

Report to	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	9 th May 2024
Lead Member / Officer	Lead member for Housing and Communities, Councillor Rhys Thomas
Head of Service	Head of Housing and Communities Service, Liz Grieve
Report author	Lead Officer: Housing Property, Mark Cassidy
Title	Housing Maintenance Voids Process

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1. The report and presentation will inform members of the current voids process, the challenges faced and budgetary pressures.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1. To provide information regarding the Housing Maintenance Voids Process
- 2.2. Void property management is a critical aspect of property management that involves the effective handling of properties that are temporarily vacant between tenancies. This scrutiny report aims to allow members to evaluate the void property management processes and procedures employed by Housing Maintenance to ensure efficiency, security, and compliance with relevant regulations and standards.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1. That the Committee notes the report contents.
- 3.2. That Committee challenge and share its views on this report and the voids process.

- 3.3. That the Committee confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 1]) as part of its consideration.

4. Report details

- 4.1. A 'void' can be defined as a property, which does not have a current, sitting tenant. There are many reasons why voids occur. Sometimes a property may be awaiting a new tenant; or a previous tenant may have given notice and vacated the property.
- 4.2. The Council's Housing Service manages and maintains circa 3,480 tenanted properties. Tenant movement results in approximately 220 properties becoming void annually (empty while new tenants are allocated).
- 4.3. In 2017 a new lettable standard was introduced, which transformed the way the department viewed the standard of the homes we let.
- 4.4. The Council takes this opportunity to refurbish the units to the new lettable standard resulting in expenditure in the region of £4M Million p/a. split between capital and revenue spend.
- 4.5. It is vital when dealing with the management process for void properties that void management is efficient and effective in order to:
- Reduce turnaround times to a minimum so that potential tenants can access properties quickly;
 - Maximise rental income by reducing rental loss by minimising void periods through good management;
 - Ensure void works are of a high quality, whilst driving cost down wherever possible; and
 - Ensure void property improvements are necessary, timely, sustainable, environmentally friendly and cost effective.
- 4.6. In recent times, the service budget has come under mounting pressures, either from the effects of Covid or changes in legislation. These pressures are detailed in Appendix 2.

4.7. A copy of the current Void standard is included in Appendix 2.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?

Sub-heading (delete as needed)

1. The theme that is most impacted by the voids work is theme 1., [A Denbighshire of quality housing that meets people's needs](#). Our homes have been developed over time, to meet the needs of the original Welsh Housing Quality Standard, which detailed the minimum standard our tenants could expect and included items such as kitchen and bathrooms, minimum requirements for outdoor space etc.
2. The recent launch (October 2023) of the revised standard (referred to as WHQS 2023) set out further expectations such as an affordable warmth agenda, introducing whole house flooring upon tenancy handover amongst others. This new standard is welcome, but presents technical, physical and financial challenges. Further detail in appendix 2.
3. [A healthier and happier, caring Denbighshire](#). Having a house that our tenants can proudly call home along with minimum standards for their homes with the affordable warmth, suitable ventilation etc. promotes healthier living (e.g. eliminating mould and condensation) and in return will make people happier in their homes.
4. [A Greener Denbighshire](#). An over arching requirement of WHQS 2023, is decarbonising our homes, by utilising renewable energy sources such as Solar PV, External Wall Insulation etc. These form part of a Target Energy Pathway (TEP), referred to in the standard, further detail in appendix 2. We always attempt to consider if decarbonisation measures are suitable at the time of refurbishing a void property.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1. The annual void budget has been set in recent times at £2.5M capital and £1.5M revenue.
- 6.2. To support us going forward to meet maintenance needs as well as void works, the new standard (WHQS 2023) is quite explicit in expecting landlords to utilise

suitable software to develop the long term plans e.g. an Intelligent Energy Software system and a suitable Asset Management software package.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

Summary of impact

Well-being Goals	Overall Impact
A prosperous Denbighshire	Positive
A resilient Denbighshire	Positive
A healthier Denbighshire	Positive
A more equal Denbighshire	Neutral
A Denbighshire of cohesive communities	Positive
A Denbighshire of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	Neutral
A globally responsible Denbighshire	Positive

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1. We meet regularly with the Denbighshire Tenants and Residents Forum (DTARF), where we discuss any changes to the standard, amongst other plans and seek their feedback.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1. Not required.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1. The biggest risk to the service is financial. With the introduction of WHQS 2023, the renting Homes Wales Act. and the very nature of an ageing housing stock, means we need to look at doing the same but with less money.

10.2. We have engaged with the Corporate Strategic Planning team to hold workshops to review our process to find ways of turning voids around quicker to bring in rental income in a more timely fashion.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1. Not Required.