

Tuesday, 18 March 2025

Report of the Assistant Director, Assets**Update on Housing Voids****Exempt Information**

Not exempt

Purpose

This report provides an update on actions taken in relation to voids since the last report in April 2024.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. Committee notes and comments/provides feedback on the proposals around the Equans contract reset in relation to void works

Executive Summary

An update on void performance was provided to Scrutiny Committee in April 2024, this resulted in 3 recommendations being made by Cabinet in June 2024.

The recommendations and actions are as follows

Recommendation	Actions	Further Actions	Risks
1. to instruct Officers to review the costs versus return, of employing an in-house inspection team to see if we can drive down the costs of voids.	<p>All notified voids are now subject to a notice period inspection by a member of the voids team. This visit identifies issues that the tenant needs to address prior to vacating the property and highlights any items of recharge back to the tenant.</p> <p>This approach has allowed us to directly test the benefits of undertaking pre-void period inspections.</p> <p>This does not appear to have brought down the</p>	<p>Following the recommendation from Scrutiny and as part of the contract reset there is a proposal that a technical officer and representative of the contractor carry out the notice period inspection.</p> <p>It is expected that the technical staff will be able to identify more issues at the pre-void stage, they will also be able to partially schedule the void works before the property becomes void.</p>	<p>There will be cases where there is no notice and as such this process will not apply.</p> <p>In some cases, personal circumstances are such that moves take place despite issues being identified during the pre-void inspection process.</p> <p>It is not known at this stage whether technical inspections at the pre-void period will have any greater effect on the overall void costs.</p>

	<p>average void cost and we are still seeing voids that require large amounts of work and with large amounts of rubbish to be removed.</p> <p>There has been no additional cost to the Authority in undertaking these inspections in this manner, conversely there has been no significant impact on void costs.</p>	<p>There should be no additional cost to this but staffing resources and effectiveness will need to be monitored regularly</p> <p>This approach may identify more rechargeable repairs and will also mean that the contractor is able to plan works before the property is void.</p> <p>Excess rubbish removal remains an issue.</p>	
<p>2. to review how we recover damages costs from existing tenants and see if there is a more proactive way, we can approach this long term</p>	<p>As set out above there is a pre-void inspection where voids are notified to the council. At this stage tenants are notified of any items that need to be rectified or that are likely to be rechargeable. Moves can be delayed where until recharges are paid.</p> <p>Following the recommendation an updated recharges policy is in draft form, this has been produced as part of the Social Housing Regulatory Programme. It is anticipated that this will be presented to the Housing and Homelessness Advisory Board in or around June 2025 (subject to agreement of dates).</p> <p>The policy seeks to formalise the arrangements for the application of recharges.</p>	<p>Involving technical officers in the pre-void inspection process will assist in identifying rechargeable items.</p> <p>Consideration could be given to offering incentives to tenants who return their property in good condition and free from rubbish.</p>	<p>As above, where notice isn't given it is not possible to undertake pre-void inspections and in some cases it is not possible to delay moves even if recharges are not paid.</p> <p>Where tenants move out of a Tamworth property the Council have very little influence or leverage over them.</p> <p>Many tenants are vulnerable and lack the financial means to pay for the recharge items. Recharges can't be added to the tenants rent account.</p>

3. that the Portfolio Holder calls Equans in to address Members major concerns around void turnaround times and ask them what their action plan is to improve this.	The Portfolio Holder has been involved in the contract reset process and has provided feedback to the consultants on the Member perspective. Equans to attend meeting of Corporate Scrutiny on 18 th March 2025.	Portfolio to have continued involvement in the contract reset process and to kept up to date on contract performance and KPI data.	
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In October 2024, Cabinet approved a “contract reset” with Equans, this reset is intended to reframe key areas of the current contract with a focus on addressing the commercial viability of the contract for Equans which will allow both parties to focus their efforts and attentions on contract performance and service delivery. One of the key workstreams within this contract reset is voids. Working groups have been in place since December and workshops are taking place through March with the aim that all of the contract reset details will be agreed and in place by April 2025. There will be a new suite of KPIs, ongoing monitoring and quarterly performance reporting providing updates on the outcomes of the contract reset.

It is recognised that performance on voids is still not where it needs to be and whilst the contract reset will be a key driver for change work is already underway on trying to resolve the underlying issues. Equans have brought on board a series of new sub-contractors dedicated to void delivery, there is a void tracker that is updated on a daily basis, this is reviewed and discussed by the operational teams on a weekly basis. and we are finalising an arrangement with a company to ensure that issues with energy supplies are addressed quickly so as not to delay void delivery. In addition to the operational meetings, issues relating to performance are discussed at a more senior level through weekly meetings between Tamworth and Equans.

Void Turnaround Times

	Average Contractor time	Average Period With Housing	Average Void period	Total Voids
2021-2	30	24	54	294
2022/3	35	24	59	273
2023/4	37	23	61	250
2024/5	42	46	88	241

Void costs remain higher than seen across the sector, Housemark benchmark figures suggest an average void cost of £3,600 whereas in Tamworth the average void cost has consistently been in the region of £4,000 - £4,500 with a relatively large number of higher cost voids. Clearance of excess rubbish left in voids remains an issue.

Void turnaround times also remain high; this is something that appears to have affected many social housing providers since 2020 but it is recognised that there is significant room for improvement and that this needs to be an outcome of the contract reset process. The full details of the contract reset process will have been agreed by the end of March 2025, this will include a full review of all KPIs along with a timetable for improvements. It is recognised by all parties that void performance is a key area for improvement and performance against the revised KPIs will be monitored on a monthly basis. The expectation is that all standard voids will be completed within the contractual timescales by June 2025, this recognises that there will be some residual voids that carry over from the 2024/25 financial year that will be outside the agreed timescales.

Options Considered

No specific options considered as this report is intended as an update only. The executive summary sets out the work being done in relation to contract reset and its impact on voids.

Resource Implications

No specific resource implications are arising from this report, as it is intended as an updated only. Any resource implications have been set out in the Cabinet report of October 2024 in relation to the Equans contract reset.

Legal/Risk Implications Background

No specific legal implications or general risks arising from this update.

Equalities Implications

See appendix 1

Environment and Sustainability Implications (including climate change)

None arising from this update.

Background Information

There was an update to Corporate Scrutiny Committee in April 2024 leading to recommendations by Cabinet in June 2024.

In October 2024 Cabinet approved a “Contract Reset” with Equans.

Report Author

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List of Background Papers

None

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment