CITY OF YORK COUNCIL

Health, Housing and Adult Social Care Committee	4 December 2024

Report of the Director of Housing and Communities

Update on Void Properties

Summary

1. This report presents Scrutiny with an overview of the current position regarding empty (void) council house properties. The report reflects on the current void position benchmarked against performance from recent years and in relation to the performance of other social housing providers. Scrutiny requested an update on void performance due to previous concerns being expressed about the number of void council homes and the time it was taking for some homes to be re-let.

Background

2. Council houses become void for a variety of reasons, ranging from tenants moving to a different local authority area, moving into larger or more appropriate accommodation, or when a tenant passes away. In York, we have around 7400 council homes and between 500 and 600 of these typically become void each financial year. It is important both from an affordable housing need and income generation perspective that the homes are empty for as little time as possible.

3. There are two primary categories of void properties. These are planned and standard. Planned voids occur when a major refurbishment/modernisation is taking place, typically to a whole apartment building, which requires all of the residents to move out for a period of time. Standard voids are those which occur on an ad-hoc basis with a maximum of 4 weeks-notice provided by the tenant.

Recommendations

4. Health, Housing and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the performance of the voids since 2022 including its current positive position.
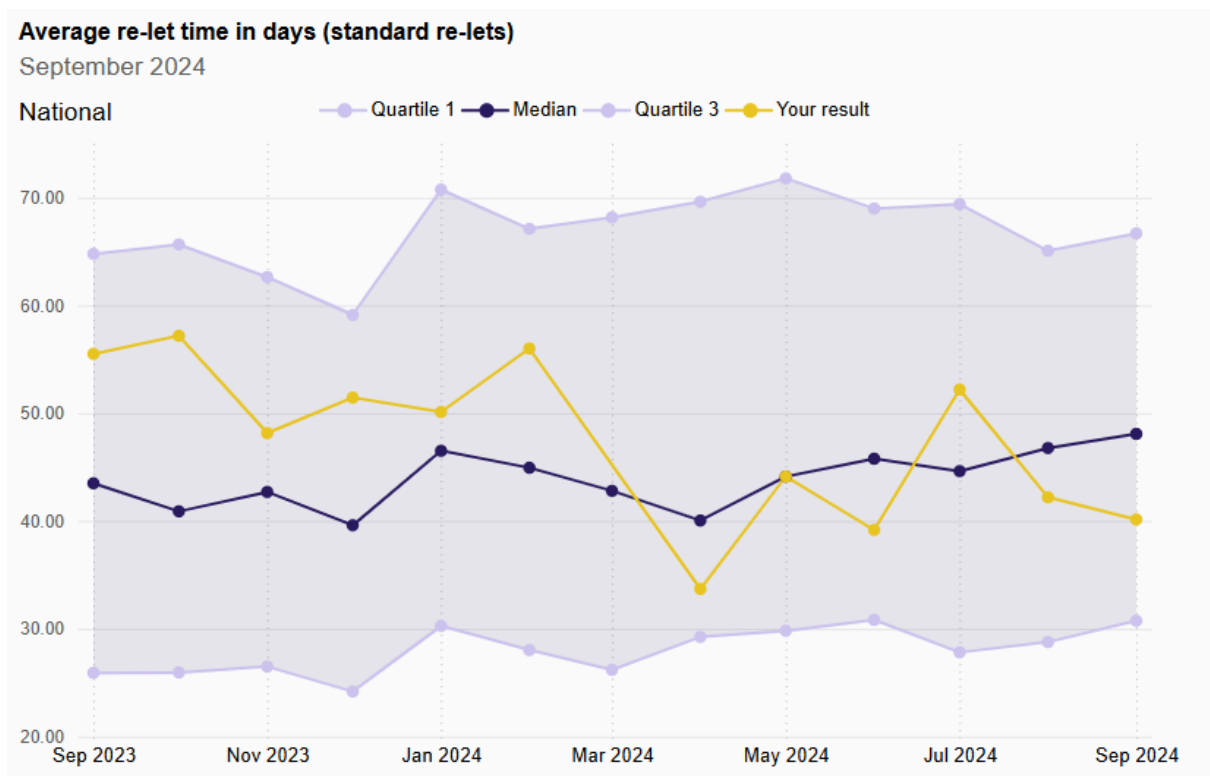
Analysis

5. This financial year, there are 72 planned voids. This consists of 40 flats in Bell Farm, where degrading bathroom pods are being removed from the backs of properties. The major refurbishment includes the building of a new thermally efficient rear extension, home modernisation works including new kitchens and bathrooms, reconfigured apartment layout, additional insulation, and the installation of air source heat pumps and solar photovoltaic panels. This work will be complete in summer 2025. In addition, there are 31 planned voids at Glen Lodge which is an independent living community. The original building at Glen Lodge is receiving major works consisting of a partial re-roof, internal reconfiguration to some flats and home modernisation including new kitchens and bathrooms, new windows, fire safety and utility improvements, and the installation of solar photovoltaic panels. This work will be complete in spring 2025. The capital budget for planned voids takes account of the lost rent and the standard sector approach is for these homes to be excluded from standard void numbers.

6. In terms of standard voids, at the time of writing this report, around 270 void council homes have been let this financial year. The graph below shows the number of standard/unplanned void properties in recent years. As of 18th November 2024 there were 61 empty council homes with 8 of these ready to be let to tenants. In late June 2022, there were 141 empty council homes. This represents a significant improvement with the current position representing our strongest position for a number of years.

Number of void properties (June 22 to Nov 24)
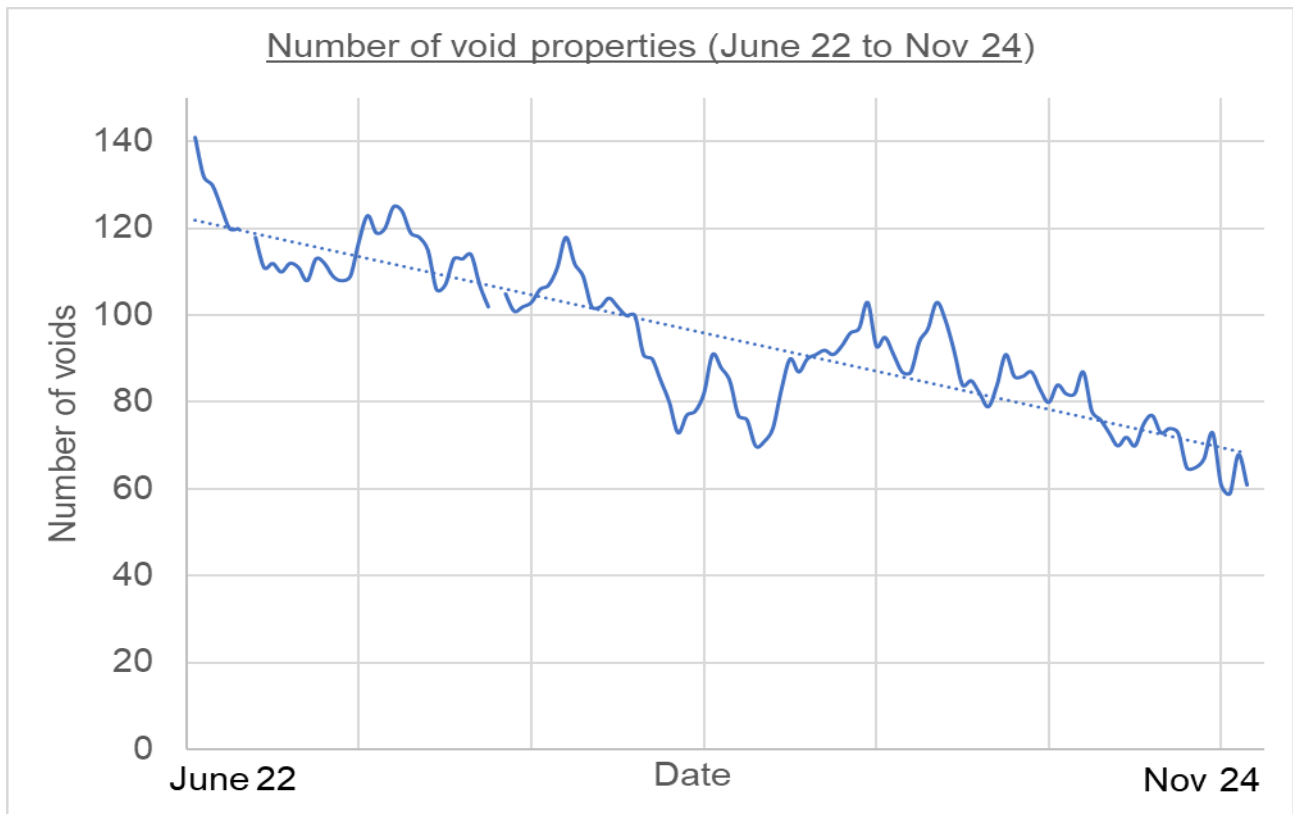
7. The improvement in void performance is the result of more efficient sequencing of works, prioritising trades capacity into the homes where possible, close monitoring of contractor performance, and more efficient working between Building Services and the Housing Management teams. Within existing resources it is believed that there remains some scope for a further small reduction in void numbers, however the primary ambition is to maintain voids at this low level.

8. There are always rises and falls in void numbers. Capacity across the service is relatively static but there are weeks when few keys are handed back and others where there are many. This appears to be relatively random and cannot be accurately predicted by months or seasons.

9. One of the key factors that affects the medium and long-term position of void numbers is the average amount of time it takes from one tenant handing back their keys to the next tenant moving in. This is referred to as the 're-let' time. The graph below is produced by Housemark and tracks City of York Council re-let times (in yellow) against those of other housing associations. The quartile and median averages included in the graph below is taken from data on Registered Social Landlords who have a stock size of less than 10,000 homes.

Average re-let time in days (standard re-lets)

September 2024

National — Quartile 1 — Median — Quartile 3 — Your result

10.   Since the start of 2024 the City of York Council have a re-let performance broadly similar to similar sized stock holding organisations. Between April 2024 and September 2024 (the latest data available), City of York Council has delivered re-lets quicker or equal to the median of peers for five of these six months. This shows a positive trend with the reduced re-let times being the key driver for the reduced number of voids.

Council Plan

11.   The City of York Council Plan 'One City for all' sets out four core commitments around Equalities and Human Rights, Affordability, Climate, and Health. Maximising the provision of good quality, safe and healthy council housing is considered integral to all four core commitments. More specifically, one of the seven priorities is to increase the supply of affordable housing. Whilst much of this priority relates to the delivery of new affordable homes in the city, one of the outlined key performance indicators is the number of void properties. The fewer void homes, the more affordable housing that is available in the city. The improved void performance outlined in this report supports the delivery of the ambitions outlined within the Council Plan.

Contact Details

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Report Approved	✓	**Date**	23/11/2024

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Wards Affected: List wards or tick box to indicate all   **All**   ✓

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

None

Abbreviations

None