

VOID REFURBISHMENT PROCESS INFORMATION REPORT

Committee name	Property, Highways and Transport Select Committee
Officer reporting	Liam Bentley – Place Directorate Gary Penticost – Place Directorate
Papers with report	Appendix A – Hillingdon Void Standard Version 7
Ward	All

HEADLINES

The report has been prepared to provide councillors with details on the void refurbishment process and its key outputs to ensure residents are provided a safe, warm, and dry environment from commencement of their tenancy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Property, Highways and Transport Select Committee:

- 1. Notes the supporting information within the body of the report**
- 2. Notes the key outputs recorded within the performance section of the report**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The London Borough of Hillingdon undertakes void works to ensure when a dwelling is let for a new tenancy:

- It shall be in a clean and safe condition
- It will comply with government standards and
- It will be presented in a good condition.

The overriding principle is that the property should be safe in terms of the health and safety of the future occupants. All repairs relating to health and safety are to be carried out prior to occupation. In accordance with the Housing Health and Safety Rating Systems (HHSRS) contained within the Housing Act 2004, the property should be free from:

any deficiency that might give rise to a hazard which interferes with or puts at risk the health or safety or even the lives of the occupants.

To achieve this the service employs:

- 1x Void Manager
- 2x Void Co-Ordinators
- 3x Clerk of works (Inspectors)
- 4x Contractors to undertake all scheduled works

The Void Standard (Appendix 1) specifically addresses the following hazards (as categorised within HHSRS) but it is the responsibility of the Void Inspector to ensure that all identified hazards are appropriately dealt with before the property is let:

- Physiological (damp and mould growth, excess cold/heat)
- Pollutants (asbestos, carbon monoxide)
- Psychological (security, lighting)
- Hygiene (pests, food safety, sanitation, water supply, drainage)
- Protection against accidents (falls, electrical hazards, fire)

The Void Clerk of Works will complete a Health and Safety Checklist for each void during the void inspection and ensure that all Class 1 Hazards are addressed before occupation.

Electrical, gas and water/waste services are to be tested and gas safety certificates and NICEIC (National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting) electrical inspection certificates will be provided.

All systems for heating and hot water will receive standard checks for safety and effectiveness and

- Essential repairs to services are completed prior to letting
- All flues are checked
- All landlords' gas appliances will receive an annual gas safety inspection (once connection arranged by the tenant).

All void properties will have an asbestos survey (refurbishment) carried out to all areas, in line with the Asbestos Management Plan (AMP). Where either Amosite or Crocidolite is identified or any damaged asbestos of any kind, removal will be arranged as required by the AMP.

Inspection stage – Take on and sign off

Each void is inspected by LBH (London Borough of Hillingdon) employed inspectors (Void Clerk of works) who undertake a thorough inspection of the property to ensure:

- The Health and Safety Check will be undertaken
- All repairs required prior to occupation will be raised (and marked as rechargeable where appropriate)
- All remedial work carried out should be documented (including before and after photos) and retained for future reference.
- All outstanding work should be recorded on the habitable certificate and orders raised (on assess). Voids Coordinator/Repairs Planners will make appointments with the tenant on sign up.

Following the inspection, the Void will be assigned with a void category of either standard or non-decent which has various subcategories to guide contractors on the agreed process for each type. For more details on void categories please see appendix 1 Void Standard V7. It is worth noting that currently over 50% of voids are assessed as non-decent due to the disrepair they are in at the point of return. This is due to many reasons such as lack of planned works replacement investment as well as lack of care by previous residents.

The void Co-ordinator will upload and create a confirmed works order ticket capturing works highlighted within the void inspection and passed to the relevant contractor.

The void inspector will monitor works as it progresses including reviewing, approving any additional works requests, and ensuring quality of works are maintained and will confirm if works have been completed to the expected standard.

Hillingdon is unique in that it controls the whole void process from start to finish, where other local authorities allow contractors to specify works. This means we have greater control on ownership, quality, and costs.

**Before and after of a non-decent Void
Kitchen Renewal: 482 Victoria Road**

Before:



After:



Bathroom:

Before:



After:



Garden Clearance: 67 Haig Road

Before:



After:

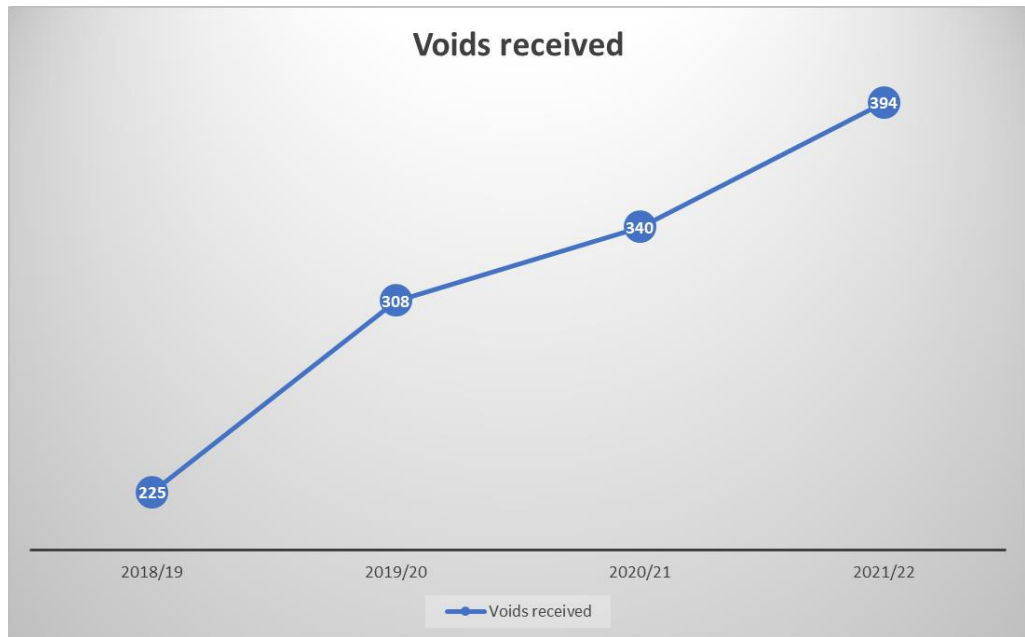


PERFORMANCE DATA

Within a 6-month period (April to September 22) Voids have received 394 voids, this is a 75% increase on demand when compared to pre-pandemic (2018/19) levels where the service had received 225 voids within the same comparable period.

This trend of increase has continued during and subsequently continued following the pandemic, the below chart shows the same 6-month period from 2018 to 2022:

Graph depicting trend of rising demand over a 4-year period:

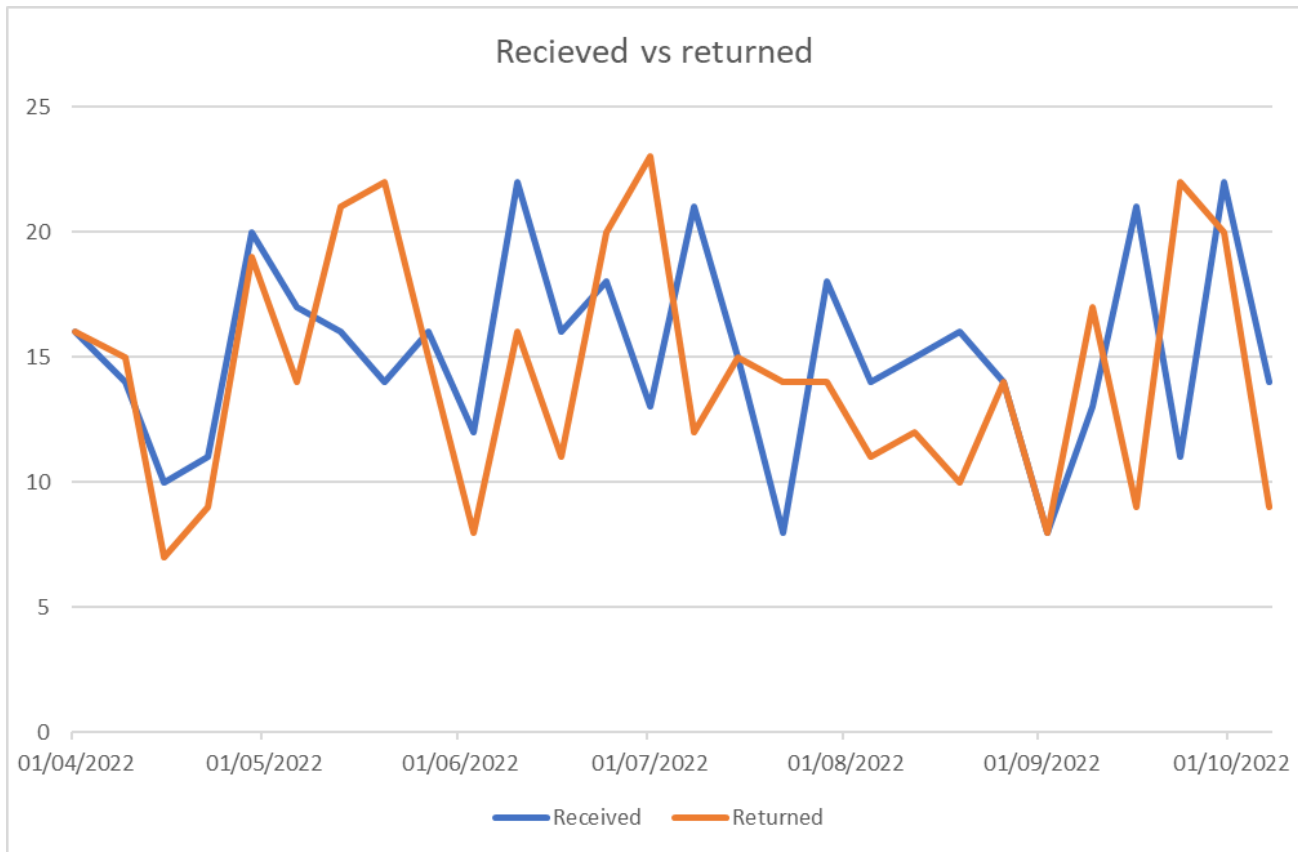


Comparatively, the service has managed to meet the overall increase in demand with a rise in productivity of 69%, this has been achieved by increasing the group of subcontractors to 4 instead of the 2 previously used. With 42 voids returned over a previous two weeks (WE 23rd & 30th)

	Totals
Total Voids issued	394
Total Voids Completed	378
Total Standard Voids Completed	136
% standard/minor voids repairs turnaround within 10 working days	83.24%

Return vs received

Regarding returned voids vs received voids; voids always run with latent output, in other words if 9-11 voids are received two weeks prior then that return output is passed back two weeks later dependant on the void type, currently 62% of voids with the service are of a non-decent standard with 56% of that number allocated as short term lets. This returned void trend has continued, however has been disrupted of late due to a previous backlog of works which has now been cleared with all voids being allocated to a contractor. 22 voids are forecast for this week's returns (WE 14th).



Noted delays

Current issues causing delays to void turn around; one of which was an unforeseen issue from the fuel cost of living crisis which has only become apparent recently and discussed at the voids management group 6th October. At void take on the electric meters often need debt clearance for large scale works to commence as it is not always safe to utilise generators due to non-adequate venting of exhaust fumes creating a safety risk. To clear this debt, void co-ordinator's need to contact the relevant energy company to arrange clearance, however with greater number of members of the public making contact to provide meter readings there have been waits of up to 8hrs to get through to a call handler. There are hopes that this is a temporary issue, however the voids management group are looking to explore a quicker approach whether that means having a dedicated top up app per property with one dedicated supplier or a single point of contact to arrange debt clearance.

Previous delay issues: contractors working on behalf of the service employ a migratory workforce, traditionally this means that majority of their employees spend the month of August and Christmas with family abroad. This means a significant decline in outputs during this time creating a backlog of works and previously had a severe impact on void turnaround times. This impact was reduced by bringing in two additional supporting contractors which has mitigated most of the delays previously experienced. However, the Service is mindful that over these periods there were still significant delays due to the continued high demand over the holiday season. The service is looking to review options on how to remove this risk all together. With options on contractors bringing in a contractual staggered annual leave entitlement or creating an internal resource pool meaning greater control on annual leave entitlement.

RESIDENT BENEFIT

The approach of the council is by working in tandem with other departments in line with our policies on Void Property Management. Void refurbishment presents an opportunity for the Council to ensure the property is safe and free from any hazards while also meeting statutory requirements prior to new residents starting a tenancy. Often it presents the best possible time to carry out overdue planned maintenance works such as Boiler/heating upgrades, Kitchen replacement, Bathroom replacements, Window and door replacements, passive and non-passive ventilation, and electrical upgrades such as installation of fire rated fuse boards. This ensures that the Council is striving to make positive contributions towards the sustainability of our communities and ensures that properties allocated, meet acceptable standards to ensure that rent loss through vacant housing is minimised.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.