

Report to	Communities Scrutiny
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Title	Housing Maintenance Voids Process – Appendix 2

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1. Current Voids Maintenance Steps and Categorisation

The following maintenance process starts from when the Neighbourhood Housing Officer advises maintenance that the keys are available.

Step	Action	Timeframe
1	Keys in/returned which the Neighbourhood officer (NHO) notifies via email that the keys are in the keysafe	1-3 days
2	Building Surveyor (BS) inspects the property for the following a. Health and safety b. Clearance c. Gas capping (where appropriate) d. Asbestos check/report e. Suitability for any disabled adaptations f. Takes photos g. Takes meter reading	1-5 days
3	BS will once reports have been received complete a full inspection/survey internally and externally and complete a schedule of works	1-5 days
4	The schedule of works will then be sent out via a framework of approved contractors	5 days
5	Any Asbestos removals required will be undertaken (depending on product)	1-14 days
6	The tenders will be reviewed and awarded	1-3 days
7	Contractor from being awarded the works to start on site within 5 days	5 days
8	Internal works can vary for minor works 25 days to major works 50 days (BS doing weekly progress visits)	25-50 days
9	External works can vary from 5 days to 60 days depending on geographic location and weather	5-60 days
10	BS on notice from the contractor once property has been signed off possible snagging/variations	1-5 days
11	Handed over to NHO to allocate/let	1-14 days

*The main thing to consider is that re-let times is not just the time sat with maintenance, but with the letting process also.

We currently categorise voids into 4 types, to help with planning, costing etc. Table below.

Type	Timescale	Typical Work
1	15 Working days	Partial House Clearance, General repairs internal and external Redecoration Replace kitchen or bathroom
2	23 Working Days	Full rewire Central Heating Bathroom renewal Kitchen renewal Partial Plastering Minor gardening works
3	35 Working Days	Full House Clearance Redecoration General repairs internally and externally Full rewire Full central heating install Bathroom renewal Kitchen renewal Extensive re-plastering Structural works including replacing lintels Damp works
4	42 Working Days	Major structural works including room alterations Full re-plastering Major garden works Excavation of floors

2. Impacts of the new WHQS 2023

The table below details the new requirements placed on landlords. One item that has significant impact on the voids process is 6b, the provision of flooring in all habitable rooms. We anticipate that this measure alone will have a £300k knock on effect to the budget.

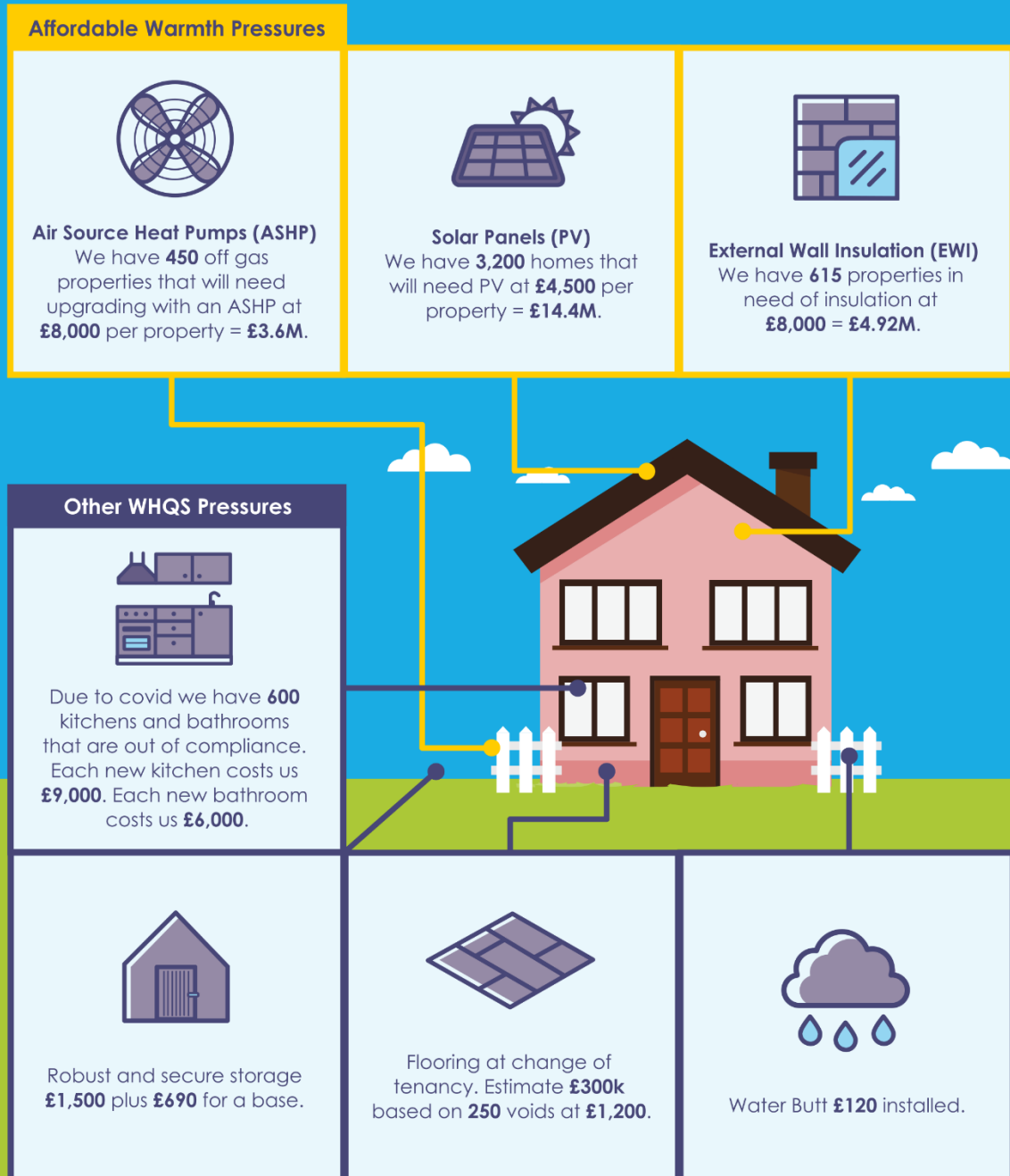
Element	Compliance date
Heating systems must be reasonably economical to run and capable of heating the whole of the home to a comfortable level in normal weather conditions (minimum of SAP 92 – EPC A)	Set by the Target Energy Pathways
In the interim, all homes must meet a minimum of SAP 75 – EPC C	31 March 2030
Carbon emissions from homes must be minimised (minimum of EIR 92)	Set by the Target Energy Pathways
Landlord's must carry out a Whole Stock Assessment and produce Target Energy Pathways for their homes	31 March 2027
Landlords must make arrangements for a smart meter to be installed in each home	1 April 2024 onwards
Measures to improve water efficiency and alleviating water poverty must be installed when replacing fittings and fixed appliances	1 April 2024 onwards
Water butts to be installed	1 April 2024 onwards
Homes must have adequate space for local recycling requirements	1 April 2024 onwards
Homes must have adequate facilities for washing, drying and airing clothes	1 April 2024 onwards
At change of tenancy all habitable rooms (bedrooms and living rooms), staircases and landings located within the home should have suitable floor coverings	1 April 2024 onwards
Exposure to noise should be minimised	1 April 2024 onwards
External lockable storage for cycles and equipment must be made available	1 April 2024 onwards
Biodiversity opportunities should be introduced by landlords who own or manage verges, parks, grounds and open green spaces by changing their management of these areas to make them more wildlife friendly	1 April 2024 onwards

The additional demands above, particularly the Target Energy Pathway (towards decarbonisation) will be costly and stretch the maintenance budget even further.

WHQS 2023

WHQS 2023 focuses on Affordable Warmth. The Target Energy Pathway of EPC C 75, is our biggest and most costly new pressure (see below). To meet this target by 31/03/2030, we will need an additional £3.8M per year.

To be compliant with WHQS 2023 we also have a number of other new budget pressures (see below).



3. Renting Homes Wales Act

Under the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016, landlords (private and social sectors) must ensure that the dwelling satisfies Fitness for Human Habitation (FFHH) obligations on the date of occupation by tenant/s, and throughout the term of the occupation contract (tenancy agreement). The FFHH Act sets out the 29 matters and circumstances to which regard must be had when determining whether a property is FFHH.

4. Financial Pressures

The chart below details the extent of the mounting costs in delivering homes to the most recent voids standard.

Void Costs		Actual	Actual	***	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Forecast	Budget	Variance between 2022/23 & 2023/24
		2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
HR2017 - REV	Internal Voids	490,546	1,323,160	1,730,929	1,667,984	1,980,746	1,982,136	1,933,873	2,310,400	1,851,396	-459,004
HR2517 - REV	External Voids	0	0	0	0	0	112,956	1,941	0	0	0
HR2017 - CAP	Internal Voids	0	30	551,059	832,820	920,700	1,061,658	1810509	2,337,923	1,870,339	-467,584
HR2517 - CAP	External Voids	0	0	68,158	100,233	68,291	83,191	558,645	690,998	500,000	-190,998
HR2607 - CAP	Rescheduled Omissions	507,261	834,694	309,904	221,507	179,687	156,855	157,889	318,138	0	-318,138
Total		997,807	2,157,884	2,660,050	2,822,544	3,149,424	3,396,796	4,462,857	5,657,459	4,221,735	-1,435,724
Increase since new lettable standard					6.11%	18.40%	27.70%	67.77%	112.68%	59%	
No. of Voids		257	275	263	201	277	217	221	221	221	
Average Void Cost		3,883	7,847	10,114	14,043	11,370	15,653	20,194	25,599	19,103	
					38.84%	12.41%	54.77%	99.66%	153.10%	88.87%	

*** New Lettable Standard

Budget Per month	351,811.265	2023-24
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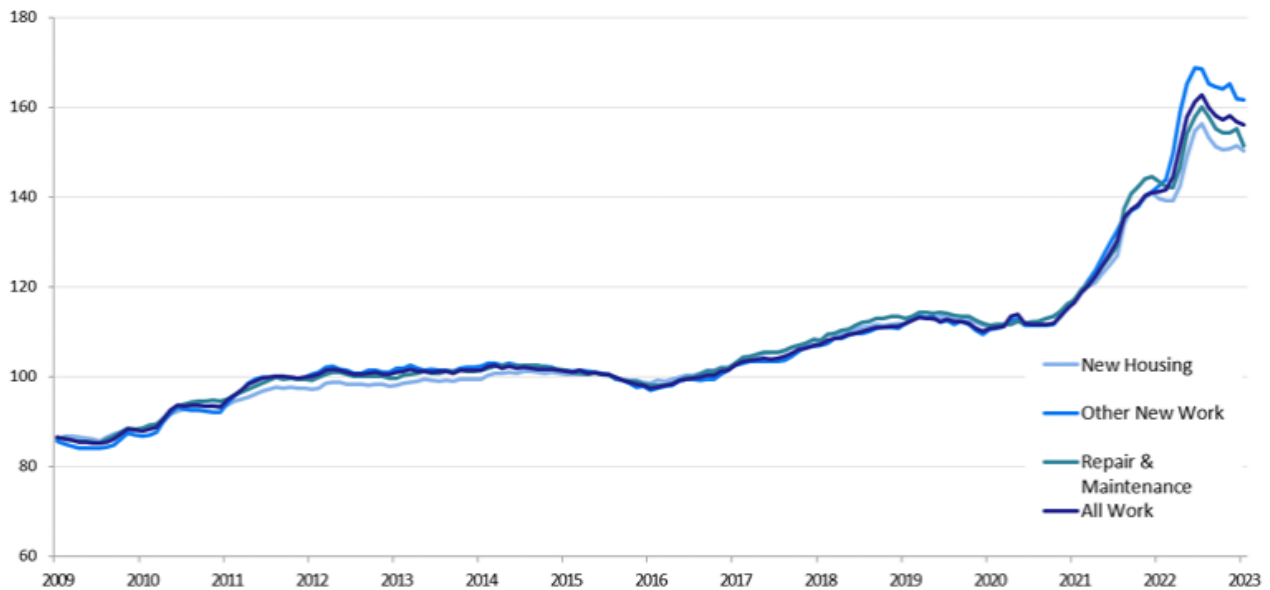
Why are costs escalating? Variety of reasons:

- The combined impact of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented materials shortages within the UK construction sector. However, in more positive news, the Construction Leadership Council have suggested the availability of many materials, including bricks, blocks and timber products may finally be returning to pre-Covid levels.
- Between 1997 and 2020, Consumer Prices Index (CPI) inflation was an average of 2%. As many businesses are all too aware, it started to rise rapidly in 2021 and reached a peak of 11% in 2022.

It fell in 2023 but may not reach what the Bank of England termed “more normal levels” of around 2% again until the end of 2025.

This means that although the construction industry, like many others, has navigated what are strongly hoped to be the worst challenges of inflation, there are still concerns about the current rate and a return to normality remains at least 18 months away.

Chart 1: Construction Material Price Indices, UK
Index, 2015 = 100



Source: Monthly Statistics of Building Materials and Components, Table 1

- The cost of maintaining the voids standard. The time is approaching, where we'll have to take a collective view of the voids standard, it is extremely high but we also think that over time (when money wasn't so tight) we've had the view that, 'well as we're here, we may as well do....' So the extra then becomes the norm.

What Can We do to Mitigate Costs?

- We'll be tendering an updated Voids Maintenance Framework in May 2024. We hope to bring more local contractors on board with the expectation that having more competition will bring costs down.
- We are looking into how we can utilise our own DLO to carry out minor voids works.
- We have engaged with the Strategic Planning Team to set up a Task and Finish group to discuss potential support they may be able to offer with regard to housing voids in the DCC housing stock, and potentially a way to look at alternative or complimentary processes to speed up this work, using the new Insight approach.
- we have put a couple of practical actions into place, such as providing a skip for the departing tenant, to encourage them to clear the house out before leaving. This is actually cheaper than, paying for the contractors to do it.
- We also give an allowance (£300 B&Q decorating voucher) for decorating to incoming tenants, who tell us they want to decorate as they wish, so rather than us do the whole house in magnolia and white, they can buy their own paint, wallpaper etc. This also reduces our costs.
- We've introduced a process where we look at each void coming up, then consider location, demand etc. so if there's an undesirable property, we can park that and divert funds elsewhere, until we can afford to do it, or sell it.

High Demand	Green
Medium Demand	Yellow
Low Demand	Red

	Rhyl	Prestatyn	Meliden	Dyserth	Rhuddlan	Bodelwyddan	St Asaph Rural	St Asaph	Trefnant	Denbigh	Denbigh Rural	Ruthin	Ruthin Rural	Corwen	Corwen Rural	Llangollen
1 bed (GN)	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A	Green
2 bed GFF (GN)	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	N/A	Yellow	Green	N/A	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
2 bed house/FFF (GN)	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	N/A	Yellow	Green	N/A	Green	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
3 bed house (GN)	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
4 bed house +	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A	Green	N/A	Green	N/A	Green	N/A	Green	Green	Green
1 bed GFF/Bung (SH)	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	N/A	Yellow	Green	N/A	Green	Yellow	Green	N/A	Yellow	Yellow	Green
1 bed FFF (SH)	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Yellow	N/A	Yellow	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2 bed GFF/Bung (SH)	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
2 bed FFF (SH)	Red	Red	Red	N/A	N/A	N/A	Red	Red	N/A	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	N/A	Red

- Finally, there is evidence to suggest that in a lot of cases where houses have been through the voids process since 2017 (new lettable standard) they are returned to us in a better condition and need less investment the next time round. N.B. Not in all cases though.

Address	Void Dates	Void Costs
1 Llys Offa, Victoria Road, Rhyl	2019	£19,368.85
	2021	£2,097.6
11 Trem Y Foel, Ruthin	2019	£7,835
	2020	£960.05
118 Victoria Road, Rhyl	2019	£6,873
	2020	£972.68
15 Arfon Grove, Rhyl	2022	£65,871.93
	2023	£3,397.57
10 Glyn Avenue, Rhyl	2018	£11,344.75
	2021	£1,760

Void Lettable Standard Checklist

Lettable standard item			
External			
The roof shall be intact without any missing, cracked or slipped tiles, slates or ridge tiles. Inc fascias gutters & chimneys.			
The brickwork, render and external joinery should be of a sound structural nature showing no signs of major defects.			
The damp proof course (DPC) level to be inspected to ensure external walls are clear of any obstacles, mounds of earth, etc, which could cause rise to penetrative or rising damp internally by breaching of the DPC. Wherever noted, this shall be removed.			
Any damaged satellite or terrestrial aerials to be removed, along with any external DIY coaxial wiring. (Visual check only) maybe rechargeable.			
Any damaged garden structures considered not safe or of benefit to the incoming tenant will be removed. The base will be left as long as it isn't dangerous and will become the responsibility of the new tenant.			
Fences and gates should be inspected for safe installation and be free from damage. Boundaries, whether fences or walls, are continuous and in a reasonable and safe condition Where possible we will provide a plan showing your boundary responsibilities and the area of your garden. Where there is a potential to fall from height, a suitable barrier will be installed.			
Gardens should be cleared of all rubbish and left in a maintainable condition any rubbish to be recharged to previous tenant.			
Trees, tall hedges, including Leylandii, will be reduced and left in a maintainable condition or removed for new tenant to take responsibility of, if over grown rechargeable to previous tenant.			
Planters and garden features left by the previous tenant will be removed where possible, only to be left in place if they are easily maintainable and of good quality. If to be removed recharge to apply. A washing line-preferably 2posts and line will be installed with suitable access path			
Security			
New front and rear door locks will be fitted, we will provide 2 keys per lock and, where appropriate, a minimum of 2 window keys. Unless suited lock fitted.			
Cleanliness			
White goods will be removed from the property and recharge will apply.			
All rubbish, carpets, furniture etc should be removed including clearance of the loft spaces and outbuildings with floors swept and left ready for recovering. (Where carpets or laminate have been left in place by the previous tenant, are well fitted, in prime condition and may benefit the incoming tenant, these shall be left in position. Where carpets are removed, gripper rods to be removed.			
Particular attention should be given to kitchen work surfaces, tiles and splashbacks, kitchen cupboards, storerooms, bathrooms and toilet areas they should be thoroughly cleaned to remove grease, mould, dirt and dust.			
All DIY works deemed inappropriate, unsafe or surplus to the requirements of the incoming tenant, unless otherwise directed, will be removed from the property and recharged to previous tenant.			
Health & Safety			
Gas check			
Check all banisters and fitted handrails are secure and firmly fixed, and that no obvious and visible sign of damage is apparent. Ranch style balustrade to be removed and replaced with spindles and handrail. Minimum of one handrail fitted to every stairway.			

Where PVCu windows have been fitted, it is important to ensure that the restrictors are operational to the first floor windows, and that the designated egress window in the event of an emergency is adequately identified and marked. (Green Button). A rod for opening, trickle vents will be supplied were appropriate.			
Where floor coverings have been removed, or are to be removed, floor boards and fitted coverings should be inspected to ensure they are secure, without signs of distress or possible imminent failure.			
Where fitted, hard wired smoke detectors and careline equipment should be checked to ensure it is fully operational and functional, with any battery detectors fitted by the previous resident removed from site.			
Sanitary Goods			
All installations for the supply of water and sanitation should be in good repair and working order. All taps and plugs should be operational. WCs should have a secure seat and lid, and should flush correctly. Sinks, WCs, baths, shower trays and wash hand basins should all be firmly fixed in position and be free from chips, leaks and bad staining. Any required replacements of sanitary goods should match existing wherever possible; however any replacements will be provided in white all properties to be fitted with non-slip flooring.			
Kitchens			
The kitchen will have space for a cooker (electric only-gas to be capped off) and a tall fridge / freezer where possible (under counter where not). Where there is sufficient space within the kitchen, there will be plumbing for an automatic washing machine; this will not be provided where there are communal laundry facilities. Non-slip flooring fitted.			
Windows & Doors			
All windows and doors shall be checked for: ease of operation, lubricated, with handles fully tightened as required all types of glass internal doors to be removed.			
Double glazed units should be inspected for misting or cracks and replaced as required, conforming where appropriate with safety glass.			
All internal doors shall, open and close with ease and have functional door furniture fitted. Minimal damage should be made good where possible (if doors are of good quality). If doors need replacing, 6 panel white grained to be installed. Flush doors to be replaced. Damaged doors to be recharged to previous tenant.			
Floors			
Any loose or defective flooring should be secured or replaced as needed. Missing vinyl tiles shall be replaced to match as near as possible existing. Vinyl sheet covering should be sound and free from signs of damage a good level base to be provided.			
Walls			
Loose and defective plaster shall be made good. Missing wall tiles should be replaced were possible to match existing.			
Any alterations by tenant to be checked in house file for consent.			
Full decoration to all properties, white ceilings, magnolia walls, white satinwood to all woodwork .			

