



Voids Improvement Project Update

Housing Scrutiny Commission 18 April 2016
Lead director: Chris Burgin

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission of the progress made in the Voids Improvement Project.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Since the introduction of the Voids Improvement project in April 2014 the performance against a number of key performance indicators has improved.
- 2.2 The rent loss and council tax liability, the number of voids held and the cost of repairs to void properties have all reduced
- 2.3 In addition, a number of process changes have been introduced to deliver service improvements in the Voids & Property Lettings service.
- 2.4 Staffing and structural changes required to improve the service and make it more effective are currently in progress linked to the Housing Transformation staffing review that started in December 2015.
- 2.5 In 2015, the average re-let per month was predominantly lower than it was in the same month in 2014. The key challenges are to implement the process improvements aligned to the Housing Transformation Programme which should see further improvements in re-let times.

3. Void & Property Lettings Performance

- 3.1 There are four key performance indicators to evaluate the success of the Voids & Property Lettings service:
 - The total rent loss and Council Tax liability incurred for properties which are void
 - The number of voids properties held
 - The cost of repairs to void properties
 - The average time taken to re-let a void property

Detailed performance information is set out in 3.2 to 3.5 of this report.

3.2 Rent loss and Council Tax liability

The rent loss for 2015/16 is forecast to be £635k and the Council Tax liability is forecast to be £174k. This has reduced significantly over the last two financial years. (See Appendix A).

3.3 Void properties held

The number of void properties at the 31/12/2015 was 213. This has reduced significantly since the start of the project in April 2014 when the number of voids held was 334. (See Appendix C).

3.4 Cost of repairs to Void properties

Improvements in consistency, involving void specifications and operating processes has reduced waste and targeted use of materials and resources. This has reduced costs of over £100K in 2015/16 on materials spend.

3.5 Average Re-Let Times (year to date)

The average re-let time (year to date) for all voids was 66.5 days in December 2015. In 2015, the average re-let time (year to date) was predominantly lower than it was in the same month in 2014 (See Appendix B). The target for the project set by the Director of Housing of 50 days.

A number of operational challenges exist around reaching this target. These are being addressed as part the wider structural changes in 2016, with additional items being delivered by the Voids Improvement Project following implementation. These will include;

- More robust management of voids & property lettings
- Amended roles of craft operatives
- Launch of a new minimum re-let standard
- Further streamlining of key processes
- Implementation of mobile working for technicians and operatives within Voids & Property Lettings
- Mainstreaming of the in-house delivery of capital programme works in void properties

4. Process Changes

4.1 There have been a number of key process changes within the Voids & Property Lettings service:

- Piloting the delivery of the kitchen refurbishment programme in void properties by the voids service

- Improving the method of feedback from new tenants
- Improvements to decorating allowance procedure

Detailed performance information is set out in 4.2 to 4.4 of this report.

4.2 In-house kitchen team

In 2015/16, 190 kitchens refurbishments will have been completed as part of the capital programme, by the in-house voids service rather than by contractors. The pilot is in the process of being evaluated and is proposed to be mainstreamed in 2016/17.

4.3 Tenant questionnaire

In October 2015, the VIP project launched a new tenant questionnaire aimed at collating feedback from new tenants about their new property.

4.3.1 The headline findings of the 139 response received so far were:

- Respondents had clear expectations of their new homes
- Positive response to the condition of new homes
- Positive response to the extent of the decorating allowance

4.4 Decorating allowance

In December 2015, changes were made to the procedure by which decorating allowance was issued to new tenants. This has resulted in tenants receiving their voucher within a few days of taking on the tenancy and has streamlined the administration of the process.

5. Next Steps

Work planned for the next 6 to 12 months includes:

- Development and launch of a new minimum re-let standard so that applicants have accurate information of what to expect from their new home
- Explore the potential for extending the amount of capital programme works in void properties delivered by the in-house team
- Review the method of setting void targets
- Development of voids IT software to enable mobile working and improvements to data quality, work scheduling and materials ordering
- Working with the corporate transport review to review the use of vehicles
- Embedding the current staffing review
- Ensuring clear operating processes are in place

6. Financial, legal and other implications

6.1 Financial implications

Rent loss from routine and long term voids is forecast to be £1,025k this year compared to £1,378k in 2014/15.

Staffing changes expected to be implemented as part of the housing transformation programme to the Voids Repairs Service and the Property Lettings Team is expected to make savings of £300K.

Peter Coles, Principal Accountant 10/3/16

6.2 Legal implications – Jeremy Rainbow, Principal Lawyer (Litigation) - 371435

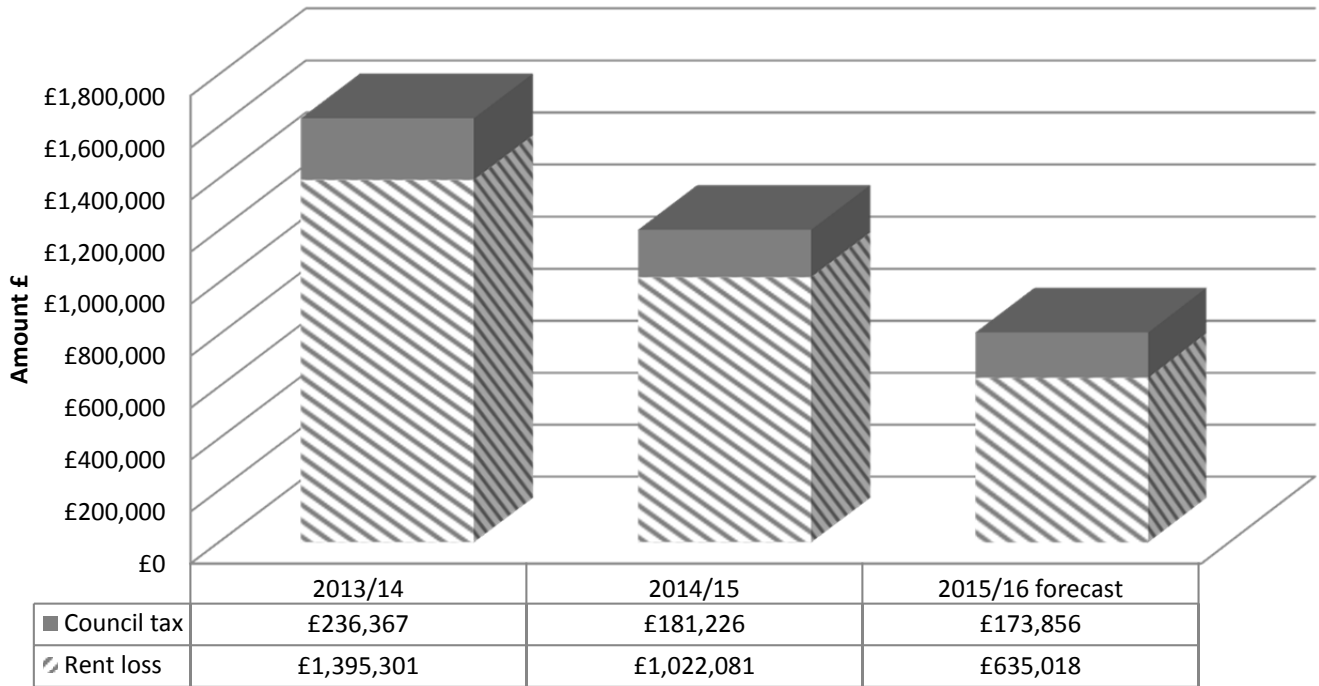
There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

7. Summary of appendices:

- A. Table of rent loss and council tax liability
- B. Table of average re-let times (year to date)
- C. Table of total void properties held (Routine & Long-term)

Appendix A

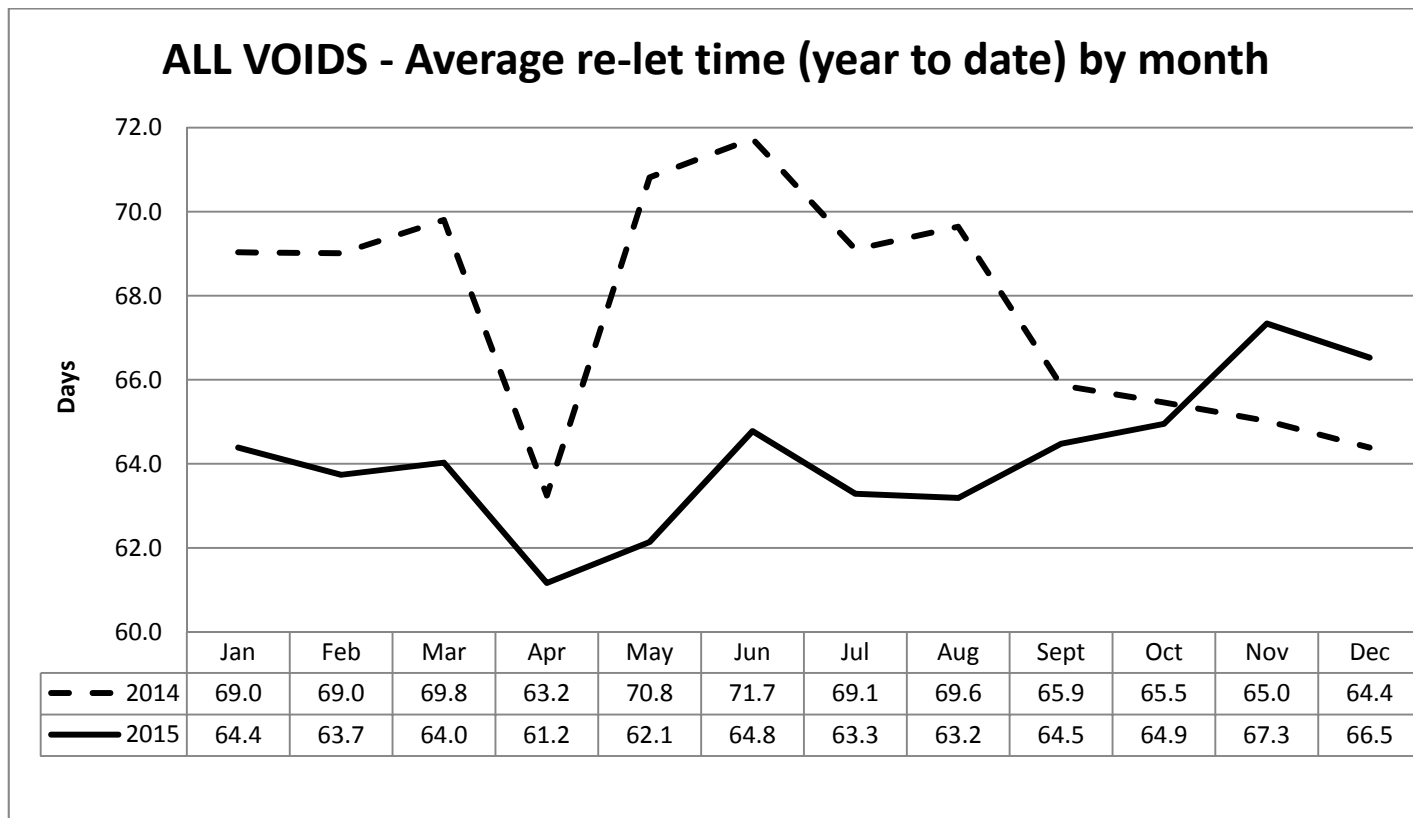
Rent loss and Council Tax liability for 2013/14 to 2015/16



Source: Data provided by Finance/Open Housing extracts as at 07/01/2016. The forecast for 2015/16 is based on actual performance as at period 9. n.b. excludes rent loss & council tax liability incurred as a result of the St Peters tower block programme

- This chart shows the forecast for rent loss and council tax to pay in 2015/16 against the previous two years

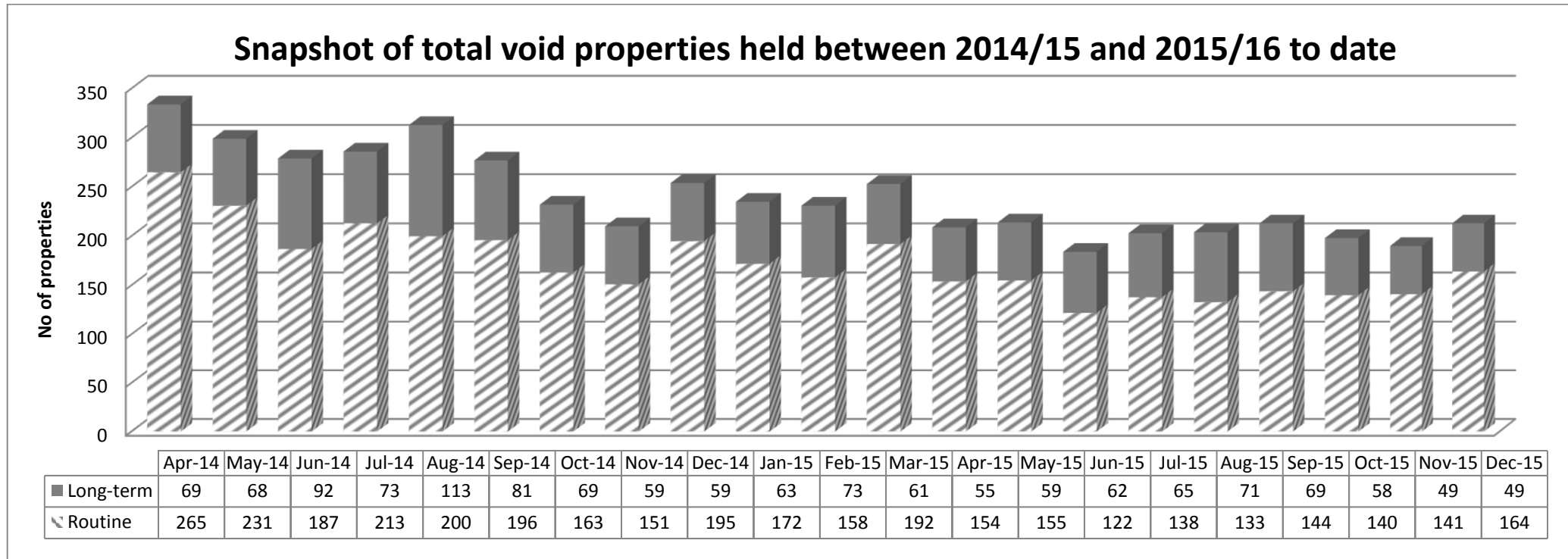
Appendix B



Source: Data provided by Finance/Open Housing extracts as at 07/01/2016.
n.b. excludes rent loss & council tax liability incurred as a result of the St Peters tower block programme

- This chart shows the average re-let time (year to date) in 2015 against the previous year.

Appendix C



Source: Void Performance Report/ SPTB report

n.b. excludes properties which are void as a result of the St Peters tower block programme

- This chart compares the total number of voids (routine & long-term) held at the end of each month.
- The number held has been falling steadily since its peak of 334 (1.6% of stock) in April 2014 and now stands at 213 (1% of stock) in December 2015.