

# Housing Scrutiny Commission

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## **Void Performance Report**

Assistant Mayor for Housing: Cllr Andy Connelly  
Housing Scrutiny Commission: 20<sup>th</sup>.November 2017

Lead Director: Chris Burgin

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**City Mayor**

## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: all
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- Report version number: v.2

### 1. Summary

This purpose of this report is to:

Update members of the Housing Scrutiny commission on the performance of the Voids and Property Lettings Team for the first quarter of 17/18.

Let members know about the changes that have been made to the way we deal with void properties as a result of the Housing Transformation Review that was implemented in November 2016.

Let members know what the impact of these changes has been on those allocated a council house and the staff that work in the service area.

### 2. Recommendations

For information only

### 3. Supporting information including options considered:

#### Background.

Previously the process for re letting vacant properties was split into two work streams, one that was responsible for the actual works to bring the property to the required standard after the previous tenant had moved out and the other was the actual process of surveying work required, advertising, offering and letting the property.

Now the city is split into two with both managers responsible for the whole end to end process. Each manager has a craft workforce to carry out the repairs along with 3 team leaders. One of the managers is responsible for Void Technicians, the team who survey the properties and one manager is responsible for the Property Lettings Team who advertise, offer and let the properties.

The reason for this change was to ensure that all areas worked together to deliver a more joined up service with all areas being responsible for achieving improved targets for void turnaround time and reduced rent loss.

### **Achievements to date:**

- More robust management of voids & property lettings
- Amended roles of craft operatives
- Launch of a new re-let standard
- Further streamlining of key processes
  - Escorted viewings brought into the service area
  - Redesign of work allocation for void repairs
  - More responsibility and accountability of void repairs team leaders
- Mainstreaming of the in-house delivery of capital programme works in void properties

### **Why do properties become void**

Rank	Tenancy End Reason	Count	%age
1	Deceased (no succession)	95	21.5%
2	Mvd Oth Accm - Mvd in with fam/friends	56	12.7%
3	Required Residential Care Home	29	6.6%
4	Property Abandoned	24	5.4%
5	Int Transfer - Management case	21	4.8%
6	Int Transfer - Affordability (other)	15	3.4%
7	Int Transfer - Downsizing	15	3.4%
8	Moved to Other City	15	3.4%
9	Affrdability(other)	12	2.7%
10	Harassment	12	2.7%
	<i>All Others</i>	<i>148</i>	<i>33.5%</i>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>442</b>	

### **Terms & Definitions:**

After a void property is surveyed we categorise it as either a routine void or long term void. We do this so that we can give the applicant a better idea when the property will be ready; this is based on the extent of work required.

#### **Routine voids**

Are those properties that require a comparatively low level of work prior to being re let. The actual void time is measured from when the termination period ends and the tenancy is terminated until the new tenancy commences.

### **Long term voids**

Are those properties which require a higher level of repair before it can be re let, the reasons maybe:

Damp proof work, wood worm treatment.

Asbestos removal (licenced)

Structural repairs

Major adaptations

Fire damaged properties

The property is being used as an office, by a residents group or the police

Projects (such as the tower blocks)

New meters and supplies.

Pest control.

### **All voids**

This is the term use when talking and reporting on all voids regardless of if they are routine or long term.

### **Number of voids held**

This is the number of vacant properties we hold at any one time; this should be less than 2% of the total stock. This figure also includes decants(see below)

### **Total annual rent loss**

This is the amount of rental income we have lost as a result of a property being empty and is based on a daily rate, the longer the property is empty the greater the amount.

There are two weeks over the Christmas period that are defined as rent free, this means that December is traditional a low month for void income loss. The average weekly rental figure are:

### **Total annual council tax loss**

We become liable for paying council tax on void properties at a daily rate as soon as the property has been empty for 1 calendar month. There are exceptions around this but this is the case in the majority of cases

### **Decants.**

Are properties that are being used as temporary accommodation for tenants whilst major repairs are being carried out to their home. Rent is not charged for the use of these properties, the tenant continues to pay rent on their main tenancy.

## **Current targets and Performance**

The current targets the Voids and Property Letting Team are working to achieve in 17/18 are:

Measure	Target	Actual performance as at August 2017
Routine Voids	45 days average	48.7
Long term voids	90 days average	85
All voids	Maximum 90 days average	57.3
No. Voids Held	Less than 2% (421)	1.3% (269)
Total annual rent loss	No greater than £825k	£199,367 (Q1 April-June 17)
Total annual council tax loss	£202,537	£53,206 (Q1 April-June 17)
Ready to let to Occupation	10 days	6.5 days

**See appendix 1 for void performance over the last 3 years and since April 2016**

## **What's working well for officers**

Joint working between Managers and the Repairs Team leaders is working well, information is being passed down and everybody is very clear what their roles and responsibilities are. This has a beneficial impact on the quality and amount of information the Tenancy Management Officer is able to pass onto the applicant with regards to the status of the property they have been offered.

Operatives have been fitting new kitchens to the same standard as the contractors we use to deliver the capital programme. This has been very well received by the craft staff and has been a big motivating factor for them. It has also resulted in the tenant receiving a good quality product.

Since the new structure we communicate with all team members better, the craft staff in particular have noticed an improvement.

We have a structured approach to team meetings and managers and Head of Service regularly visit site to inspect works in progress. Regular PDR's and 1-2-1 are carried out.

The apprentices enjoy working in voids and have a positive impact on the work we do.

## **What's working well for applicants**

The actual tenancy sign up process is now carried out at the property rather than back at the office, this makes it quicker and more convenient for the new tenant.

The void turnaround times have all seen a sustained reduction since the

implementation of the new way of working. This is in spite of a reduction in the number of craft staff, down from 84 to 76, this is a significant achievement and is seen as a direct result of the new management structure and the support that is now provided for all those working in the Voids and Property Lettings Team.

Prospective tenants are as a result able to move into their home in a shorter timescale.

**What's not working so well and what we are going to do about it.**

Delays due to the removal of licenced asbestos. This requires notification to the HSE and if not arranged in a timely manner can have significant impact on the planning of void work. Delays can also occur due to contractors who can't always work as quickly as we would like as they have built in delays due to lead in times i.e. asbestos, kitchens and rewires. This will form part of our ongoing process improvements and partnership working with other sections etc.

Refusal rates are high, properties are offered correctly in accordance with policy and applicants bid for the properties they want. However, when some applicants have secured the property they have bid for they then refuse the actual offer. This is largely due to the property not being in the area they want, or they see a property advertised in the next cycle that they prefer, this is an issue nationally. We have increased the amount of information on the website so that applicants are fully informed on the location and the property attributes we even link to Google maps so they can physically see the property. Applicants are also encouraged to visit the area to view the outside of the property to be certain it is the area they want in order to mitigate refusals.

Rank	Code	Offer Refusal Reason	Count	%age
1	RARE	Not want area	268	41.6%
2	RNRP	Treated as refusal as no reply	114	17.7%
3	RWPT	Wrong property type	68	10.5%
4	RPLI	Property layout issue	66	10.2%
5	RBBM	Bid by mistake	30	4.7%
6	RBDF	Want to bid for property in next cycle	20	3.1%
7	RGEI	Garden/exterior issues	20	3.1%
8	RMOB	Access and mobility grounds	12	1.9%
9	RNYR	No longer wants housing	12	1.9%
10	RRTH	Affordability	10	1.6%
		<i>All Others</i>	25	3.9%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>645</b>	

**What we are doing to continue to improve void performance:**

**Productivity measures:** Void repairs staff currently operates a manual work allocation system and are not currently mobile working. This does not allow easy access to productivity data which has to be manually calculated. We have put some systems in place to capture some data in this area and are just starting to record productivity information and need to be able to collate this over a period of time for it to have meaning and application. This will enable us to set realistic targets and carry out future resource/workforce planning and increase the efficiency of craft operatives.

**Sheltered housing:** In recent years Sheltered Housing schemes have proved unpopular and difficult to let. We have started a project to find out why, what the actual demand is for the schemes and re visit our offer, this is ongoing.

**Mobile working/works planning:** The roll out of the mobile working solution is eagerly anticipated by Voids, this will help automate systems and communicate more effectively within voids and other areas of the business that we work for and those that help us, eg. Asbestos team and stores. It will also streamline the ordering of materials making it more efficient and accurate.

**Works Planning:** We will also introduce a system of works planning, similar to repairs, so that we can estimate the completion date of a void more accurately so that people have more notice of when their new home will be ready for them to move into.

**Target Setting:** With the introduction of some manual systems we have put in place to monitor productivity as an interim measure prior to mobile working being introduced, this will enable us to set more realistic individual and team targets which prior to the transformation did not exist.

**Performance Management:** There is ongoing work being carried out to improve the performance management data. Apart from reporting on average void times this also includes looking at time in between processes to ensure any dead time can be eliminated, for example by looking at one particular area in detail RTL to Occupation we have been able to identify issues and put mitigating measures in place to ensure that this timescale could be reduced and it now stands at 6.5 days. This will continue with the look at other areas and the same approach will be applied

#### **Future work areas:**

**Daily tenancies:** The introduction of daily tenancies would have the benefit of reducing the RTL to Occupation timescale further as we would not have to wait until the nearest Monday in order to commence a tenancy. This however would need extensive research and investigation and would require the involvement of Legal, Rent Accounts, Income Management, ASTH, IT etc. and would need to be run as a specific project

**Decorating voucher scheme:** The current B&Q scheme comes to an end next year and we have started to procure a new supplier, this will change the way decorating materials are supplied to our tenants and will increase efficiency reducing the costs of materials still giving the new tenant an element of choice.

**Stores review:** Currently our materials are delivered by the in house stores service. This will be changing in the new year and we need to work with the new supplier to ensure that current service levels are maintained.

**Peaks and Troughs:** Void repairs are a reactive service and we respond to the number of voids we have at any one particular time. Naturally there are peaks and troughs as a result of this. For the peaks we could start to look at better use of contractors which would depend on their capacity to pick work up. At the same time where there are troughs we could look at bringing more work in house where we are able such as rewires.

#### **4. Details of Scrutiny**

This report is to update members of the Housing Scrutiny Commission

#### **5. Financial, legal and other implications**

##### 5.1 Financial implications

##### 5.2 Legal implications

None sought

##### 5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

None sought

##### 5.4 Equalities Implications

None sought

##### 5.5 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)



**7. Summary of appendices:**

Appendix A, Void Performance

**8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?**

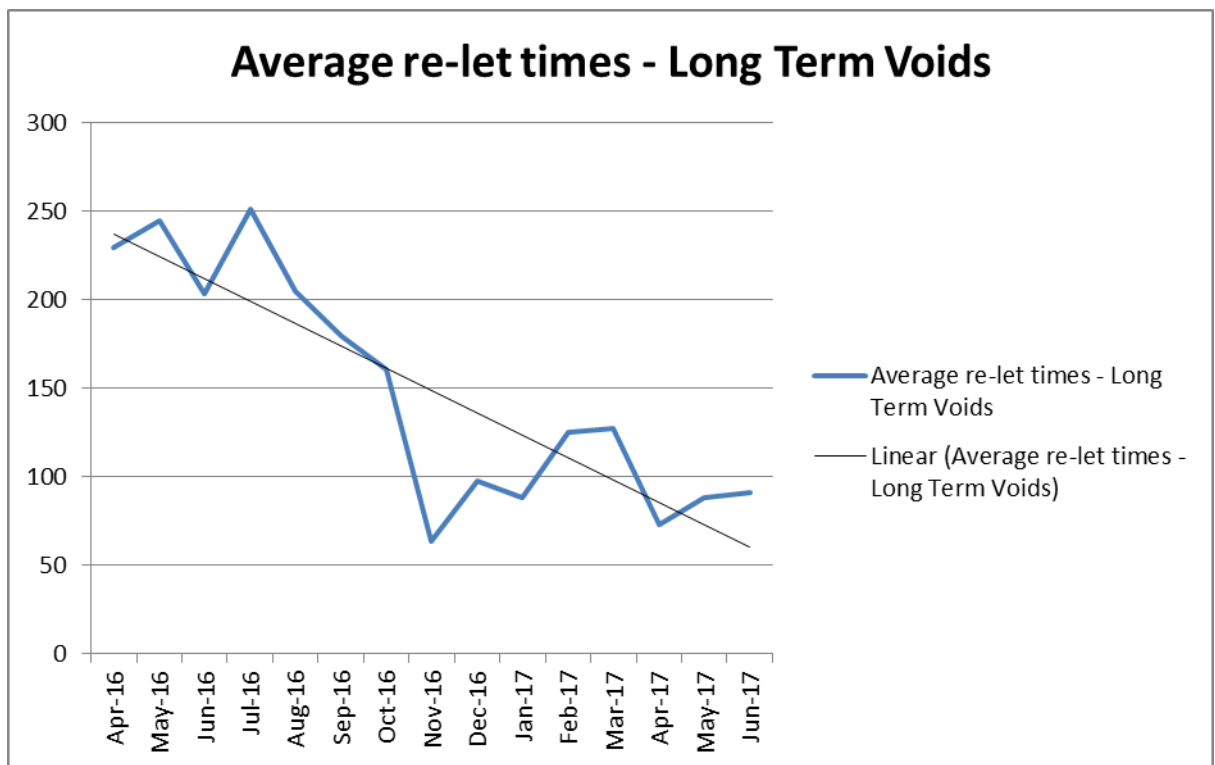
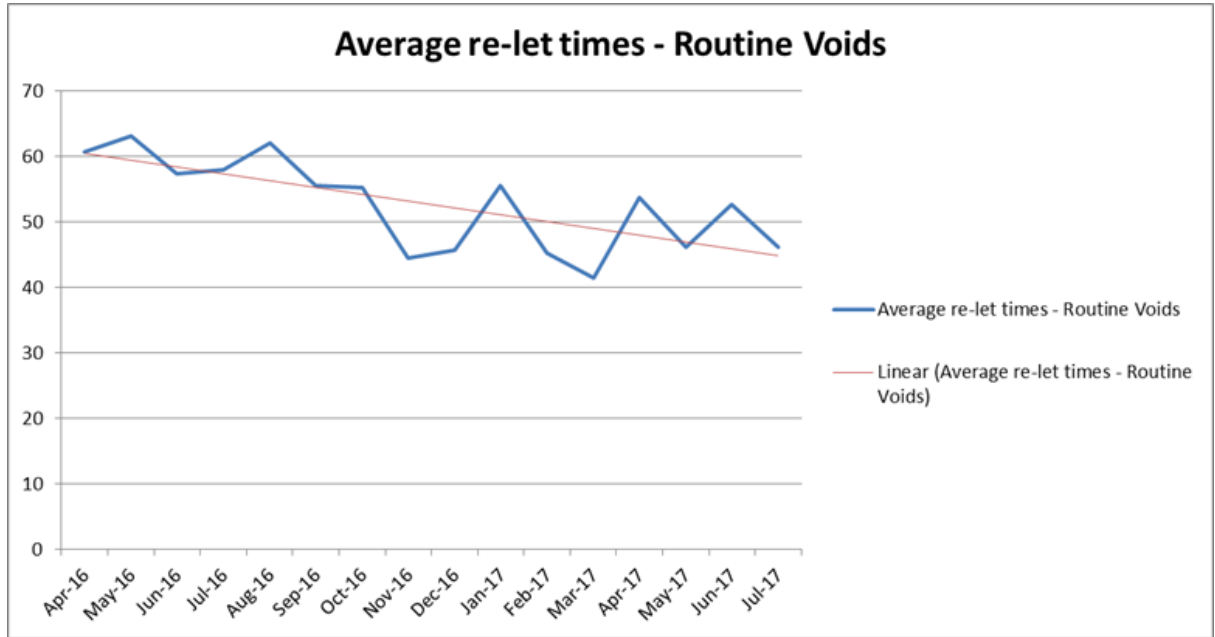
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**9. Is this a “key decision”?**

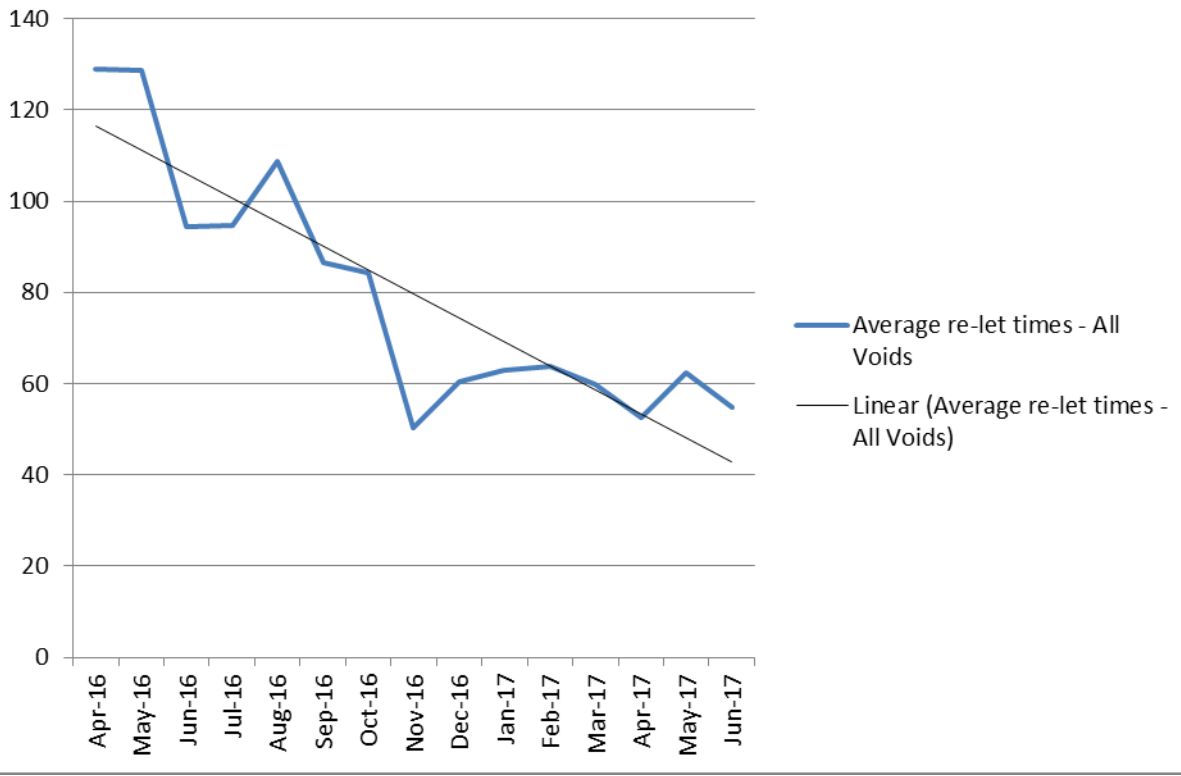
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## Appendix 1

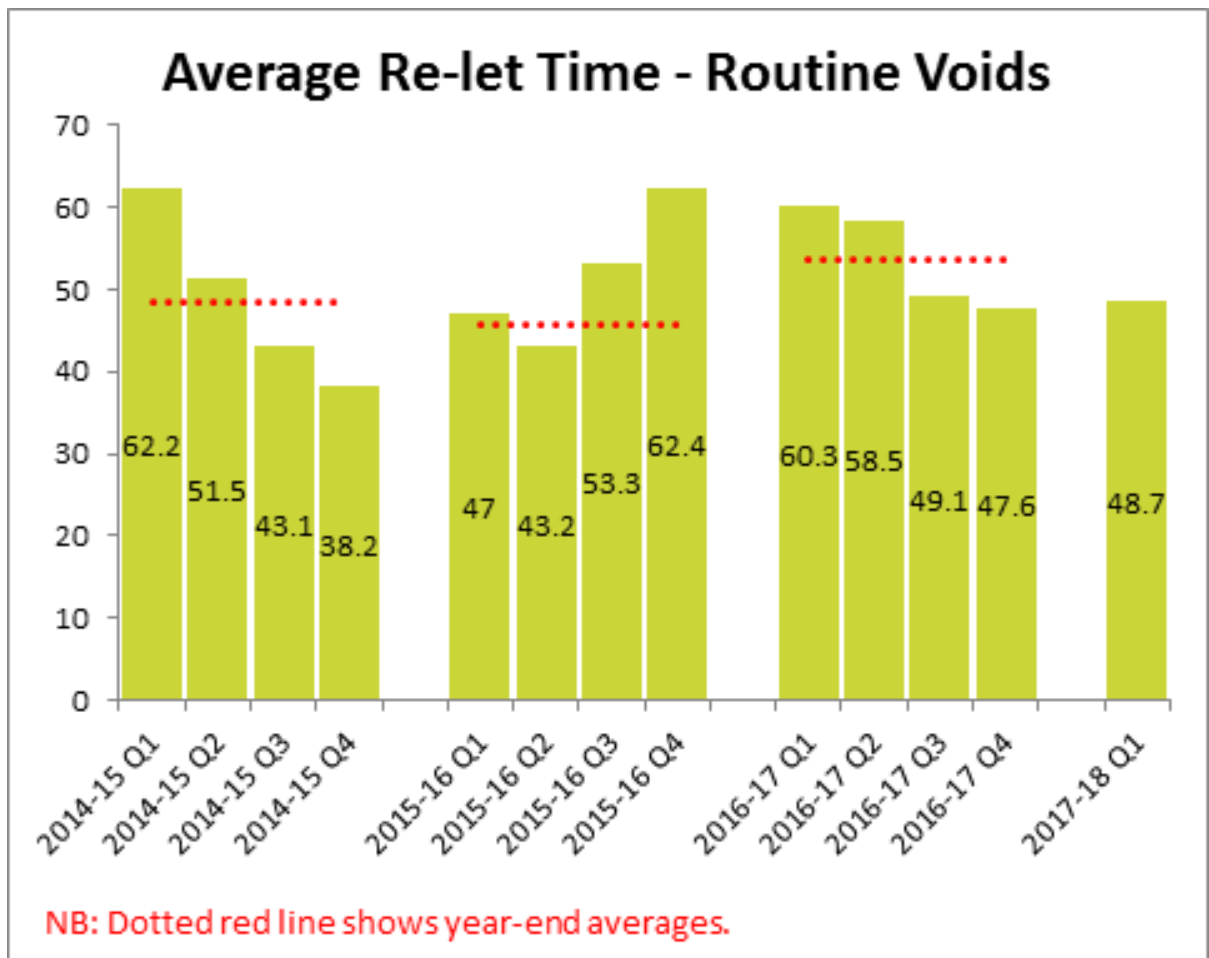
### Void Performance since April 2016



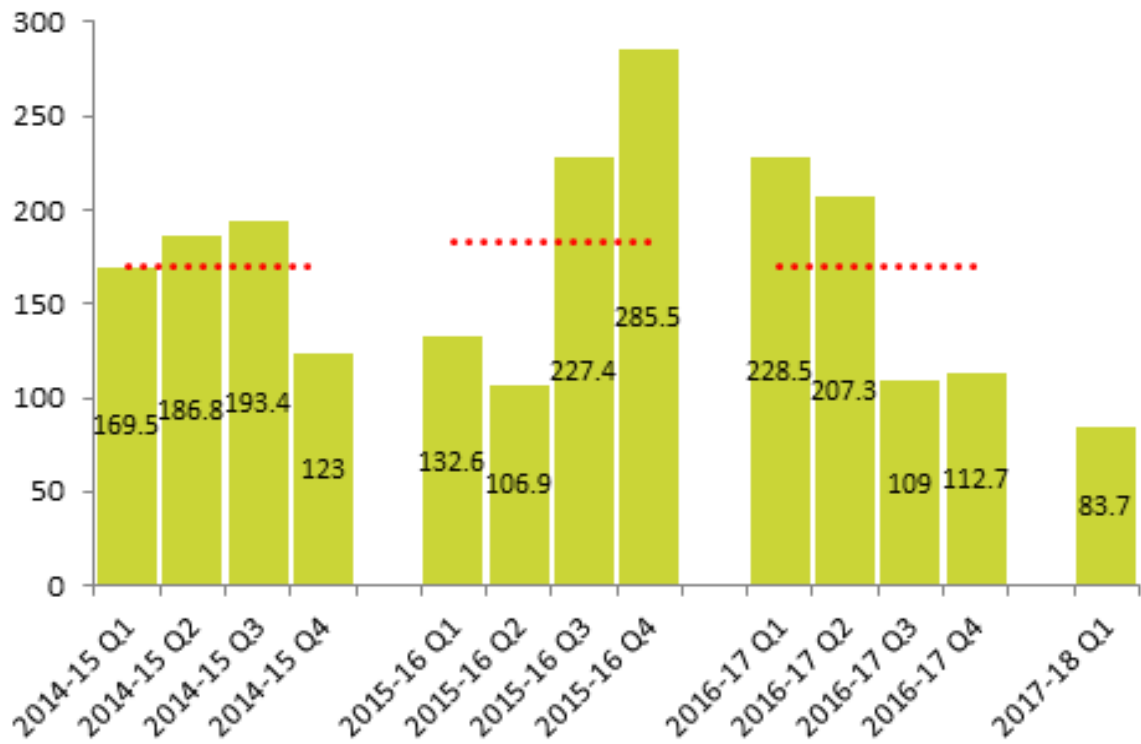
### Average re-let times - All Voids



## Void Performance over the last 3 years

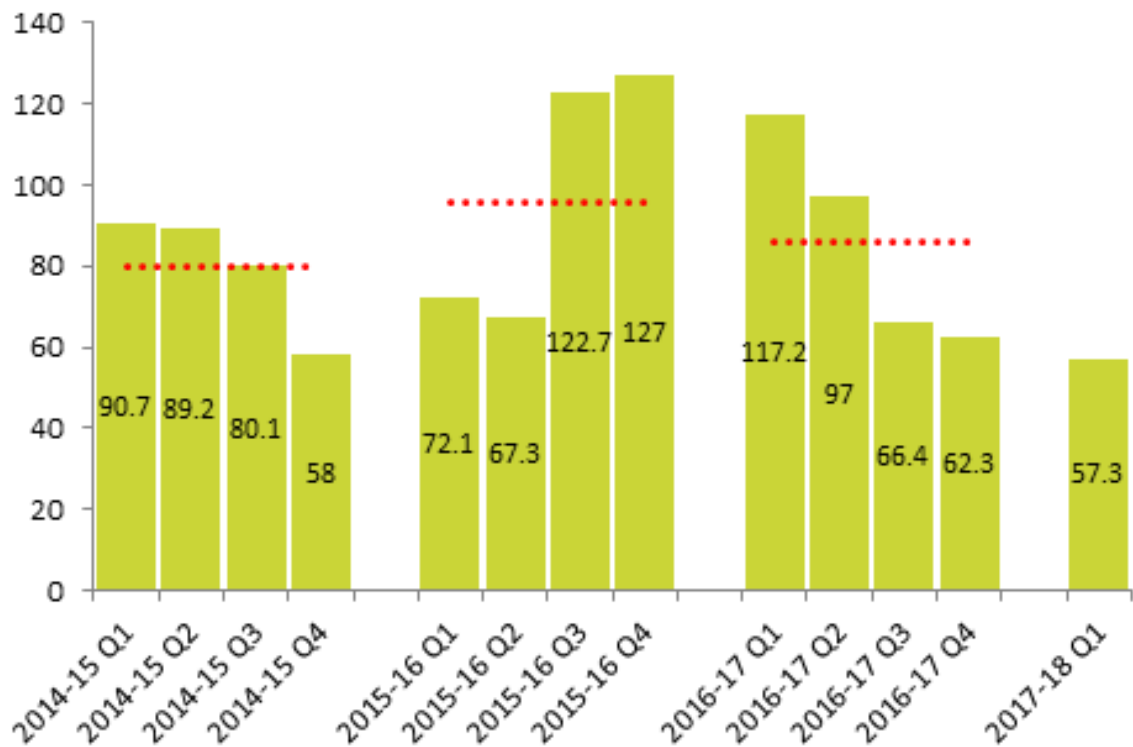


### Average Re-let Time - Long Term Voids



NB: Dotted red line shows year-end averages.

### Average Re-let Time - All Voids



NB: Dotted red line shows year-end averages.

