmed that the Housing Improvement Plan includes Leaseholder services, and the Board may request for more in depth topics to be added to the workplan.

Cllr King asked on longevity of the Board. Annalisa advised that as long as Guildford had a housing service, she expected the Board to be in place.

Recommendation:

Board agreed the draft Terms of Reference with amendments/clarification to:

- Number of non-Executive members from four to up to
- include online option to attend meetings

Actions:

- Annalisa to update Terms of Reference
- Democratic Services to incorporate additional agenda items

4. Introduction to Housing Service

Annalisa shared that this is a pivotal time for housing locally and nationally.

Following the fraud investigation and self-referral to the [Regulator of Social Housing](#) (RSH) the service has developed a [Housing Improvement Plan](#) to respond to the SOLACE report recommendations and to address the failing identified in the self-referral.

She explained that nationally, there is a new era for regulation for all social housing providers, with the RSH introducing four consumer standards on 1 April 2024 for landlord services functions.

Noted the Housing Service has two strands for the Boards consideration – strategic functions (homelessness, allocations, enabling) and landlord functions (management maintenance and engagement).

She provided a few numbers for context – 5,200 homes, 2,300 applicants, 1,200 approaches.

Councillors advised that poor service issues with the housing service not solely due to the fraud investigation. Julian thanked members for the feedback, he explained that we recognise that there are areas of good service and areas for improvement. We need to give staff the opportunity and systems to deliver great services. The team want to do a good job, as seen by whistle blowing, and have been through challenging times. We are working with team to empower and support them with improvements but will take time to resolve system and IT issues. We acknowledge where we are, where we came from and where we want to be.

5. Housing Ombudsman Annual Self-Assessment

Annalisa explained that the annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Service's Complaint Handling Code was a new requirement for all social landlords. We have met all the code requirements but must keep under review and ensure the policy is embedded in practice and that lessons are learnt from complaints for ongoing improvements.

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Board members reinforced the need to ensure the policy is embedded in practice. Julian advised of the need for a culture change in way react to complaints. Working with Peter Stevens Interim Joint Assistant Director for Communications and Customer Service on system, process, and culture. We need to ensure comprehensive monitoring of complaints – not only numbers and time completed but confirm actions completed and satisfaction with case handling.

6. Housing Service Complaints Handling Performance Report

Annalisa shared the report and noted the increase in complaints. This is to be expected given the fraud investigation and impact on services, and also due to the government's national [Make things right campaign](#). We also welcome complaints (as free feedback) and do not want residents to be afraid to raise issues. The report also includes area for improvement – suggested Board request an update in six months.

Patrica stated that TEG had reviewed the report and requested further details inc type of complaint.

Board discussion on fencing, record keeping, members enquiries, website and to reduce formality of process.

Annalisa confirmed that TEG can raise complaints for tenants, provided they have tenant permission to act on their behalf.

Actions:

- Annalisa to request clarification on fencing requests
- Annalisa to ask Peter Stevens to consider Councillor access to complaints systems
- Annalisa to ask Communications team to review accessibility of online complaint form
- TEG to receive quarterly complaints report
- HOB to review six monthly complaints report

7. Forward Plan

Annalisa shared draft plan and invited comments and future agenda suggestions. Annalisa recommended that the Board have *standing items*:

- Housing Improvement Plan Progress
- RSH Progress
- Performance
- TEG reports/ feedback

and *topics reports* as listed with additions of Allocation Policy, York Road HUB, TEG reports.

Agreed next meeting reports:

- Declarations of Interest
- Terms of Reference
- Housing Improvement Plan Progress
- RSH Progress
- Performance - Q1 report
- Void Report
- TEG feedback
- Forward Plan
- AOB

8. AOB

Board members requested training on allocations process included in Councillor Training.

Pat raised question regarding support for service veterans. Julian advised have priority for housing. Cllr McShane advised of Armed Service Champion – Cllr Hives.

Cllr Creese questioned how addressing current voids. Annalisa confirmed that we are not in the position we want to be, as have a significant backlog of works, following end of contract and need to prioritise resources to ensuring the safety of tenanted homes. Julian confirmed that the in-house responsive repairs team have worked to relet some homes and a new contractor had been appointed to start in September. Discussion on impact of overgrown gardens, housing need and how to progress.

On a positive note, Pat advised that her new neighbours were very happy with the works in their new home.

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Cllr McShane requested a communication plan for the Board.

Board agreed eight weekly cycle of meeting – Wednesdays at 6pm convenient for all.

Actions

Annalisa to request all member training session on Allocations – invitation to inc all Board members

Annalisa to request allocation information on ex services applicants be shared with HOB and Cllr Hives.

Julian to request team review long term void gardens

Voids report to next meeting

Annalisa request press release of first meeting with link to agenda and notes and open invitation to attend

Annalisa to request Democratic services set up series of meeting for the next 12 months.

9. Date of Next meeting

Proposed next meeting 25 September 2024.

10. Close

Cllr McShane thanked everyone for attending and looking forward to working with Board in the future. Close of meeting 730pm.

31 July 2024

Housing Operations Board Terms of Reference

The Council established a Housing Operations Board, under the Executive Working Group protocol in July 2024.

Remit to:

1. promote tenant and leaseholder engagement in decisions relating to the Council's housing services,
2. include stakeholders in strategy, policy, and performance reviews,
3. provide support and challenge to service improvement initiatives and
4. provide assurance of the Council's work to meet the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards.

The Board will comprise of:

- The Executive Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Housing (Chair)
- Four Guildford tenant members (one may be a leaseholder) including the Tenant Engagement Group (Vice-Chair)
- Two Homelessness representative members (one service user with lived experience and a manager from a service provider)
- Up to five non-Executive members

Tenant members of the Board will be nominated by the Tenant Engagement Group Chair, from existing engaged tenants and leaseholders and be appointed by Chair and Vice Chair of the Board.

Homelessness representative members will be nominated by the Homelessness, Advice and Allocations Lead and be appointed by Chair and Vice Chair of the Board.

Non-Executive members of the Board will be invited to express an interest in the Board and be appointed by Portfolio Holder for Housing and/or Leader of the Council.

Substitutes are permitted for Tenant, Homelessness representative and non-Executive Board members

Frequency of meeting

The Board will normally meet every eight weeks, except the months of August and December, and will be held in Surrey school term time.

The Chair may reschedule or call ad hoc meetings as required.

Meetings of the Board will normally be held in public, with an online option, and attendance by tenants, leaseholders and members is encouraged. Agendas, reports, and minutes will be publicly available, published on the Council's website.

Invited Speakers

The Board may invite other stakeholder representatives including for example service users, statutory agencies, voluntary sector groups for specific items.

Specific terms of reference:

The Housing Operations Board will receive reports on matters relating to the Council's housing functions. These will include:

- The HRA Business Plan and budget
- The Housing Service Plan
- Quarterly KPIs performance reports
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures
- Health and Safety and energy efficiency compliance reports
- Complaints Reports inc Housing Ombudsman self-assessment
- Housing Improvement (Transformation) Plan progress reports
- Other matters relating to the delivery of the housing landlord function, with an emphasis on meeting the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards
- Reviews of existing policies or the introduction of new policies relating to or affecting Council's services
- Matters relating to tenant scrutiny and challenge as part of delivering co-regulation of the housing landlord service
- Reviews and development of related strategies inc Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and Housing Asset Management Strategy.

NB Reports listed are indicative not prescriptive nor exhaustive. The Board may request additional information related to the housing services.

Scope

The Board will provide review and advice on reports related to housing management and maintenance, tenant engagement, asset management, homelessness advice and allocation, tenancy and estate management, leasehold management, and compliance.

The Board will **not** review the private rented sector housing service in environmental/regulatory services, nor housing development in asset services. The Council has a Housing Development Board to consider future developments,

The scheme of delegation identifies the decision-making remit and responsibilities of the officers, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Executive and Council. Where reports relate to items for officer and Portfolio Holder decision, the comments and recommendation of the Board will be considered, as part of the consultation process. Where reports relate to items which will be submitted to the Council’s Executive or Council for decision, the comments and recommendations of the Housing Operations Board will be submitted within the officer report.

Version	Date	Originator	Comments	Approved
Draft 1	3 June 2024	Annalisa Howson	First draft for discussion with Democratic Services, Portfolio Holder	
Draft 1.1	19 June 2024	Annalisa Howson	Share with PH and TEG for agreement	
Draft 1.2	28 June	Annalisa Howson	Add homelessness reps	
Draft 1.3	12 July	Annalisa Howson	Included feedback from TEG and governance officer	
Approved 1.4	31 July 2024	Annalisa Howson	Update following Housing Operations Board – nonexecutive members and hybrid meeting	Housing Operations Board 31 July 2024

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Guildford Borough Council: Housing Improvement Plan

19 September 2024

Key: Completed/in place, On track, Not Started

Leadership						
Ref	Actions	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update
H1	Develop an improvement plan for Housing with a particular focus on leadership, cultural change, tenant engagement, building and tenant safety, compliance, staff training, procurement and budget monitoring.	Complete	1	Strategic Director Housing, Communities & Environment	CGSC 15 May Council 23 July	
H2	Introduce performance management culture, including more comprehensive monthly compliance reporting and assurance, and regular review by CLB and Scrutiny. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To review KPIs and monitor key decisions, risk logs and improvement plans at directorate management meeting. Ensure regular monitoring reports including the risk register, voids, budget monitoring and contract awards reviewed at least quarterly by directorate management teams, with non-compliance tackled swiftly. 	May 24	2, 3, 7 and 21	Assistant Director of Housing	Corporate Performance Monitoring: Overview & Scrutiny (resources) Housing Operations Board	
H3 Page 13	Refresh the Housing Strategy, in partnership with stakeholders and residents to help align housing service plans to wider aspirations for Guildford Borough Council's people and places, and the Social Housing Regulation Act. Ensure the Corporate Strategy feeds into the Housing Strategy and vice versa.	December 24	4 and 5	Assistant Director of Housing	Housing Operations Board TBC Full Council TBC	New Housing Strategy & Enabling Manager started end of August 2024. Corporate Strategy approved July 2024
H4	Ensure a permanent Joint Strategic Director of Housing is in place and has adequate time to devote to Housing, amongst their other priorities.	Summer 2024	8 and 9	Chief Executive	Joint Senior Staff Committee	Permanent Strategic Director for Housing, Communities and Environment in post. Currently, the SD is supporting Planning and Regeneration due to a vacancy. The new SD of Economy, Planning & Place will be starting in November.
H5	Review the entire Housing staffing structure and ensure that it is fit for purpose, is robust and has the necessary capacity and skills. Ensure all job profiles are up to date and reflect organisational and service needs.	Phase 1 June 24 Phase 2 December 24	10 and 16	Assistant Director of Housing	TBC	Phase 1 complete: pivotal roles recruited to in compliance & repairs: Phase 2 will be a comprehensive

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						review, and currently scoping HR requirements for review.
H6	Agree a Corporate Vision and Values and ensure that this is reflected and fully embedded within Housing. Ensure a 'golden thread' approach exists so that the Corporate Strategy feeds into the Housing Strategy, and in turn, feeds into team plans and Appraisal Targets	December 24	11 and 12	Assistant Director of Strategy & Corporate Services	Corporate Strategy, 23 July Council	Values discussion featured at all housing staff event June 2024 and embedded into performance appraisals
H7	Introduce a performance culture. Ensure all housing staff have regular 121s, annual appraisals, with clear work-based and behavioural targets, with 6 monthly reviews and development plans.	September 24	13 and 27	Assistant Director of Housing	n/a	Commenced, will align with Corporate performance management Meeting with Housing & HR – Learning & OD: 18 th September Housing service SharePoint site in development
H8	Undertake a skills and qualifications audit for the housing team and ensure that senior housing managers and housing executives hold professional qualifications and if they do not, support them to obtain these qualifications.	October 24	14 and 15	Assistant Director of Housing	n/a	New Housing Strategy & Enabling Manager leading this work
H9	Ensure all permanent jobs are reflected within the Establishment and match with the specified staffing budgets.	Completed	17	Assistant Director of Housing	n/a	
H10	HR and Housing Service Recruitment panel members to consider references as part of the recruitment process for permanent, agency and interim candidates. (HR to retain references on file for 2 years)	Completed	18	Assistant Director of Housing	n/a	This is now standard.
Governance and culture						
Ref	Actions and status	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update
H11	Develop a skills requirement audit that identifies the minimum levels of procurement and financial management knowledge required for roles across the organisation, with an associated training programme to help all staff in relevant roles meet the requirements.	Training to be complete Dec 24	20	Assistant Director of Strategy & Corporate Services	n/a	Initial discussions with HR. New Housing Strategy & Enabling Manager leading on work.
H12	Engender a 'no blame' learning culture within a framework of staff taking personal accountability and responsibility and within a performance culture.	July 24	25	Assistant Director of Housing	n/a	Open discussions at Housing Away Day. Updated Corporate Whistleblowing Policy which has been embedded into Housing practices.

Guildford Borough Council: Housing Improvement Plan

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H13	Encourage staff to come forward with continuous improvements, innovation and creativity whilst adhering to Good Governance and following due process.	July 24	26	Assistant Director of Housing	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Away morning: June • Housing Volunteers group & engagement with Housing workstream leads for ideas. • Improvement Champions Group for staff to be involved with wider council improvements. • Housing away afternoon – October • Feedback part of 1:1s & appraisals
NEW Page 15	Review and update our terms of reference for Housing-related Boards and Group meetings	Jan 2025		Assistant Director of Housing	CLB Hot Topics 09/09/24 (internal)	<p>Terms of reference for the following groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Operations Board (Executive Working Group) • Tenant Engagement Group (constitution, not formal TOR) • Agreed 09/09/24: Corporate Health and Safety Group: to include Asbestos, Fire Safety, Legionella
Finance, Budget & the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)						
Ref	Actions and status	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update

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H14	Ensure the team follow, comply, monitor and report on procurement, contract procedure and financial rules in all work areas. Ensure all reports requesting investment, major procurement and financial expenditure include a robust business case. Ensure the HRA, Capital and General Fund (Housing) revenue budgets have detailed breakdowns. Ensure there are inbuilt financial checks and balances, with Purchase Order and procurement monitoring.	June 24 December 24	6, 28, 29, 31, 32, 34 and 57	Assistant Director of Housing	Housing Operations Board: HRA Business Plan and budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up monthly budget monitoring meetings Shared contract and procedure rules Identified in staff appraisals to attend required training. Procurement training for Housing Staff Procurement Awareness incl. Contract Procedure Rules: October 1st Procurement Act Workshop - Housing training: October 8th
H15	Ensure sufficient HRA experienced Accountants support the Housing Service.	September 24	30		n/a	Savills re-procurement completed July 24 Meeting with Savills 23 rd September on HRA business plan review and training to appropriate staff
H16	Recruit permanent procurement staff.	September 24	33		TBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Interim Head of Procurement started June 24. Housing service has dedicated procurement resource within corporate procurement. Permanent staff will be part of the Finance team structure review- delayed until after October
NEW	Review Housing GF budgets to ensure correct appropriation between GF and HRA. Move predominantly HRA budget areas into HRA. Where services are provided to other council services, these budgets are managed and commissioned by the service.	April 2025		TBC	Housing Operations Board: HRA Business Plan and budget	Agreed at Housing service budget challenge session – September 2024. Work with Finance & Housing will be ongoing for next April.

Guildford Borough Council: Housing Improvement Plan

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Back-log of Voids (Empty Properties)						
Ref	Actions	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update
H17	The inspections pre and post-works to be undertaken by Guildford Borough Council surveyors. Appoint permanent surveyors	December 24	37 and 38	Assistant Director of Housing		All works over £1000 post-inspected. Ongoing challenges with surveyor recruitment.
H18	Undertake a service review of the key to key void process with cost benchmarking and best practice.	December 24	39 and 40			Initial meetings taken pace. Exploring options for independent facilitator to support service review.
Leaseholds and Leaseholders						
Ref	Actions	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update
H19	To review leaseholder regulations and services and prepare for new Leasehold Reform Bill. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process map the work of the leasehold team; so that new members of staff clearly understand what needs to be done, and where files are stored, etc. Comprehensive leasehold review to be scoped. Including refresh processes, clear roles and responsibilities and ensure adhered to processes 	December 24	41, 42, 44, 45 and 46	Assistant Director of Housing		Leasehold lead attended leasehold reform awareness session to develop future responsibilities.
H20	Ensure appropriate accountancy support for Leaseholder Service Charges. An accountant with financial responsibility for Leasehold Service Charges.	September 24	43	Assistant Director of Finance		Leasehold lead working with Finance and created a service charge project team.
H21	To undertake an audit and review of all HRA leasehold property let to RPs and charities. Will establish leasehold register, review earlier communication/decisions and confirm next steps.	September 24	47, 48, 49	Assistant Director of Housing		In progress.
North Downs Housing and other Local Authority Companies						
Ref	Actions and status	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update
H22	Undertake a review of North Downs Housing.	July 2024 Ongoing	50, 51	Strategic Director Housing, Communities & Environment	Executive Shareholder and Trusts Committee	Paper on NDH: Executive Shareholder and Trusts committee 8 August

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Next steps for the committee: Procurement of a suitably qualified company to carry out a review into the most effective governance structure of North Downs Housing Review includes a detailed options appraisal into the future operation of NDH – including options to wind up the company or to continue operations in a commercially viable manner
Compliance & Decision Making						
Ref	Actions and status	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update
H23	Ensure Key Decision reports concerning contracts are presented to the Executive for decision and appear on the Forward Plan.	May 2024	52	Assistant Director of Housing	Forward Plan for Guildford	Housing Managers monitoring procurement and contract renewals Housing SMT forward plan developed to map report pathways.
H24	Prepare for the Procurement Act 2024.	September 24	54	Assistant Director of Finance		New Head of Procurement in post, drafting Corporate Procurement Strategy. Procurement Training for Housing staff. Training will include housing related contract case study. Housing staff involved in the drafting of new Procurement toolkit for staff. Procurement created Commercial Network for all staff.

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						Procurement Act 2023 is delayed until 24 February 2025, but the council will not delay its preparations.
H25	Ensure that Urgency Powers are only used in exceptional circumstances and that the Strategic Director for Housing ensures that the Monitoring Officer agrees that the Urgency Powers are warranted on a case-by-case basis and that there is full constitutional compliance.	May 2024	55	Strategic Director Housing, Communities & Environment		
H26	Ensure that all Procurement requirements are followed, and that Housing works closely with the Corporate Procurement Team and Legal Services.	May 2024	6 and 56	Assistant Director of Housing		Regular meetings with Housing & Procurement.
H27	Set out Planned Housing Works with associated costs reviewed quarterly for progress on planned works and actual to projected costs.	March 25	58	Assistant Director of Housing		Developed a draft planned works programme, and will form part of HRA review.
Housing Software Systems						
Ref	Actions and status	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update
H28 Page 19	Upgrade the Housing Software System and ensure it interfaces with the Corporate Finance System, Business World and Housing Applications	2027	61	Strategic Director Housing, Communities & Environment	TBC	Project mandate in draft for housing senior management review. After this, it will be circulated to various teams for comment: ICT, Procurement, Legal, Finance, Strategy & Performance.
Complaints						
Ref	Actions and status	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update
H29	Clarify and review the Complaints Process ensuring it is a simple and clear process, which puts customers at its heart.	Complete	63	Assistant Director of Communications & Customer Services	Adopted by Chief Executive in consultation with lead councillor 24.04.24	Complaints Policy updated in April 2024, in line with HO code.
H30	Analyse complaints and identify themes; so that service and policy improvements can be made.	June 24	64	Assistant Director of Housing	Annual complaints report: Housing Operations Board 31.07	Review complete and service improvements identified

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Agency Staff						
Ref	Actions and status	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update
H31	Review recruitment, induction and management of all agency staff. To ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the relevant software system (Business World) flags when contracts should be reviewed. all agency staff have the references, relevant and necessary qualifications and experience all agency staff disclose if related to or know existing permanent and/or agency staff and councillors all staff policies apply to agency and permanent staff. 	June 24	65, 66, 67 and 68	Assistant Director of Strategy & Corporate Services	n/a	HR review on agency staff Agency staff do follow key policies as part of induction. Relationship policy now in place.
Housing Data, Corporate Property & HRA Land Data						
Ref	Actions and status	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update
H32 Page 20	To ensure all HRA land and assets are documented and listed.	March 25	70 and 71	Assistant Director of Housing		Asset management strategy project mandate is drafted and with internal stakeholders for comment. Initiated work with Procurement & initial market engagement with suppliers.
H33	Housing to liaise with Corporate Assets and Property Team to ensure that maintenance & repairs of Housing garages and Housing car parks are undertaken by the most effective and appropriate services	December 24	72	Assistant Director of Housing		Started – planning stage
Preparation for and Compliance with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2024						
Ref	Actions and status	By when?	SOLACE Para	Owner	Governance Mapping	RAG & progress update
H34	Prepare for and comply with the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. Develop data management, improvement plan and processes to adhere to legislative and regulatory requirements with reference to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RSH consumer standards H&S compliance, Tenant Satisfaction Measures Building Safety compliance 	Spring 2024 Ongoing	53, 73, 74 and 76	Assistant Director of Housing		Housing Away Morning June 24, October 24. HQN conducting external assessment against Consumer Standards.

Guildford Borough Council: Housing Improvement Plan

19 September 2024

Key: Completed/in place, On track, Not Started

						Following RJ, ongoing engagement with the Regulator of Social Housing to meet standards.
H35	Strengthen and document engagement with tenants and broaden and refresh the representation of TEG (The Tenant Engagement Group).	July 24 (now ongoing)	75	Assistant Director of Housing	Tenant Engagement Group	3 TEG sessions have taken place: Introduction to Improvement Plan, vision for TEG & 3 year plan. Shared Regulatory Judgement with TEG. TEG receive monthly email updates on Improvement Plan TEG Constitution in place
H36	Consider commissioning a Social Housing Management Peer, or independent Review for Consumer Standards.	Completed	77	Assistant Director of Housing		HQN conducting external assessment against Consumer Standards

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Guildford Borough Council

Report to: Housing Operations Board

Date: 25 September 2024

Ward(s) affected: All

Report of Strategic Director of: Housing, Communities & Environment

Report Author: Annalisa Howson, Assistant Director of Housing Guildford and Waverley.

Email: annalisa.howson@guildford.gov.uk

Lead Executive Member: Cllr Julia McShane

Email: Julia.McShane@guildford.gov.uk

Status: Open

Key decision: No

Voids Management – Progress Report

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The report provides members of the board with background relating to the status of void ¹properties and sets out the actions taken to reorganise the management of voids following the loss of staff and contractors in September 2023.
- 1.2 Providing safe good quality homes to residents in housing need is fundamental to the Council. The housing team's ability to deliver this service was severely impacted by the loss of staff and contractors last year.
- 1.3 The report details the current position regarding the increased number of voids that have arisen and describes the approach that will be undertaken by Housing Services to reduce this number and to reduce the average number of days that properties are vacant over the next twelve months.

¹ The time period when a council property is unoccupied, following the end of one tenancy and the commencement of another.

- 1.4 The report also recommends that the Board should receive regular updates to monitor the progress made by officers to manage and reduce the level of voids.

2.0 Recommendation to Housing Operations Board

That the Housing Operations Board resolves:

- 2.1 To note the contents of the report and to support the approach that is being taken by officers to reduce the number and turnaround times of void properties.
- 2.2 To identify any areas for comment or further exploration.
- 2.3 To make any recommendations to senior management or the Portfolio Holders for Housing.
- 2.4 To receive progress reports in relation to the performance of reducing void numbers, turnaround times and tenant satisfaction.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Council has a duty to effectively manage and maintain Council homes.
- 3.2 The reduction in void turnaround times is a key driver to meeting housing need and maximising rental income to support the delivery of services.

4.0 Status of Report

- 4.1 This report is an open report.
- 4.2 For the purpose of transparency, the activity within the report is 'live' and any data offered will vary weekly, if not daily. Any information offered within the report is based on data available from 2 September 2024.

5.0 Strategic Priorities

- 5.1 The management of the void process relates to the Council's Corporate Strategy 2024-2034 in a number of ways. There is the contribution to a well-managed Council that delivers decent and affordable homes as part of a resilient well managed council that contributes towards the sustainable, prosperous, and inclusive borough.
- 5.2 The effective management of the Housing Revenues Account (HRA) Housing Stock, contributes to the Council's wider Housing Strategy in meeting the Borough housing needs, alongside having a direct impact on the cost associated to homelessness.

6.0 Background

- 6.1 Delivery of the HRA empty homes (voids), from their becoming empty to being relet, is a cross functional activity embracing a number of teams within the housing function, with the Housing Property team playing a key role within the delivery of the process.
- 6.2 Following the investigations into the alleged Housing Fraud, a number of the Housing Property staff were released from the council's employment. Part of the duties of those released was the management of the voids process. After this initial action, further staff within the property team left the organisation, resulting in there being no link to any of the previous Void service activity within the property services team.
- 6.3 Subsequent investigations into the activities of these staff led to the termination of the service contract in place to deliver both Planned and Void works.
- 6.4 Further qualitative and quantitative assessments of the works that had been undertaken under this contract, exposed serious concerns of both inferior and on occasions, unnecessary works. It was revealed significant issues where some empty properties had kitchens and bathrooms removed, together with central heating systems for no

apparent reason, leaving these units in a poor state of repair and requiring extensive works to bring them to a lettable standard.

- 6.5 Investigations into the processes used by those under investigation, exposed that other third-party suppliers were operating out of contract, and on occasions, the works undertaken had either not been completed or done to a poor standard. As a result of these investigations, all relationships with third party suppliers undertaking void works under the auspices of the previous members of the property team were ceased.
- 6.6 Following the investigation the housing team's initial focus was to ensure the health and safety of current tenants. Resources were focused on assessing and arranging compliance works to meet legislative and regulatory requirements.
- 6.6 The above actions, led the Borough Housing Repairs Team (BHRT), better understood as the Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) of the council, being the only vehicle available to deliver void works. Under its present operating structure, the BHRT's directly employed workforce is supplemented by several specialists subcontracted Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to support the day-to-day service. These subcontractors were asked to increase their capacity to enable them to take on further works and assist in the delivery of the void process. To date this support continues and the BHRT has been able to deal with a variety of minor and medium sized voids and working closely with the remaining and new members of the Property Services team, have provided a steady throughput of properties available for letting.
- 6.7 It was also identified that whilst the BHRT have performed admirably in sustaining a steady delivery of homes available to let over the last six months. To avoid any long-term impact on its primary purpose of delivering the day-to-day responsive repair service, an external contractor was needed to work alongside the BHRT to support and deliver a number of voids presently held, with a focus on some of the properties requiring significant works.
- 6.8 In recognition of this immediate and urgent requirement, a short-term piece of procurement has taken place, engaging a contractor for 12 months with a contract value of £700,000. Regrettably this

process has taken longer than anticipated due to internal capacity challenges. The newly engaged contractor will commence void delivery in October following a mobilisation period to agree the approach and strategy.

- 6.9 The fundamental review of the existing voids revealed a number of properties subjected to major works in various stages of completion. The approach agreed to legislate for properties within this category is to treat them as legacy voids requiring major works. These properties will be batched and procured as a single project piece to avoid the diversion of labour away from General Need voids.
- 6.10 A further long-term voids contract is currently in development, for 2025 onwards and will be subject to the normal procurement process. In addition, a further procurement to undertake the substantial works required to the 15 properties mentioned in 6.7 above is also being progressed.

6.11 Contextual Data

Number of Lettings

The table below provides an overview of lettings and types of letting over the past two years and the performance 2 September 2024.

Year	Secure lettings²	Non-secure lettings³	Housing Association lettings⁴	Annual total
2022/23	241	31	153	425
2023/24	148	25	176	349
01/04/24 to 02/09/24	71	11	33 (70 nominations waiting tenancy start dates)	185

Whilst this report focuses on the delivery of the empty properties owned by GBC for relet, it should be noted that the Allocations team nominate and offer properties to let from other housing providers. Having a reasonable supply line from these suppliers, the council

² Permanent council homes let on introductory, flexible and/or secure tenancy.

³ Temporary accommodation to homelessness or decant applicants.

⁴ Council has nomination rights to affordable housing developed in the borough.

have been able to maintain a steady delivery of housing to our client base.

- 6.11 There are several factors that affect the volume of voids let in any one year, but anecdotally the average number of lets for GBC stock is circa 230 units a year. This does indicate that during the period under investigation, there was a short fall of properties being made available to let. Appendix 1 indicates the duration the pre properties have been void, with evidence that there were a significant number of properties void at the time of the original staff dismissal.
- 6.12 Based on a 'normal' volume of GBC properties let in any one year, we would expect to see approximately five properties a week managed through the lettings process. The present staffing structure is designed for this volume and as can be seen in appendices the numbers of properties pipelined and forecasted as being ready-to-let, far exceeds this established capacity. Whilst this resourcing issue has been identified and efforts are being made to increase the present resources, attracting suitably skilled staff to meet the demands of this level of workflow is proving extremely challenging.

7.0 CURRENT POSTION

- 7.1 In identifying the present position of the voids within the HRA housing stock, it is important to offer some context of the data and the numbers being offered.
- 7.2. The council's transfer policy facilitates the aspirations of our tenants to occupy a property that is suitable for their needs, and this level of mobility often leads to the letting of an empty property, by creating another. This is what is colloquially referred to as the "resultant voids' and makes projecting future void numbers challenging.
- 7.3 It can be difficult to the expected number of empty homes. Tenancies are ended for a variety of reasons including moves to another tenure, move to another social home, move to care homes or when the tenant passes away.
- 7.4 As of the 2 September 2024 the total number of voids 278 reported in appendix 1 are identified in three classifications: -

- **Voids waiting occupation.**
- **Operational Void works**
- **Structural, long term or Strategic voids**

7.5 In line with the investigations outlined above in section 6, it has been established that there were several properties already void before the officers previously connected to the service were removed from their posts. Whilst some of these properties have subsequently been progressed and let over the last nine months, it has resulted in an excessive number of properties appearing as void at this moment in time. These are now often referred to as legacy voids, but for the purpose of the report, these have been amalgamated into one of the above categories.

7.6 The subsequent analysis detailed in appendix 1 relates to those voids categorised as 'voids waiting occupation 'or 'operational void works only as described in 7.4.

7.7 Appendix 2 provides the board with the proposed timeline for future works delivery with Appendix 3 providing commentary on the resultant void projections.

8.0 Future Approach

8.1 Given the implications of the housing investigation into the alleged fraud and the termination of the contract with the principal contractor providing the previous work stream, the housing service has had to adopt a short, medium, and long-term approach to the management of voids.

8.2 The minor works voids have to date been undertaken by the DLO, while a short-term voids contractor was selected through a procurement exercise. This has taken longer than expected.

8.3 The DLO will collaborate with the appointed contractor and will focus on minor works voids whilst the contractor will undertake works to voids requiring major works. It is anticipated that based upon the average cost of each of the major works void that the contractor will be able to turnaround circa 75 voids within the contract sum, whilst

the DLO will deliver the balance of the remaining voids over the same duration.

- 8.4 The future strategy is to appoint a long-term Voids contractor over a five-year period, with built in review periods that will be managed under a performance management framework. At the same time, the 15 properties where complete refurbishment will be required will be subject to a separate procurement exercise.

9.0 Consultation

- 9.1 There has been significant consultation with members following the housing investigation into the alleged fraud and the members are being kept updated on the actions emanating from the Housing Improvement Plan that has been developed following the recommendation of the SOLACE report.
- 9.2 As part of the future long-term delivery of the voids, (TEG) Tenant Engagement Group will be asked to assist with the development of the 'void standard' and a new tenant satisfaction survey.
- 9.3 In future regular progress reports will be presented to this board to review and track the trajectory of progress.

10.0 Key Risks

- 10.1 Loss of rental income – this will impact on the delivery of the day-to-day services to tenants and leaseholders.
- 10.2 Failure to deliver void properties within agreed targets – this will have an impact on meeting housing need that will impact ability to tackle homelessness and moves for tenants requiring larger or smaller accommodation.
- 10.3 Empty properties are at risk of attracting Anti-social behaviour and risk of squatting.

10.4 Reputational risk of not meeting the Corporate Strategy objectives - The 2024- 2034 strategy has a particular focus on the council providing decent and affordable homes.

11.0 Legal and Governance Implications

11.1 The Council has a legal obligation to ensure that the housing it provides meets health and safety requirements.

11.2 All contracts required to deliver on the recommendations in the report will be procured in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and robust contract management will be put in place.

12.0 Financial Implications

12.1 The effective management of void properties contributes to the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan in terms of maximising income and making effective use of capital and revenue resources to maintain and improve the Council's housing stock.

13.0 Human Resources Implications

13.1 There are no specific Human Resources implications as the proposal is to use external contractors and this will have a positive impact on the current DLO.

14.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

14.1 An EIA is not considered to be required at this time however, as the project progresses, an EIA will be completed and submitted as part of on the ongoing review of voids performance to the Board.

15.0 Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

15.1 The council as part of the Corporate Strategy is committed to reducing Net Zero Carbon and within the Housing Revenue Account

Business Plan, Housing Services will be setting out the approach to meeting central government targets by 2050. As this plan evolves and the scope of how this will be achieved becomes known, the void period for remedial works may again become more protracted as further upgrade works are needed to meet these targets.

- 15.2 The incoming contractor is striving to contribute towards the corporate targets and demonstrated support initiatives on other non-Guildford contracts in relation to recycling, reducing carbon emission and community projects. The DLO is working to the corporate requirements meet the commitments in relation to the delivery of its service.

16.0 Next Steps

- 16.1 As part of the Housing Improvement Plan the review of the void management process will lead to a more streamlined process that will reduce the respective times within the elements of the process. This will be in conjunction with the weekly Voids and Allocation meetings to monitor and track progress of void properties, together with the ongoing meetings with the DLO and the short-term contractor to ensure that there is effective communication with all parties.

- 16.2 The procurement of the long-term Operational Void works contract is a key component of the strategy to reduce void numbers as there is a return to the traditional number of void properties post the implications of the fraud. In tandem will be additional procurement of the Structural, long term or Strategic voids. Further progress reports will be provided to this Board to track progress and to review and challenge as appropriate.

- 16.3 Work with TEG on Void Standard and new tenant satisfaction survey.

17.0 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Outstanding Number of Void Properties Analysis

Appendix 2 - Proposed timeline for future works delivery

Appendix 3 - Resultant void projections

Report clearance progress:

Your report will not be published by democratic services unless the below is completed and there is evidence of the correct clearance process.

This box must not be deleted and will be published with the report.

Finance	Louise Kolmar	19 September 2024
Legal & Governance	Claire Beesly	19 September 2024
Human Resources	Ali Holman	18 September 2024
Equalities	Francesca Chapman	18 September 2024
Strategic Director	Julian Higson	19 September 2024

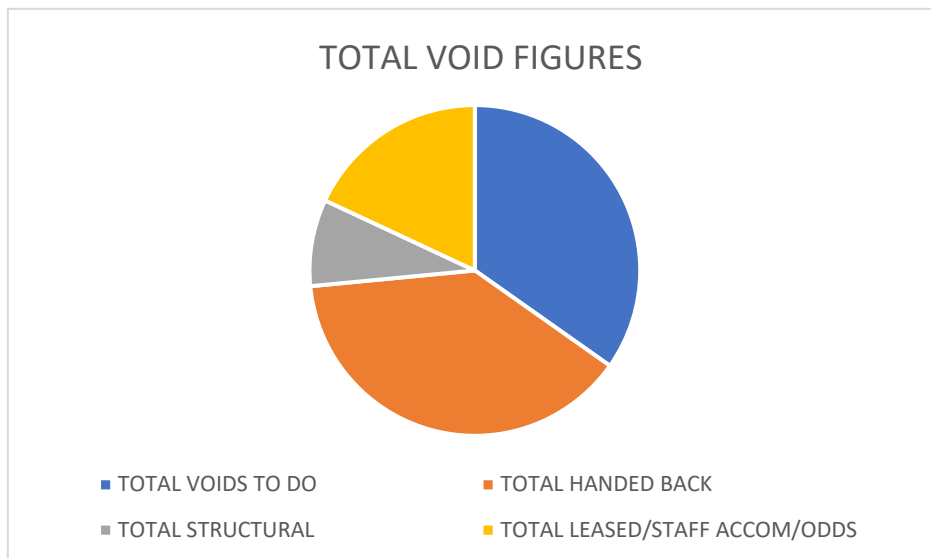
Appendix 1

Outstanding number of void properties

The following data is all taken as a snapshot in time from a base data on the 2 September 2024. As the activity of void management is a responsive and continuous activity, subsequent use of comparative data may not be appropriate.

The following offers the present void status in line with the commentary offered in item 7.4.

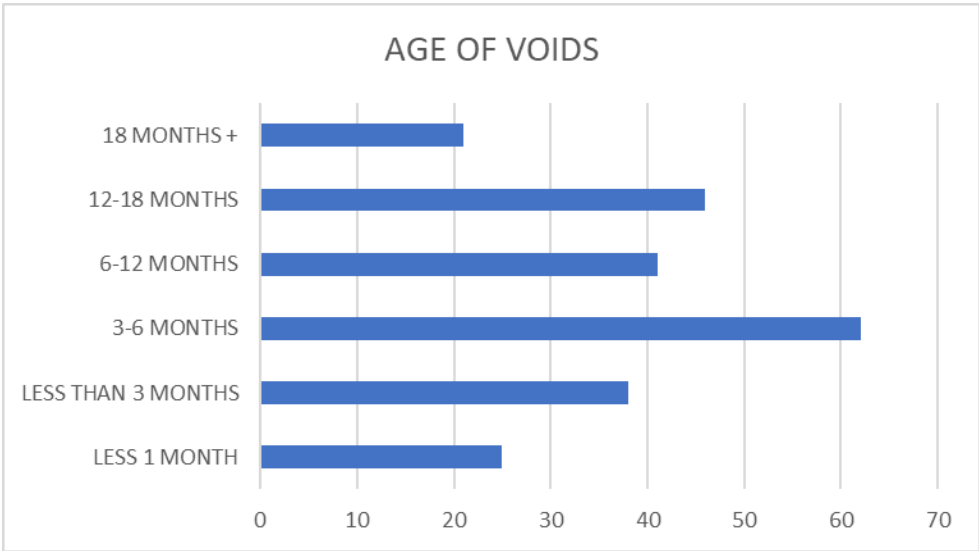
Operational Void works	Voids waiting occupation	Structural voids	TOTAL
165	68	[45]	233 [278]



Time void

The length of time the 233 properties identified within the categories **Operational Void works** and **Voids waiting Occupation**, can be broken down as follows –

LESS 1 MONTH	LESS THAN 3 MONTHS	3-6 MONTHS	6-12 MONTHS	12-18 MONTHS	18 MONTHS +
25	38	62	41	48	21



From the above, 69 of these properties or 29%, were void prior to September 2023.

Appendix 2

Proposed timeline for future works delivery

As part of the need to forecast volumes and resources, the future time required to complete voids works for the those in the category of **Operational Void works**, has been analysed with the following result.

Target of lets per period.

1 month	3 months	6 months	12 months	Longer
6	85	42	8	24



Whilst it is assumed the short term targets will be delivered within the present contracted resources, the longer term issues need to be addressed through the future procurements outlined in item 8.4. Within these targets it shows that there will be a reduction of nearly 50% of those voids presently defined as **Operational Void works**, to the status of being ready to let and passed to the Allocations team for allocation.

The contracted delivery of these numbers has been established, resourcing the management process to ensure that the qualitative assessments can be completed to ensure that the required standards are being met, has proved more challenging.

Going forward, if these targets are met, the volume of ready let properties will result in a spike of unprecedented volume and pressure on the Allocations team. It could also unbalance the present letting process, with

clients having a level of choice which could create the false impression of our future capacity in meeting housing demand. Both these factors will need careful management and again, further short term resourcing.

Appendix 3

Resultant void projections

As identified in item 7.2, one of the main aims of the Allocations Scheme is to afford residents a level of mobility as their housing needs change. As a result, in many cases the letting of a home results in the creation of a void, as tenants transfer from one GBC home to another. There are a number of variables that can impact the level of new arising voids making it difficult to predict through any exact process.

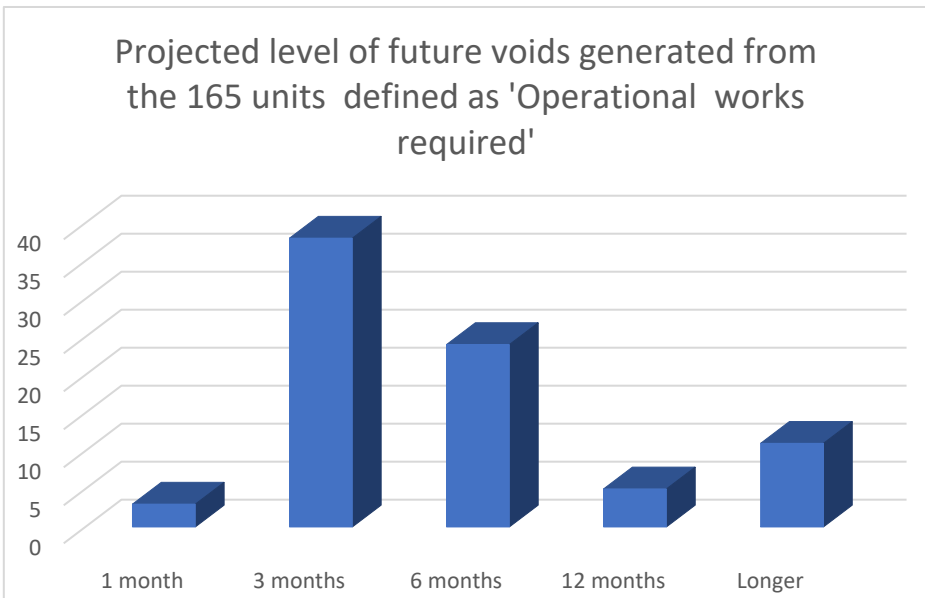
However, to try and offer members some context to this issue, officers have used their experience to apply a factor based on property types to enable some level of forecasting of the 160 units that fall within the operational Void works criteria. For transparency these factors are as follows -

Property type	Factor	Explanation
Bedsit	0%	These general needs properties are normally entry level units where the tenant will originate from the housing register, therefore not generating a new void
Sheltered flats	75%	It assumed that occupants of a sheltered scheme will be downsizing from a larger property the remaining voids are let to applicants living with family, in private rented accommodation or are owner occupiers.
1 bedroom properties	20%	Whilst the majority of our one bedroom general needs units are normally entry level properties, however ground floor flats and 1 Bedroom bungalows also contribute to meet the need of those looking to downsize or who have disability need.
2 bedroom properties	50%	These can be seen as a step from GBC 1 bed units, but also attract an entry level to our properties for a number of private rented that are looking to move into social housing due to expanding families
3 bedroom properties	100%	Will normally be as result of transfer from another GBC property

4 bedroom properties	100%	Will normally be as result of transfer from another GBC property
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Applying the above factors against the relevant property types within the **Operational Void works** around the of predicted returns the new arising voids will be as follows: -

1 month	3 months	6 months	12 months	Longer
3	38	24	5	11



Reviewing the predicted arising new void level, an anticipated 81 new voids will be the result of letting the 165 units that form the bulk of the backlog of our void properties, or a factor of 50%.

If we were to assume this factor is consistent and apply it to the 68 properties that are defined as awaiting occupation and assume these are let over the next quarter alongside all those predicted a being ready to let, we would expect to generate a further 75 properties as void over the same quarter.

This is whilst looking to let 159 properties. So, whilst projecting reducing the number units from the present void total in the next quarter by approximately 68%, due to the arising new voids factor, it will in fact only be a reduction of 49% in the actual number of voids within the system.

Agenda item number: 8

HOUSING OPERATIONS BOARD – FORWARD PLAN

SUBJECT	DECISION TO BE TAKEN	STATUS	KEY DECISION (YES/NO)	CONSULTATION (WHO)	RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	CONTACT OFFICER	TIMESCALE/FREQUENCY
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Draw up Terms of Reference (ToRs) ▪ Define clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of members ▪ Appoint Chair, Secretary and members ▪ Attendance tracking mechanisms and monitoring to drive representation in line with ToRs ▪ Delegation arrangements, including retention of accountability ▪ Procedures to escalate and remediate issues ▪ Documentation standards including demonstrability of challenge and fulfilment of responsibilities ▪ Consideration of specific regulatory requirements surrounding governance; independence, segregation of duties and conflicts management 	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Completed – See ToR</p> <p>Completed – See ToR</p>					
HOB Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Frequency ▪ How – online, face to face ▪ Timing in the cycle ▪ Venue ▪ Minutes (who) ▪ Invited speakers 	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p>			ToRs		<p>Every 8 weeks (Excl Aug/Dec)</p> <p>As required</p>
Reporting - General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What reports are required ▪ Timeframes ▪ Produce a template for all reports ▪ Who is responsible for production of the reports ▪ Who will collate and circulate the reports 	<p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p> <p>Completed</p>					<p>See ToR</p> <p>See ToR</p> <p>TBC</p> <p>See ToR</p> <p>See ToR</p>
Reporting – Specific (What teams will report on)	<p>HRA Business Plan and budget (Julian/Annalisa)</p> <p>Housing Service Plan (Julian/Annalisa)</p> <p>Housing Improvement (Transformation) Plan progress reports (Julian/Annalisa)</p> <p>Strategic Review and development ; Housing Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and Housing Asset Management Strategy (Julian/Annalisa)</p> <p>Housing Repairs: (Ernie Gray)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decent Homes Standard ▪ 6 Areas of Health & Safety (Exception reporting) ▪ Capital Programme/Procurement Pipeline ▪ HRA Business Plan ▪ Legislative updates 						<p>Sept 2024</p>

SUBJECT	DECISION TO BE TAKEN	STATUS	KEY DECISION (YES/NO)	CONSULTATION (WHO)	RELEVANT DOCUMENTS	CONTACT OFFICER	TIMESCALE/ FREQUENCY
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvement Plan ▪ Stock Condition Survey ▪ Leaseholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ s.20 ○ service charges ○ arrears Homelessness, Advice and Allocations: (Siobhan Kennedy) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Homelessness plan ▪ Rough sleepers Neighbourhood Housing: (Siobhan Rumble) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Grounds Maintenance ▪ Cleaning ▪ ASB ▪ Tenancy Audits ▪ Tenancy Sustainment ▪ Performance against Tenancy Standards Service Insight & Improvement: (Meena Lota) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of existing policies/introduction of new policies ▪ KPIs ▪ Complaints – including lessons learned, Housing Ombudsman self-assessment ▪ Tenant Satisfaction Measures ▪ Overall performance against regulatory Standards ▪ Matters relating to tenant scrutiny and challenge 						Sept 2024
	<p>Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voids 						Sept 2024