

North Yorkshire Council

Executive Member for Arts Culture and Housing

26 January 2026

Void Management Strategy

Report of the Corporate Director Community Development

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Executive Member approval for the Void Management Strategy, which sets out North Yorkshire Council's approach to managing its empty housing assets, balancing timely re-letting with regulatory compliance, safety and quality.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Void Management Strategy (see Appendix A) sets out North Yorkshire Council's approach to managing its empty housing assets following local government reorganisation. It replaces fragmented legacy arrangements with a unified, evidence-based framework that ensures statutory compliance, supports strategic investment, and improves service delivery.
- 2.2 Developed in recognition of the high demand for social housing and the need to ensure our empty homes are improved and made available to let as efficiently as possible, the Strategy addresses key challenges in delivering the Lettable Standard. It establishes the priorities for the service of safety, quality and decency, balanced with re-let time and cost.
- 2.3 The Strategy is aligned with the Housing Strategy 2024 – 2029, the Housing Improvement Plan and the newly harmonised Lettable Standard. It is structured around four key principles: maintaining timely void turnaround times, ensuring compliance and safety, delivering consistency in property standards and supporting long term sustainability.
- 2.4 The Strategy provides a foundation for continuous improvement and future innovation in void works. It is a core component of the Council's transformation journey and its ambition to become an exemplar social landlord.
- 2.5 The Strategy is underpinned by key regulatory frameworks including the Decent Homes Standard and the Consumer Standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing. These obligations shape our compliance and investment priorities.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following the local government reorganisation in April 2023, North Yorkshire Council inherited housing assets, management systems, and operational models from seven predecessor district councils. This legacy created a fragmented landscape of housing asset quality, void management processes, compliance frameworks, and service delivery approaches, which posed significant challenges in achieving consistency, transparency, and statutory compliance across the housing portfolio.

- 3.2 The Regulator of Social Housing's C3 grading in 2024 highlighted critical weaknesses in the Council's ability to evidence compliance with key safety standards, including gas and electrical safety, fire risk management, and the Decent Homes Standard. It also identified gaps in tenant engagement, data integrity, and performance monitoring. These findings reinforced the urgent need for a unified, strategic approach to void management.
- 3.3 The development of the Strategy has been informed by sector best practice, regulatory guidance, and benchmarking. It is closely integrated with the Housing Strategy 2024–2029 and the Housing Improvement Plan and informed by the Consumer Standards.

4.0 VOID MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

- 4.1 The Void Management Strategy establishes a unified framework for managing North Yorkshire Council's empty housing assets. It replaces fragmented legacy arrangements with a consistent, data-driven, and tenant-focused approach. While many of the activities described are already underway and documented separately, the Strategy brings them together into a single, coherent framework. The Strategy is designed to ensure that all empty homes are dealt with consistently to bring them up to a safe, decent, and sustainable standard, and that void management becomes a long-term driver of housing excellence.
- 4.2 The Strategy is structured around four thematic sections, each representing a strategic priority and operational focus and across two stages, reducing the backlog and longer-term void management planning.
- 4.3 The Strategy recognises the work already undertaken and the decisions taken which impact on void management, such as; the harmonisation of the Lettable Standard and the Repairs Standard, Contract Reviews, the Decarbonisation and Stock Condition Survey Programmes and pulls them together to provide the context in which our approach to void properties has been drawn up.
- 4.4 The Roadmap for Improvement sets an interim operating target at 2.5% of total stock, which equates to approximately 210 properties. This target reflects the current position given an average key return of 38 homes per month, existing backlog and stock condition challenges. The Council acknowledges that this is not an ambitious long-term target. Once stock knowledge improves and capital programmes are embedded, we will aim to improve on that operating target, focussing on mean performance in our benchmarking group (around 0.75%) with an ambition to achieve top quartile performance.
- 4.5 Stage 1, Reducing the Backlog details the outcomes to be expected over the first 12 months of the strategy. The average turnaround time for void properties has increased in recent months, reflecting the scale of works required to meet the new Lettable Standard. While this figure is currently elevated, it is expected to stabilise as new processes and contractor frameworks become embedded.
- 4.6 The initial months show a slower rate of improvement due to the scale of works required. However, as additional contractor capacity, category-based scheduling, and improved oversight become embedded, the trend demonstrates a steady decline in backlog. By Month 6, the impact of these measures is expected to accelerate progress, with turnaround times stabilising and more properties returned to allocation. The forecast for Month 12 aligns with our operating target of 2.5% of total stock, reflecting a balanced approach.
- 4.7 Section 2, Improving void management for the longer term involves a strategic approach that builds on the proactive maintenance, and efficient processes which are being established and aligns with our Asset Management Strategy, improving data use and digital innovation, and a focus on tenancy sustainment, tenant satisfaction and engagement.

4.8 Governance and oversight are integral to successful delivery. The Strategy will be monitored through the performance framework, where void data is reported monthly to Extended Management Team and on a quarterly basis to Executive, Overview and Scrutiny and the Tenant Forum.

5.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

5.1 By embedding compliance and improving housing conditions, the Strategy supports the Council's commitment to delivering safe, decent, and secure homes for all tenants. It aligns with the Housing Strategy 2024 - 2029 and the Housing Improvement Plan, both of which prioritise tenant safety, satisfaction, and equity.

5.2 The Strategy contributes to the Council's net zero and climate resilience objectives by targeting EPC C ratings across the housing portfolio, reducing fuel poverty, and supporting the Beyond Carbon Programme and the York and North Yorkshire Route map to Carbon Negative. In line with the Asset Management Strategy investment decisions will be guided by sustainability principles and long-term environmental impact.

5.3 The Strategy also promotes inclusive growth and community wellbeing by ensuring that voids are managed in a way that supports regeneration, tenant engagement, and long-term neighbourhood stability.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 In developing the Void Management Strategy, the Council considered several alternative approaches. These were assessed against their ability to deliver compliance, consistency, and long-term improvement across the housing portfolio.

6.2 The Strategy adopted reflects a balanced and proactive approach. It consolidates existing programmes and responsibilities into a single, coherent framework, while also introducing new systems and delivery models where needed. This enables the Council to respond to immediate regulatory and operational challenges and lays the foundation for long-term transformation and continuous improvement in void management, in line with the wider housing asset management strategy.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Void Management Strategy does not introduce new financial commitments beyond those already planned and underway. Instead, it brings together existing programmes and activities into a single strategic framework, providing greater clarity, coordination, and oversight of void management.

7.2 Key financial activities already in progress include the implementation of the Lettable Standard, improving the standard to which void properties are brought prior to re-let, the stock condition survey programme, which is being rolled out across the housing portfolio to inform future investment decisions and ensure compliance with regulatory standards. Energy efficiency improvements, including works to achieve EPC C ratings, are being delivered through existing capital programmes aligned with the Council's net zero ambitions, supported by external funding streams such as the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. In addition, service transformation is progressing through the strengthening of internal delivery teams and the expansion of planned maintenance programmes to reduce reliance on reactive repairs and external contractors, with investment prioritised through the HRA Business Plan and supplemented by strategic borrowing and grant funding.

- 7.3 Void performance has a significant impact on rental income. The loss of rent, reducing the income to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for management and maintenance spend, each 1% equates to around £450k lost rent income. The strategy sets out how the service intends to reduce the void backlog, returning homes to rent as soon as is possible.
- 7.4 Financial oversight will continue through existing governance arrangements, including annual budget-setting processes and HRA reviews. The Strategy enhances transparency and accountability by setting out a clear and consistent approach to void management.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Void Management Strategy supports the Council's legal obligations as a social housing landlord by providing a structured and consistent approach to compliance across the housing portfolio.
- 8.2 Legal and regulatory requirements including the Decent Homes Standard, Awaab's Law, the Consumer Standards Framework, and wider health and safety legislation are reflected throughout the Strategy. These frameworks underpin the Council's approach, prioritising safety and quality over re-let times.
- 8.3 The Strategy does not introduce new legal duties but consolidates and clarifies how existing statutory responsibilities will be met.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Void Management Strategy supports the Council's commitment to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion in the delivery of housing services. The Strategy helps ensure that all tenants, regardless of background, identity, or personal circumstances, receive safe, decent, and responsive housing.
- 9.2 The Strategy contributes to tackling inequalities in housing quality and access by focusing on implementation of the Lettable Standard, bringing housing quality up and tackling issues such as fuel poverty and energy efficiency, which disproportionately affect low-income households and vulnerable residents. It also aims to embed consistent compliance across all properties, reducing the risk of harm in homes that may have experienced historic underinvestment. Improvements in data quality and service oversight will further enable the Council to identify and respond to disparities in housing conditions and outcomes.
- 9.3 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) (see Appendix B) has been carried out to assess the potential impacts of the Strategy and ensure that it supports fair and inclusive service delivery. The Strategy is expected to improve housing conditions and service responsiveness, which will benefit all tenants, including vulnerable groups such as older people.

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 A key focus of the Strategy is improving the energy performance of council-owned homes. This includes works already underway, via the Lettable Standard and Decarbonisation Programme, to achieve EPC C ratings across the housing portfolio, which will reduce carbon emissions, lower energy bills for tenants, and contribute to the Council's commitments under the Beyond Carbon Programme and the York and North Yorkshire Routemap to Carbon Negative.

10.2 A Climate Change Impact Assessment has been carried out (see Appendix C) to evaluate the environmental implications of the Void Management Strategy. The assessment concluded that there will be no negative impacts, as the works outlined in the Strategy are already underway and have been planned in alignment with existing sustainability and energy efficiency objectives.

11.0 PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Detailed performance management of void properties began in January 2025. This data shows us that at that point 212 void properties required works, this equated to 2.55% of stock.

11.2 In the time since January 2025 the Housing Standards service has received an average of 38 voids per calendar month (384 total) of which 24% (94) were Cat 1, 42% (162) were Cat 2 and 33% (128) were Cat 3. In the same time frame, the Housing Standards service has returned 248 properties back to Housing Management for allocation at an average of 26 homes per calendar month. With the average number of new voids per month exceeding those completed, a backlog has developed. As of the end of October 2025 the number of voids stood at 407 (4.9% of stock).

11.3 The Strategy recognises the performance challenges the service has experienced and sets an operating target of 2.5% (210 homes).

11.4 The Council monitors void performance through a range of established mechanisms, including Tier 1 and Tier 2 dashboards. These arrangements are already in place and will continue to operate in their current form.

11.5 In addition to improving turnaround times, the Council will undertake a comprehensive end-to-end review of the void management process. This will cover every stage, from the point keys are received, through works scheduling and completion, to property handover and letting. The aim is to identify and eliminate inefficiencies, streamline communication between teams, and ensure that improvements are driven across the entire process, not just within the works phase. This review will form part of the continuous improvement programme and will be monitored through existing governance arrangements.

12.0 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The Void Management Strategy responds directly to a number of known risks, including regulatory non-compliance, housing quality, lack of housing availability and inconsistent service delivery across the housing portfolio. While the Strategy does not eliminate these risks, it provides a structured approach to managing them through clearer governance, improved data, and a more coordinated delivery model. The implementation of the Lettable Standard may increase void time in the short term but in the longer term this will improve the quality of our housing stock.

13.0 CONCLUSIONS

13.1 The Void Management Strategy provides a single, coordinated framework for managing the Council's empty housing assets following local government reorganisation. It consolidates existing activity and sets out clear objectives for reducing the backlog, driving up standards and bringing homes back into occupation. The Strategy aligns with wider corporate priorities and supports the Council's ambition to deliver safe, decent, and sustainable homes, underpinning its long-term improvement journey and commitment to becoming an exemplar social landlord.

14.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 14.1 Approval will give formal authority to implement the Strategy and deliver its objectives through established governance arrangements. It also ensures that improvement activity is coordinated, transparent, and aligned with statutory and regulatory requirements, while contributing to wider corporate priorities and the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.

15.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 15.1 That the Executive Member for Culture, Arts and Housing approves the Void Management Strategy as set out in Appendix A.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Void Management Strategy

Appendix B – Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

Appendix C – Climate Change Impact Assessment (CCIA) Screening Form

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None

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Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.