

North Yorkshire Council

Housing Service Void Management Strategy

Overview

North Yorkshire Council is committed to reducing the number of empty council houses and improving the safety, quality, and energy efficiency of its housing stock. This document outlines our approach to void management, balancing timely re-letting with regulatory compliance and long-term investment.

In line with the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards focussed on safety and quality, we aim to ensure every property meets the harmonised North Yorkshire Council Lettable Standard, delivers value for money, and provides a positive tenant experience. This enhanced standard means that our void turnaround times have increased however, these improvements ensure homes are safer, warmer, and more economical to run.

This statement provides:

- **Performance update** on void properties from January–September 2025
- **Our Approach** our priorities and strategic objectives
- **Roadmap for Improvement** and how we will monitor progress

Our approach prioritises transparency and accountability, embedding improvements that will create a legacy of high-quality homes while meeting obligations under the Social Housing Regulation Act.

Background

Definition of a Void

The terms *void* and *vacant* are often used interchangeably, but for clarity within this document we will use the following definitions:

- **Void:** A property where keys have been returned by the outgoing tenant and the home is with the Housing Standards team for inspection and works to meet the Lettable Standard.
- **Vacant:** A property that has completed void works, is back with Housing Management and Allocations, and is ready for a new tenant to move in.

This distinction helps track progress accurately and ensures consistent reporting across teams.

Why Does Void Management Matter?

The way in which void properties are managed is important for a number of reasons:

- The need to use available council housing for those in housing need;
- The negative impact void properties can have on the local community; and
- 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

Legal and Regulatory Context

Local Authorities' approach to void management is underpinned by a robust legal and regulatory framework designed to ensure homes are safe, decent, and fit for habitation. Key legislation and standards include:

- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 – establishes the duty to provide homes that are fit for habitation.
- Housing Act 2004 – introduced the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), a risk-based tool for identifying hazards.
- Decent Homes Standard (2006) – sets minimum quality requirements for social housing.
- Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 – mandates safe removal and management of asbestos.
- Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 – reinforces obligations to maintain habitable conditions.
- Fire Safety Regulations 2022 – strengthens fire safety compliance in residential properties.
- Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 – shifts emphasis from speed of re-let to safety, quality, and tenant satisfaction, introducing Consumer Standards and Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

Horizon Scanning – Decent Homes Standard 2

The Government is consulting on a reformed Decent Homes Standard (DHS2), introducing tougher requirements on safety, energy efficiency and tackling damp and mould. The Council is already embedding elements of the proposed standard through its Lettable Standard during void works. Acting now reduces future financial burden and compliance risk, avoids costly retrofits and supports net zero ambitions while improving tenant wellbeing.

Local Context

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

North Yorkshire Council was formed in April 2023 through Local Government Reorganisation, bringing together seven former district and borough councils and the county council. This consolidation created a single housing service responsible for managing approximately 8,500 homes across a large and diverse geography. The transition requires harmonisation of policies, standards, and processes, including void management, which previously varied significantly between legacy organisations.

Historic underinvestment

Legacy councils experienced prolonged periods of underinvestment in housing stock, resulting in a backlog of major repairs and properties falling below modern standards. This historic underinvestment has contributed to a higher proportion of voids requiring extensive works, including structural repairs, asbestos removal, and energy efficiency upgrades. Addressing these issues is central to improving turnaround times and ensuring compliance with current regulatory requirements.

Regulatory Improvement Plan

Following a self-referral, in September 2024 the Regulator of Social Housing issued a NYC with a C3 Regulatory Judgement, highlighting areas for improvement in stock condition data, compliance assurance, and delivery of decent homes. In response, North Yorkshire Council implemented an Improvement Plan focused on:

- Increasing our awareness of the condition of all our homes by completing 100% of stock condition surveys by September 2026.
- Strengthening compliance, monitoring and reporting of health and safety requirements.
- Increasing tenant involvement in service delivery and development

HRA Business Plan

The HRA Business Plan sets out a 30-year financial strategy to maintain and improve housing stock while ensuring long-term sustainability. Key priorities include:

- Investing in energy efficiency and decarbonisation to meet net zero targets.
- Funding major works programmes to address historic underinvestment.
- Reducing rent loss through improved void turnaround times. Void management is a critical component of the HRA strategy, balancing operational efficiency with investment in quality and compliance.

Lettable Standard

The Council's Lettable Standard reflects the Legal and Regulatory requirements above and goes further by mandating:

- A minimum EPC rating of C for all re-let properties.
- Full removal of internal asbestos.
- Neutral decoration and flooring in kitchens and bathrooms.
- Compliance with all statutory safety checks.

This framework ensures that every North Yorkshire Council property returned to allocation meets the Decent Homes Standard, providing safe, energy efficient, and comfortable housing, aligning with both regulatory obligations and tenant expectations.

Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF)

North Yorkshire Council has secured funding through the SHDF to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions in its housing stock. The programme focuses on upgrading homes to EPC Band C or better, using measures such as insulation, air source heat pumps, and solar PV.

Earlier phases have already improved over 150 homes, and the current programme aims to retrofit thousands more by 2028, supporting net zero targets and reducing fuel poverty.

Long Term Void Properties

Alongside the repair and retrofit programmes for void properties the council also holds a number of long-term void properties where decisions are pending on the longer-term viability of the asset or where they are linked to strategic service reviews ie. warden accommodation as an element of the Sheltered Accommodation Review. These properties are not included in void management data.

NYC Void Management Process

When a property becomes void it is assessed by the Housing Standards team and categorised based on the amount of repair work to be carried out to bring it to the Lettable Standard.

- **Category 1 - minor void work: 15 calendar days** *for instance full internal redecoration, minor repairs, and ensuring the property meets the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) requirements for safe occupation as well as compliance with the Decent Homes Standard (DHS).*
- **Category 2 - major void work: 35 calendar days** *for instance all tasks covered under Category 1, along with the replacement of one or more capital elements within the property, such as a kitchen, bathroom, windows, boiler, or similar significant components.*
- **Category 3 - major plus void work: 70 calendar days** *for instance major refurbishment, including structural repairs required due to subsidence or other significant issues. This category also covers properties undergoing retrofit programmes and those affected by major loss events such as fire or water damage, often requiring insurance-related works.*

Void Performance

Current void performance and trends

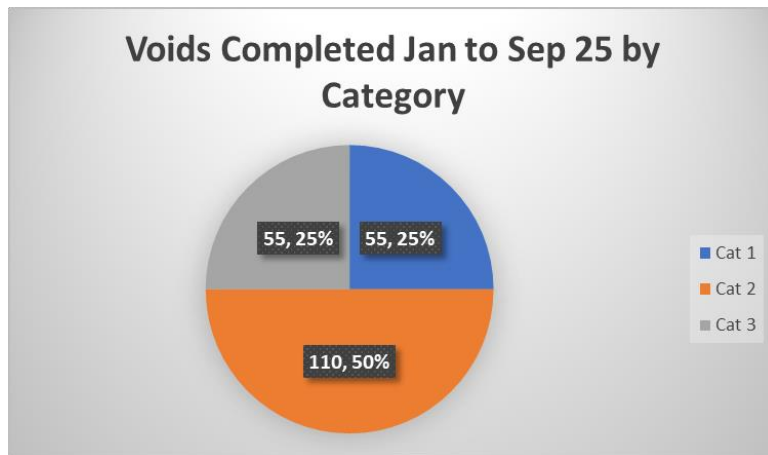
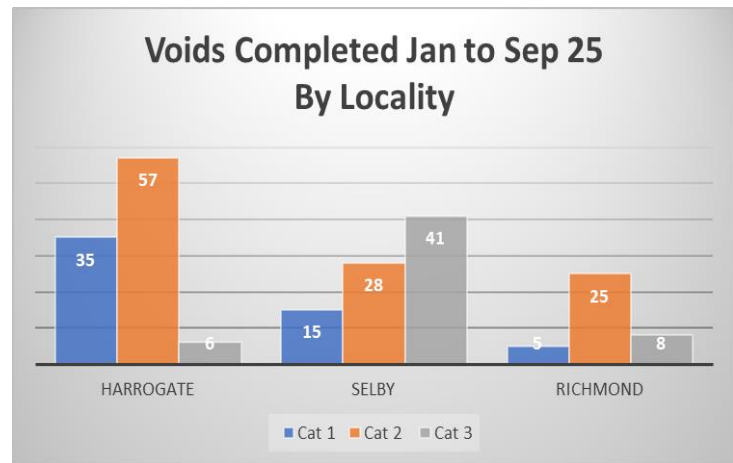
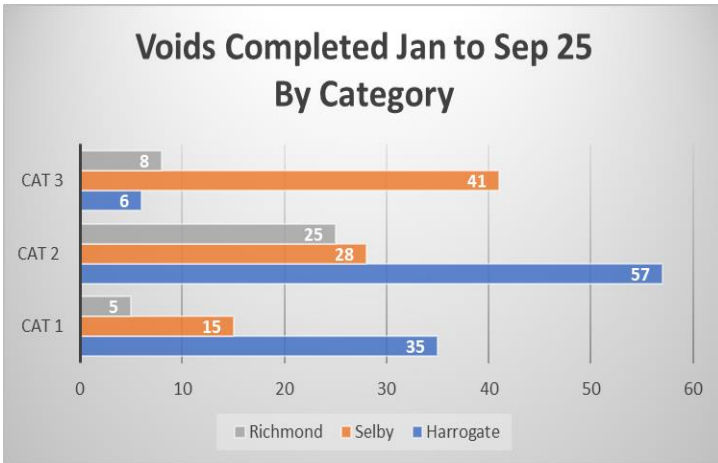
Detailed performance management of void properties began in January 2025. This data shows us that at that point 212 void properties required works, this equated to 2.55% of stock.

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.

This brings us to a point in October 2025 where the total number of voids stands at 407 (4.89% of stock) of which 27% (110) are Cat 1, 43% (173) are Cat 2 and 30% (124) are Cat 3.

Profiled by category of void the chart below shows the distribution of those void works completed and returned for allocation between January and September 2025:

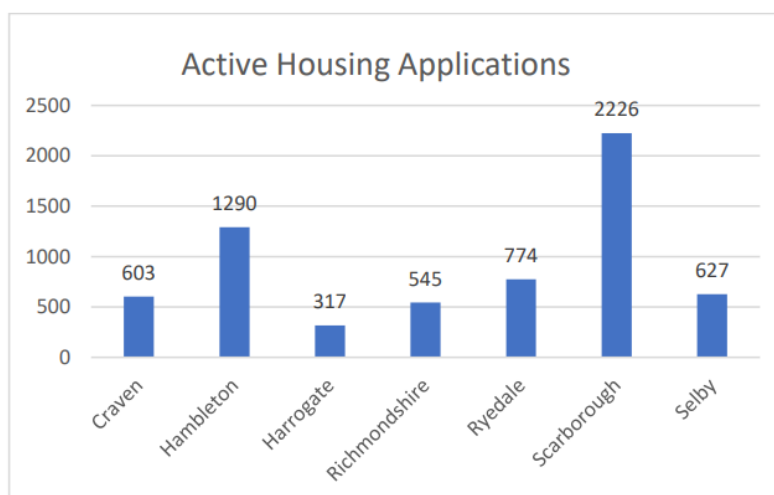


Current vacant performance and trends.

North Yorkshire Council currently maintains a relatively low proportion of properties that are vacant and ready to let, reflecting an efficient re-let process and good alignment between available stock and tenant demand.

Housing Demand

There were 6382 active applications on North Yorkshire Home Choice on the 1st July, 2025. Harrogate appears on the list for the first time, and although has a low number of actual active applicants (317), the area did have 700+ applications Under Review Active and able to bid pending full verification, so would have the third highest numbers on the register.



Data from North Yorkshire Home Choice also tells us that the highest demand for housing across all localities is from those with a 1 bedroom need.

How We Benchmark

This report uses benchmarking data from Housemark to contextualise North Yorkshire’s performance. It uses Tenant Satisfaction Measures derived from management information from 2024/25 and financial figures from 2023/24 to illustrate the national landscape of void and vacant properties and related expenditure.

Figures 1 and 2 compare NYC’s performance to national levels. Benchmarking against all English social housing providers using Housemark (n=137) puts North Yorkshire Council in the second quartile for homes vacant and available to let in 2024/25 (above). This reflects an efficient re-let process and a good fit between prospective tenants and the accommodation falling available.

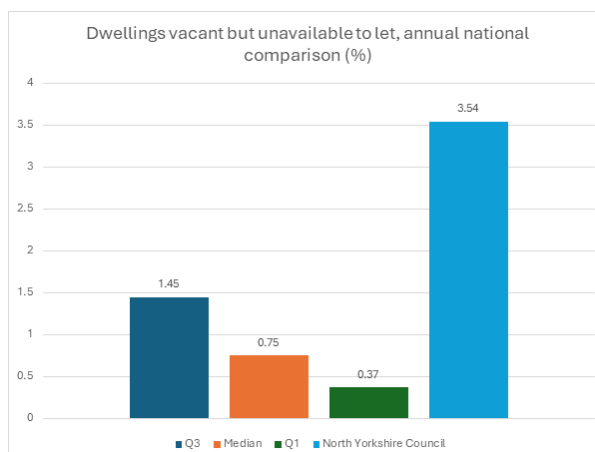
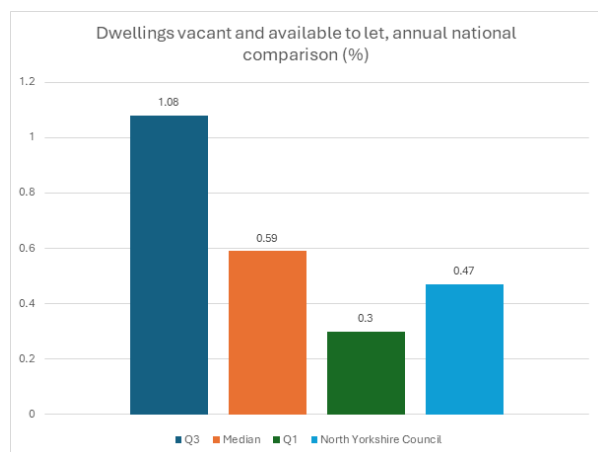


Figure 1

Figure 2

In contrast to its low rate of availability, North Yorkshire had a much higher percentage of properties vacant but unavailable for letting than social landlord peers (n=132) in 2024/25 (above). The homes captured in this metric are those undergoing works; either retrofitting with modern energy-efficient materials and technologies, or repair and remodelling to bring them in line with our new Lettable Standard.

Eight social landlords reported a higher percentage of properties vacant but unavailable to let in the latest reporting year. These include one housing association (Accent Group, 18.07% unavailable), three borough councils, three London boroughs, and one county council

(Northumberland, with 5.12%.) Only three of that group (the London boroughs of Brent and Southwark, and the Borough of Guildford) have so far received consumer standards gradings: all C3s; all as a result of a self-referral; all deemed to hold insufficient evidence of health and safety compliance. The narrative of their judgements suggests all have poor stock quality, which would tend to result in longer void times in order for defects to be rectified.

Overall, comparison to national levels of voids and vacant homes shows that we have moved rapidly from a typical rate of homes available for re-letting to a very low level. This is because newly vacant properties have increasingly been assessed as needing significant works while void to bring them up to an acceptable standard.

The gap between the quality of stock that we are finding when homes fall vacant and the quality required by our new Lettable Standard is probably the most significant factor in our high rate of unavailability. It means that we are having to carry out more work on each home before it is suitable for re-letting.

Our Approach

Policy Position

North Yorkshire Council's approach to void management aligns with the expectations of the Regulator of Social Housing and recent legislative changes. While historic performance measures placed heavy emphasis on re-let times, the current regulatory environment prioritises safety, quality, and decency over speed alone.

Our approach reflects this shift by:

- Ensuring all homes meet the harmonised lettable standard, including removal of internal asbestos, neutral decoration, and flooring in kitchens and bathrooms.
- Delivering compliance with Consumer Standards, which emphasise property condition and tenant experience.
- Incorporating energy efficiency improvements during void works to support decarbonisation targets and reduce tenant energy bills.
- Maintaining transparency and accountability through enhanced monitoring of quality and tenant satisfaction, rather than focusing solely on turnaround times.

This approach balances the need to minimise rent loss and waiting times with the imperative to provide homes that are safe, decent, and sustainable.

Improving tenant outcomes means homes higher quality, warmer, and better presented, which leads to higher satisfaction and fewer complaints. Investing in quality upfront delivers long-term cost efficiency by reducing reactive repairs and compliance risks. It also provides regulatory assurance by demonstrating alignment with the Social Housing Regulation Act and the expectations of the Regulator of Social Housing, delivering homes to the Decent Homes Standard. Finally, it builds public confidence by demonstrating that the Council prioritises tenant wellbeing over speed.

Key Principles

- **Maintain Timely Void Turnaround:** We will actively monitor and manage void works to ensure properties are prepared promptly without compromising quality. This means using category-based scheduling and improving oversight so that turnaround targets are met while maintaining compliance.
- **Ensuring Compliance and Safety:** Every property will undergo robust checks before allocation to confirm it meets statutory safety requirements and the Council's Lettable Standard. This includes gas and electrical safety, asbestos removal, and fire safety measures, ensuring homes are safe and habitable from day one.
- **Deliver Consistency in Property Standards:** The harmonised Lettable Standard will be applied across all homes, guaranteeing fairness and confidence in the quality offered to new tenants. This removes historic variations between former district councils and ensures every tenant receives a home that meets agreed standards.
- **Support Long-Term Sustainability:** Void works will incorporate energy efficiency upgrades and durable materials to reduce future maintenance needs and support net zero targets. This approach improves affordability for tenants, reduces carbon emissions, and protects the Housing Revenue Account from compounded pressure in the future.

A summary of the work and decisions taken by the Council to date

North Yorkshire Council has taken significant steps to improve the management of void properties and raise the standard of homes offered to tenants.

Lettable Standard

As detailed above, in June 2025, the Council adopted a harmonised lettable standard following extensive tenant engagement and scrutiny, introducing key enhancements such as a minimum EPC rating of C, removal of asbestos, neutral decoration, and flooring in kitchens and bathrooms.

To support delivery, the category-based approach to void management was implemented, with properties assessed as Category 1 (minor works), Category 2 (major works), or Category 3 (major-plus works), each with defined turnaround targets.

Contract Review

Recognising the need for greater capacity, the Council ended or did not review legacy contracts which no longer met required specifications and mobilised new arrangements, including the Construction DPS launched in November 2025 and the Align Retrofit Framework activated in September 2025, appointing seven additional contractors.

Operational Oversight and Monitoring

To maintain quality and timescales, the Council has introduced additional contract supervisors and support roles, ensuring closer oversight of works. Weekly progress checks are carried out against the target of 20 properties per week returned to allocations, with performance monitored via the Housing Improvement Board. Reporting has also been enhanced to track turnaround times, rent loss, and tenant satisfaction, providing greater transparency and accountability.

Investment in Energy Efficiency

Alongside this, significant investment has been committed to energy efficiency, with £1.77m secured through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to upgrade 150 homes and a £20m retrofit programme mobilised to improve 1,664 homes by June 2028.

Stock Condition Programme

The Housing Standards Team have a target to complete 100% of stock condition surveys by September 2026, followed by implementation of a five-year rolling programme of surveys. This will improve awareness of investment requirements and enable proactive planning to reduce delays and prevent properties from falling into major works categories.

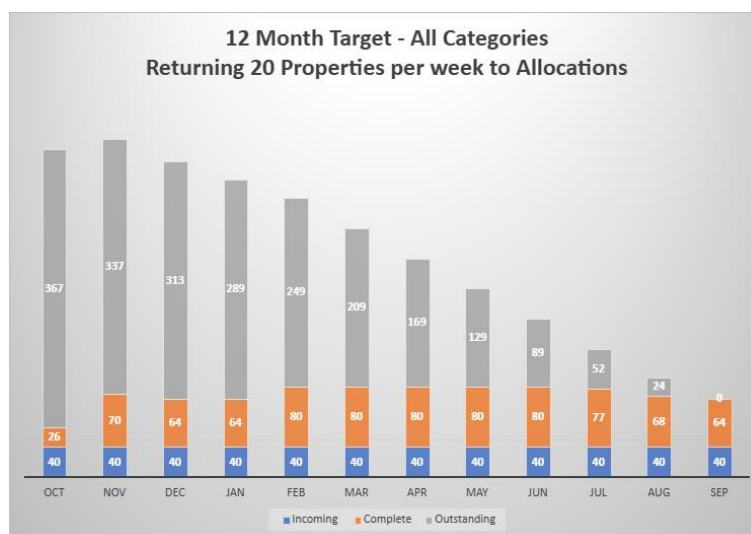
Roadmap for Improvement

North Yorkshire Council aims to reduce the proportion of empty properties to a sustainable level while maintaining high standards of safety, quality, and energy efficiency. A reasonable operating target has been set at 2.5% of total stock, which equates to approximately 210 properties. This target reflects the balance between minimising rent loss and ensuring homes meet the harmonised lettable standard before allocation.

Reducing the Backlog (short term measures)

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.

The graph below illustrates the projected reduction in void properties over the next 12 months as short-term measures take effect. 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.



Improving Void Management (Longer Term)

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 **tenant satisfaction and engagement**.

Data Use and Digital Innovation

Implementing predictive analytics can help forecast demand and prioritise works. Using data available from our Stock Condition Survey and Retrofit programmes as well as works orders raised through voids works we can start to predict incoming void works and categorisations.

Digital Inspections and Dynamic Scheduling

The introduction of mobile-enabled survey tools and dynamic scheduling systems will streamline void inspections and contractor allocation. This approach reduces delays, improves resource utilisation, and ensures properties are prepared for letting as quickly as possible without compromising quality.

Internet of Things (IoT) Sensors and Smart Monitoring

Environmental sensors will be deployed to monitor temperature, humidity, and occupancy, enabling early detection of abandonment, damp, or property misuse. These insights allow proactive intervention before a property becomes void, supporting compliance with Awaab's Law and improving tenant safety.

Cloud-Based Survey Software and System Integration

Survey platforms integrated with the Council's asset management system will provide real-time data capture and reporting. This integration supports predictive maintenance, accurate cost forecasting, and improved scheduling, ensuring decisions are evidence-based and aligned with strategic priorities.

Data-Driven Decision Making

Predictive analytics will be used to identify properties at risk of becoming void and forecast turnaround times. This intelligence enables targeted interventions, optimises contractor allocation, and supports long-term planning to reduce rent loss and improve operational efficiency.

Demand-Led Prioritisation

Moving away from a "first-in, first-out" approach, properties will be prioritised based on tenant demand and readiness to let. This demand-led model significantly reduces turnaround times and ensures homes are allocated quickly to those in greatest need.

Tenant Engagement

Engaging tenants before they leave their property is critical to reducing void costs and delays. Supporting tenants at this stage can impact the condition in which homes are handed back, while early access for inspections and planning can improve pre-void planning and scheduling accuracy.

Additionally, engaging incoming tenants early for move-in readiness can reduce the level of vacant homes.

How we will monitor progress

To ensure delivery against our objectives, North Yorkshire Council will monitor performance through a clear set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and structured reporting arrangements. These measures provide transparency, enable benchmarking, and support continuous improvement.

Key Performance Indicators

Average Void Turnaround Time: Tracks the time taken from tenancy termination to property allocation, segmented by category.

Rent Loss Due to Voids: Measures the financial impact of empty properties on the Housing Revenue Account.

Customer Satisfaction (New Tenants): Captures feedback from tenants moving into void properties, focusing on quality, safety, and overall experience.

Decent Homes: The number of homes assessed to be non-decent.

Reporting Framework

Monthly Performance Reporting: Reported to the Executive Management Team (EMT) for operational oversight.

Quarterly Performance Reporting: Shared with the Executive, tenants and scrutiny panels to ensure transparency and accountability.

Quarterly Review Meetings: Held with voids and lettings teams to assess progress, identify issues, and agree corrective actions.

These KPIs will be monitored through Tier 1 and Tier 2 dashboards, enabling real-time visibility of performance and supporting evidence-based decision-making.

Quarterly Revenue and Capital Financial reporting: Shared with the Executive, following review with Directorate Management Team (DMT). Highlighting key budgetary issues including forecast against the approved budget

Quarterly Housing Capital Board: Detailed capital programme review and update, assessment against planned expenditure and future pipeline of works.

Annual Business Plan review and Budget setting: Current and future business plan assumptions reviewed and 30 year business plan reforecast, taking into consideration latest view on investment requirements and the impact of any external influences such as Rent Policy and regulatory requirements. Assumptions within the plan are stress tested and measured against financial performance metrics.

Strategy Review

Progress on performance will be reviewed on a quarterly basis. The overall approach will be reviewed on an annual basis and any amendments to the approach will be discussed at Housing Improvement Board and with the Portfolio Holder.