

APPENDIX 1

 <p>ST HELENS BOROUGH COUNCIL</p>	<h1>Place Services Scrutiny Committee</h1> <h2>15 April 2024</h2>
---	---

Report Title	Housing Voids Spotlight Review
Cabinet Portfolio	Regeneration and Planning
Cabinet Member	Councillor Richard McCauley
Exempt Report	No
Reason for Exemption	N/A
Key Decision	No
Public Notice issued	N/A
Wards Affected	All
Report of	Tanya Wilcock Director of Communities Tanyawilcock@sthelens.gov.uk
Contact Officer	Karl Allender Scrutiny Support Officer karlallender@sthelens.gov.uk

Borough Priorities	Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life.	X
	Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities.	X
	Create safe and strong communities and neighborhoods for all.	X
	Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy.	X
	Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture.	
	Be a responsible Council.	X

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report is a summary of the evidence that was submitted to the 'Housing Voids' Place Services Scrutiny Committee Spotlight Review and concludes with a series of recommendations linking directly to, and in support of, several Council Priorities.

2. Recommendation for Decision

Place Services Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 1) Approve the Task Group Report and its recommendations as set out in Appendix 1a.**
- 2) Submit the recommendations to Cabinet for response.**

3. Purpose of this report

- 3.1. This report presents the evidence submitted to and the findings of the 'Housing Voids' Place Services Scrutiny Committee Spotlight Review, held between 2 October 2023 and 20 November 2023. The principal purpose of the review was to:

- Engage with a variety of housing partners in the Borough.
- Understand the challenges facing the housing sector.
- Understand the turnover of properties and the number of void properties that exist in the Borough.
- Investigate the work underway to reduce void turnaround times.
- Explore the impact voids have on the Council's statutory housing function.
- Scrutinise the actions undertaken by the Council and partner agencies to address the issues.

4. Background / Reason for the recommendations

- 4.1. At the Place Services Scrutiny Committee Work Programme Workshop held on 12 June 2023, Members agreed to establish a Task Group to strengthen their understanding of the issue of Housing Voids, with a focus for the review being voids in the Social Housing Sector. Members agreed to hold a Spotlight Review to gain a better understanding of the wider issues within the housing sector and to identify potential areas for improvement.
- 4.2. Members of the Place Services Scrutiny Committee were invited to participate in the Spotlight Review. Participating Members included:
- Councillor Robyn Hattersley (Chair)
 - Councillor Tracy Dickinson
 - Councillor John Hodkinson
 - Councillor Keith Laird

- Councillor Ann McCormack
- Councillor Geoffrey Pearl

4.3. The following officers and housing partners supported the Spotlight Review meeting, which was held on 2 October 2023:

- Samantha Murray Assistant Director (Housing and Communities)
- Paul Warburton Managing Director, Torus
- Lisa O Connell Service Lead (Allocations), Torus
- Samantha Lloyd Policy Manager, Torus
- Heidi Hewitt Service Manager, Your Housing Group
- Karl Allender Scrutiny Support Officer

4.4. The following officers attended the 2nd Spotlight Review meeting, which was held on 20 November:

- Samantha Murray Assistant Director (Housing and Communities)
- Karl Allender Scrutiny Support Officer

4.5. At the initial meeting, Members were provided with an overview and background information relating to the context of the Council's role in relation to Housing Allocations and Homelessness. Whilst the Council is not a housing provider, it retains the statutory duties of a Strategic Housing Authority. The relevant data that was shared with Members included:

- there are 6,500 people on the Under-One-Roof waiting list as of October 2023.
- 20% of the Borough's housing stock is in the socially rented sector.
- 981 lettings of social homes were completed in 2021/22.

4.6. In order to fulfil its statutory duty, the Council must:

- Periodically review the Borough's housing needs in relation to housing conditions and housing mix.
- Distribute Disabled Facilities Grants (subject to means testing and up to a prescribed maximum) to enable Homes to be adapted to meet the needs of the Borough's existing population.
- Have a Housing Allocation scheme, publish a summary of it and allocate housing accommodation in accordance with the scheme.
- Make inquiries into cases of homelessness or threatened homelessness, to provide interim accommodation to people who are homeless and secure permanent accommodation for people who are eligible for assistance.
- Ensure that homelessness and the prevention of homelessness advice is freely available.
- Publish a homelessness strategy at least every 5 years and take it into account in discharging its functions.
- Inspect dwellings to identify hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and take appropriate enforcement action where Category 1 hazards exist.

- Licence Houses in Multiple Occupation where there are five or more persons in two or more households sharing of facilities.
 - Develop and publish a Tenancy Strategy for the borough.
- 4.7. In recent years, the social housing sector has had to respond to several challenges regarding an increase in the number of vacant properties (Voids), which has resulted in applicants waiting longer for a property to become available and ready to occupy. For Homelessness Services this impact results in residents staying longer than is suitable in temporary accommodation.
- 4.8. The challenges faced are reflected in the Council's Quarterly Performance Reports. The Place Services Scrutiny Committee has been monitoring the respective Housing related performance indicators, in particular:
- HS001 - Number of households who are assessed as owed a full housing duty (where homelessness has not been prevented or relieved).
 - HS003 - Number of private sector vacant dwellings that are returned to occupation or demolished as a direct result of action by the Local Authority.
 - HS005 - Number of households that are families with children living in temporary accommodation.
- 4.9. Although the Council is a non-stock holding authority, it retains a key role in terms of ensuring there is suitable housing available to meet the needs of the Borough. As a Housing Authority, the Council provides an Allocations Scheme for determining housing need priorities and for defining the procedure to be followed in allocating social rent and affordable rent properties.
- 4.10. The Council has a Nominations Agreement with Registered Housing Providers, which sets out the percentage of available properties that the Providers will make available to the Local Authority. The delivery vehicle for this Nominations Agreement is called 'Under One Roof' which is a 'choice based' letting system managed on behalf of the Council by Torus.
- 4.11. Members were provided with the current context and key challenges that the social housing sector is facing. Supply and demand issues are key contributors to the increasing waiting times for social housing, with demand significantly outstripping supply. Members were advised that the current economic context, together with the cost-of-living crisis, has had a significant increase in the demand for affordable homes. This coupled with changes over recent years with regards to supporting refugees' programmes, such as the Homes for Ukraine programme, has meant that the number of available homes is not sufficient to meet the need.
- 4.12. Members were informed that the scale of demand has increased year on year. There are over 1,000 calls to the contact centre per month seeking support from the Housing Options Service. At the time of this report, the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation (as temporary accommodation) to avoid homelessness involved 13 families. As a result, families are being

accommodated in temporary accommodation that is out of the Borough, which is increasing the financial impact on Council expenditure.

- 4.13. Members were informed that the Council's responses included a letter to all Registered Providers requesting assistance to maximise the availability of properties and to maximise the use of the Under One Roof letting scheme. There had also been an operational commitment from Torus to prioritise voids allocated to people in temporary accommodation.
- 4.14. Officers meet with Registered Providers on a quarterly basis and most recently there was significant dialogue with the sector in relation to the recent Allocations Policy Changes and the review of the Nominations Agreement.
- 4.15. Members were informed that the key priorities to improve the process are:
 - to minimise the time that applicants wait for an available property.
 - to encourage move on and throughput of hostel accommodation (time delays result in the need for B&B accommodation to be used which in turn creates frustration for applicants).
 - acknowledge that properties need to be prepared to a good standard.
- 4.16. Members raised questions around the use of benchmarking data around void turnaround times, homelessness and the use of temporary accommodation; they queried if our statistics are comparative with neighbouring authorities. It was noted that the issues experienced in St Helens are a national trend. Members were also reassured that information is shared between regional authorities via a Merseyside Working Group, to highlight best practice and planning and processes for improvements.
- 4.17. Further questions were raised around Registered Providers and how the working arrangements are in terms of cooperation and engagement. It was noted that the Council does have a positive working relationship with all Registered Providers with housing stock in the Borough associated with the authority; however, it was noted that there are some challenges with the Registered Providers who have a small stock presence in the Borough. Some Registered Providers also now operate on a national basis and have a presence in many areas, making them less visible in the borough.
- 4.18. The Task Group was informed that the Torus baseline for properties to be allocated via Under-One-Roof is 75% and for all other Registered Providers it is 50% of their vacant properties. It was highlighted that the allocations baseline needed regular monitoring across all respective Registered Providers in the Borough.
- 4.19. Members also raised concerns about the lack of engagement into this Spotlight Review from some of the Registered Providers operating in the borough; only two Registered Providers engaged from the eight that were invited. Members suggested that a regular Focus Group should be held with

all Registered Providers encouraged to attend. Members agreed that collective action is imperative.

- 4.20. Members questioned how often the Nomination Agreement is reviewed. It was advised that the review should take place every few years and preparations were in place to commence a review of the existing agreement. It was further highlighted that this was a good opportunity to reach out and negotiate with Registered Providers on the percentage baseline, and to scrutinise and monitor more closely the behaviour of Providers in maximising housing provision.
- 4.21. It was noted that a new post of Strategic Housing Officer has recently been recruited to, which will support this process by providing additional capacity to monitor the delivery of the expected properties and adherence to the Nominations Agreement. The Task Group agreed that an update should be brought to the Place Services Scrutiny Committee on the developments of the Nomination Agreement as well as the progress made to engage with all Registered Providers.

Evidence from Registered Providers (Torus)

- 4.22. Members received a presentation from Torus who gave an overview of the organisation and its remit. Torus has a significant footprint across the Northwest supporting 11 authorities with approximately 40,000 units in its portfolio. Approximately 13,500 homes are within St Helens consisting of 11,298 for general needs; 1,410 housing for older people; and 111 supported housing units.
- 4.23. Torus administer the UnderOneRoof allocations scheme on behalf of the Local Authority and have delivered this service since 2006 as one of eleven Registered Providers on the Under One Roof Scheme. Torus is the largest participating landlord, hosting a nomination agreement of 75% of Housing Provision. The banding criteria is set out below:
- Band A – for households with an urgent need to move,
 - Band B – for households with a high priority to move,
 - Band C – for households with an identified housing need,
 - Band D – for households with no other housing need but interested in affordable social housing and home buy.
- 4.24. The demand for housing as of September 2023 is set out in Table 1 below. Following a refresh of the waiting list membership in March 2022, the number of applications reduced from 10,800 to 6,015. Recent evidence is showing an increase in demand which has been attributed to the cost-of-living crisis, high interest rates, property availability and cost of rents in the private rented sector and new build properties. The increase in demand is particularly prevalent with Band A and in Band B.

Table 1

Bands	Numbers
Band A	214
Band A*	30
Band B	1302
Band B*	92
Band C	1829
Band D	3381
Grand Total	6848

4.25. Torus also provided a breakdown of demand by bedroom need as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2

1 bedroom	3514
2 bedrooms	2089
3 bedrooms	1018
4 bedrooms	223
5 + bedrooms	4

- 4.26. Torus highlighted that the data indicates demand for smaller dwellings housing will increase even further. It was suggested that this is attributed to both an ageing population and a reduction in the average family size, with the forecast being that this trend will continue over the next 10/15 years. Torus discussed their 5 Year Corporate Plan and the thinking around the 'future demand for housing'.
- 4.27. Data taken from the 2021 Census Housing Summary Overview (31 January 2023 update) shows that 30.8% of housing in St Helens is within the rented sector, with 20.6% of the total rented accommodation being in the Social Housing Sector. Currently, demand is higher than the regional and national averages; moreover, St Helens has a lower percentage of 1 and 2-bedroom

properties than the rest of the region and nationally. Based on the future trend forecast, Members agreed that it would be helpful for the 'Future Demand for Housing Report' to be shared with the Place Services Scrutiny Committee to enable Members to keep up to date on the national housing market context and the trend of demand.

- 4.28. Demand for sheltered accommodation schemes has also seen an increase. The demand appears to be predominantly (but not exclusively) single males. This trend has seen a resultant rise in anti-social behaviour within sheltered accommodation properties, which increases demand on resources and makes these schemes challenging to manage. Torus stated that the sheltered accommodation schemes will be reviewed. Members agreed that Place Scrutiny Committee would like to be kept up to date with the progress of the Sheltered Accommodation Scheme Review.
- 4.29. Torus explained that a new IT system was being procured and developed to support Under One Roof and will become live in 2024. enabling customers and residents to make better informed choices on their tenancy, and easy access to bidding and managing supply and demand mapping.
- 4.30. Torus is the biggest provider of properties in Under One Roof; in the year to date, Torus had provided 218 properties of the 283 let through Under One Roof. It was discussed that the monitoring of all providers should be enhanced to ensure providers are maximising the properties available within the Nominations Agreement.
- 4.31. Torus discussed void turnaround times across the group. At the time of this meeting, the voids end-to-end process was taking a longer period of time than the target. Year to date, the Torus re-let time was 112.6 days, with this being a year-on-year increase since 2020.
- 4.32. Members questioned the process and the cause of the delays and were advised that challenges faced in the sector in terms of void turnaround is staff retention. The capacity to maintain properties in a timely manner has been severely affected due to a high staff turnover rate. HMS, the main contractor supporting Torus with repairs and maintenance, carried out a rigorous procurement exercise to recruit 110 apprentices across the respective skilled areas to improve its capacity to deal with and reduce the number of voids and the time it takes to relet the properties. Stabilising the contractor workforce has been a priority, with staff retention being the focus. Torus and HMS will continue to look at making progress in this area. Members suggested ideas on how the Council may be able to support this process. As well as recruitment and retention issues, the cost increases and accessibility of certain materials was a major challenge that slowed down the repair process.
- 4.33. Torus ensure that voids standards are maintained and remain high, prior to re-letting; however, this is often proving to extend the end-to-end process as it can often take up to two weeks to clear a property ready for inspection. The

turnaround can then often be stalled due to the availability of inspectors. Although adding an additional cost and time factor, Torus stated the importance of maintaining pre-let standards in order to support tenants in setting up their home as well as providing longer term tenancies. The standard of the property alongside the allocations service, create important first impressions on new tenants and can set the course of the future relationship with their landlord.

- 4.34. Torus highlighted issues with rubbish and clearance when a property becomes void. It was noted that property clearance is a significant and increasing problem. This is both costly and time consuming.
- 4.35. Members raised questions around the working relationship between Registered Providers and the Council. Torus highlighted that Registered Providers do not compete against one another and that the relationship with the Council is very good.
- 4.36. In terms of improvements, there was an agreement between the Council and Torus that data sharing needed to be improved from Under One Roof to the Council. A lack of resources had prevented regular, detailed monitoring by the Council and Torus, and improving the ability for cross cutting data sharing and monitoring was crucial. This has been addressed with regular reports being received.

Evidence from Registered Providers (Your Housing Group)

- 4.37. Members received a presentation from Your Housing Group, who reinforced the challenges mentioned by Torus; particularly in relation to space, bedroom requirements and the shifting forecast for demand in the sector going forward.
- 4.38. Similar to Torus, Your Housing Group's voids turnaround time is 90.07 Days on average, with an average turnaround cost of £4k. Although these figures are high, there is evidence of these number decreasing from its peak.
- 4.39. Both Torus and Your Housing are facilitating regular meetings to mitigate the challenges. As well as this, both Registered Providers are delivering Task Groups to scope further potential changes to meet the challenges. Members felt that it would be helpful to understand the outcomes of this work and would welcome the final report to be brought to a future meeting. Members suggested that this should also be shared with all Registered providers.
- 4.40. It was further reinforced that re-let times are significantly hampered by the need for house clearances, this being a particular problematic when drug related paraphernalia is present. Members discussed whether penalties or incentives could be considered and whether Registered Providers had explored opportunities to incentivise tenants to maintain and leave their properties in a reasonable state of repair (i.e., without leaving extensive rubbish for clearance).

- 4.41. Your Housing Group expressed that tenancy retention and sustainability is vital for stable tenancy and improving attrition rates and is a key focus for the organisation on how this can be improved. The tenancy termination data provided to Members is set out in Table 3 below. It is evident that many of the termination reasons are showing a decreasing trend and the overall termination figures have reduced in comparison to the previous year.
- 4.42. As shown in Table 3, 'Deceased' is the most common reason for in the end of a tenancy and the Homes becoming available. In many cases where a tenant has died there are challenges with void turnaround times as many of the properties will not have received maintenance for several years in some cases. Officers explained that it can often be difficult to gain access to properties to assess potential work requirements making pre-planning difficult.
- 4.43. The second highest reason for the end of a tenancy could be mitigated if potential tenants had more control over where they live. Although the Choice Based System currently in place does allow some autonomy over choice of location, the issue with housing voids often limits the potential to choose a preferred location. By reducing the number of voids, the less likely people will want to move to a more suitable location, the fewer terminations, and void periods the registered providers are likely to have to deal with. Members were keen to monitor this data from all providers.

Site Visit

- 4.44. Members undertook a Site Visit on 2 November 2023 to two Torus properties in St Helens. The main purpose was to look at the pre-tenancy voids standard. The voids standard does differ from one provider to the next. Some providers may communicate to tenants at sign-up that it is their responsibility to decorate and furnish their home and keep gardens in good and clear condition. However, members were in support of the high standard set.
- 4.45. It was evident that the voids standard is a priority for Torus and Members valued the site visit. Questions were raised around incentives for tenants to maintain the high standard on leaving the property vacant and or penalties for damage and leaving rubbish for clearance. While members agreed that a high tenancy standard is important for supporting people and families setting up a new home, the turnaround time is significantly affected by this process. As mentioned above, at the time of this report, Torus recorded that the average void turn around was 112.6 days. This is more than twice the target set for a void turnaround and a year-on-year increase. Torus noted that this was unacceptable, and that work is being undertaken to address this. Members agreed to monitor this across all 11 providers. Members suggested that it would be beneficial to see a breakdown of the voids process.
- 4.46. The quality of work and attention to detail was evident. Members thanked Torus for arranging the site visits and meeting staff to talk about their work. Following the site visit, members requested a second meeting with officers to

discuss questions raised. Questions were focused particularly on the Council's Nominations Agreement and the Council's Enforcement Policy.

Table 3.

GN Terminations 01 September 22 to 31 August 2023			
Termination Reason	No of Terminations in period 01 September 2022 to 31 August 2023	% of terminations in 22/23	% of terminations in 21/22
Deceased	281	22.6	19.3
To Move Nearer Family/Friends	126	10.1	14.2
Property Unsuitable-Ill Health	111	8.9	9.4
Moved to Support or Care Accom	99	8.0	5.1
Requires Larger Home	89	7.2	8.2
Abandoned	67	5.4	4.9
ASB (Victim)	60	4.8	5.7
neighbourhood Issues	57	4.6	4.4
Property Unsuitable-Poor Cond	54	4.3	5.2
Eviction (Arrears)	37	3.0	1.1
Moving In With Partner	37	3.0	2.9
Domestic Abuse	31	2.5	2.8
Purchase Own Home	30	2.4	2.9
Affordability (Cost of Living)	26	2.1	1.6
Downsizing	24	1.9	1
Moved to Independant Accom	22	1.8	1.7
To Move Nearer to Work	16	1.3	2.1
Affordability (Rents)	15	1.2	1.3
Prison	12	1.0	0.5
Decant	9	0.7	1
No Contact - Keys returned	9	0.7	1
Eviction (Tenancy Breach)	8	0.6	0.6
Decant Temporary	5	0.4	0.6
Re-establish Family Relations	5	0.4	0.5
ASB (Perpetrator)	4	0.3	0.8
Partneship Break(Non Violent)	4	0.3	0.6
Under-occupation	4	0.3	0.5
Total	1242		
2022/23 - 105 Tenancies ended in 12 months or less (8.4% of all terminations)			
2021/22 - 134 Tenancies ended in 12 months or less (11.2% of all terminations)			

- 4.47. The escalations policy covers the Council's ability to take enforcement action when Registered Providers are not engaging, ensuring high standards are achieved within Registered Provider stock in the borough. Members were reassured to hear that the process works well, and any necessary repairs are responded to in accordance with the protocol without enforcement action. Furthermore, a process of escalation is written into the protocol which utilises the full range of enforcement tools; however, the Council would expect to resolve matters earlier in the process e.g. damp and mould investigations are prioritised for immediate response along with any other matters that are considered imminent.
- 4.48. Registered Provider tenants who contact the Council are always asked to confirm that they have contacted their landlord directly in the first instance.

5. Consideration of Alternatives

- 5.1. No alternative options have been considered in this report.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1. Members were reassured by recent recruitment of a new Housing Strategy Officer, which will now make available the capacity to undertake further monitoring of housing allocations, ensuring Registered Providers are achieving their agreed allocations targets. Members requested that the respective detail and outcomes from this work will be provided to the committee when available.
- 6.2. Common themes within the evidence received by the Task Group included the challenges experienced by the Registered Providers, including recruitment and retention of contractors, increased resource spent on house clearances and the demand on general day to day resources in dealing with the volume of requests for housing. Members suggested how the Council can support the process of recruitment through its 'Ways To Work' scheme.
- 6.3. A whole system approach across the Registered Providers is key to ensuring a downward trend in housing voids turnaround times. This would reduce the time spent in temporary accommodation by people who have experienced homelessness, improving their wellbeing and reduced costs to both Registered Providers and the Council.
- 6.4. Information sharing and best practice, as well as scrutinising data in a whole system approach across all respective parties, was highlighted as an area for improvement and Members requested that the Place Services Scrutiny Committee be updated on progress in this area.
- 6.5. Members questioned whether customer service/satisfaction was as effective for those tenants of Registered Providers that did not have a presence in the Borough (i.e., customer facing officers/premises) compared to those that did and satisfaction levels had any impact on tenant retention and sustainability.

- 6.6. Members suggested that the Council and Registered Providers work more closely to improve the current trend in housing voids. It was suggested that the Registered Providers Forum for this work should be utilised to initiate wider Scrutiny.
- 6.7. This review highlighted increasing concerns about the supply and demand imbalance of affordable housing in the Borough. The Task Group agreed that this issue should be a priority for the Place Services Scrutiny Committee to continue monitoring on its work programme.
- 6.8. It was evident that Torus seek to maintain a high standard in promoting re-let standards. However, if this could be managed differently, members suggested that an option could be explored to offer a voucher scheme etc in some circumstances.
- 6.9. The Task Group suggests that the Registered Providers consider exploring if tenants can be incentivised to keep homes in a good state of repair and cleared out when they leave or could they be penalised in some way for not doing so.
- 6.10. Both Torus and Your Housing Group are delivering Task Groups to scope potential changes to meet the challenges. Members requested that the outcome of this work would be beneficial for Place Scrutiny Committee to monitor and requested that it is presented at a future Place Services Scrutiny Meeting.
- 6.11. Whilst the Social Rented Sector is a significant proportion of properties in the Borough, the Task Group believes that the Private Rented Sector is an important sector of housing to tackle especially around improving housing standards that impact the health and wellbeing of residents and reduce inequalities. Members raised questions around the Escalations Policy in both the Social and Private Rented Sector and wanted to understand more on how this is progressed and managed, The Task Group suggested that the Place Services Scrutiny Committee considers discussing an item on Private Rented Sector to its work programming workshop for 2024/25.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1. There are no direct legal implications for this report.

8. Equality Impact Assessment

- 8.1. Whilst no Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out for this Spotlight Review, an effective system for managing void properties is a central function in the wider provision of providing housing in the Borough, in turn, improving the lives of residents, particularly those vulnerable and in need.

9. Social Value

- 9.1. Ensuring that there is sufficient capacity, utilising skilled and experienced contractors is essential to an effective void management process. Many Registered Providers operate local employment opportunities such as apprenticeships and engage local contractors, demonstrating wider social value.

10. Net Zero and Environment

- 10.1. Greater recycling of unwanted goods within the void management process could reduce the environmental impact of household clearances.

11. Health and Wellbeing

- 11.1. Minimising time spent in either temporary accommodation or unsuitable accommodation will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of applicants.

12. Customer and Resident

- 12.1. Actions to reduce timescales for void properties will have a positive impact on customers and residents in the Borough. Ensuring that there is clear communication within the wider allocations process will also enable applicants to make informed choices on their housing options.

13. Asset and Property

- 13.1. There are no Council Asset and Property implications for this report.

14. Staffing and People Management

- 14.1. The agreed actions in this report will be carried out by existing staffing resources identified by the Council and its partner organisations.

15. Risks

- 15.1. Risks have been identified within this Spotlight Review in relation to the ability to meet demand, the growing challenges of homelessness and the impact of the wider cost of living crisis on the housing sector. Ensuring that operational practices are efficient and effective will assist in mitigating some of the risks regarding timescales for re-letting properties, but the wider challenges will remain in relation to demand for accommodation in the Borough.

16. Finance

- 16.1. The report highlights the financial implications both for the Local Authority in the use of temporary accommodation and for the Registered Providers in the increased costs of property repairs and delays in re-letting properties.

17. Policy Framework Implications

- 17.1. The Housing Voids Scrutiny Spotlight Report aligns with priorities 1 to 4 and 6 of Our Borough Strategy priorities, together with the St Helens Borough Council Housing Allocation Policy and St Helens Borough Council Housing Strategy 2022-27.

18. Impact and Opportunities on Localities

- 18.1. There are no direct impact and opportunities on localities resulting from this report, which considered borough-wide matters.

19. Background Documents

- 19.1. Performance Monitoring Reports 2022/2023.
- 19.2. St Helens Borough Housing Strategy 2022-27.
- 19.3. Census 2021 - Housing Summary Overview Update 31st Jan 2023.
- 19.4. St Helens Borough Council Housing Allocation Policy.

20. Appendices

- 20.1 1a Recommendations

Housing Voids Spotlight Review

Recommendations

Rec No	Recommendations	Responsible Officer	Agreed Action and Date of Implementation
1	<p>Registered Providers Forum</p> <p>Seek to establish the issue of Housing Voids as a regular Item on the Registered Providers Forum to enable and maintain scrutiny and performance.</p>	<p>Housing</p> <p>Head of Housing Services</p>	<p>The agenda item 'Housing Voids Update' will be added to the future Agendas of the Registered Provider Forum and attendees will be invited to share the current performance on this issue.</p> <p>With effect from the Registered Provider Forum meeting in June 2024.</p>
2	<p>Via the Registered Providers Forum, officers seek to raise for consideration, the potential for Registered Providers to incentivise tenants in keeping homes and gardens in a good state of repair and cleared out when they leave. Incentives such as a Golden Goodbye- to reduce Void time.</p>	<p>Housing</p> <p>Head of Housing Services</p>	<p>Within the agenda item on 'Housing Voids Update', Providers will be invited to share best practice and service innovations in relation to management of void properties.</p> <p>With effect from the Registered Provider Forum meeting in June 2024.</p>
3	<p>Recruitment of maintenance operatives and contractors/ inspectors.</p> <p>Ways to work to arrange and facilitate meetings with Torus/HMS to establish skills demand and needs assessments. To feedback on progress made to Place Scrutiny Committee during the 2024/25 municipal year</p>	<p>Strategic Growth</p> <p>Head of Economy</p>	<p>Ways To Work to establish contact and agree initial actions by July 2024.</p> <p>Feedback on actions and progress by end of December 2024.</p>
4	<p>Seek to ensure that further detail in the Performance indicator HS004 is provided to establish how many empty homes are in the Social rented sector within the narrative of the report.</p>	<p>Housing</p> <p>Head of Housing Services</p>	<p>Further information will be included in both the Performance Indicator database and also in the Performance Report narrative on this indicator.</p> <p>Data for this indicator is sourced from Council</p>

			<p>Tax information, and this is reported in Quarter 3 each year.</p> <p>With effect from Quarter 3 monitoring period 2024/25.</p>
5	<p>Annual Housing Voids Update</p> <p>The Place Services Scrutiny Committee to receive an annual update on housing voids issues. Housing Officers and representatives from the Registered Providers forum to provide a detailed update looking at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic compliance, (cooperation of the Register Providers in fulfilling their obligations within the Nominations agreement. • Registered Providers to provide Voids Data - Reference of all voids and a breakdown of data relating to voids for each provider. • Registered Provider update on Progress and initiatives on reducing Voids • Torus to provide the 'Future demand forecast for housing'. • Receive feedback from the recommendations and progress from the Task Group reviews to understand the key highlights and progress conducted by Torus and Your Housing Group • Progress made on the review of the Nominations agreement. 	<p>Housing</p> <p>Registered Providers/ Head of Housing</p>	<p>A report containing the information outlined in the report will be prepared for a future meeting of the Place Services Scrutiny Committee in consultation with the Chair of the Committee during 2024/25.</p> <p>To be scheduled as part of the agreed Work Programme for Place Services Scrutiny Committee for 2024/25</p>
7	<p>Place Services Scrutiny Committee to consider including in the work programme for 2024/2025 on the theme of The Private rented Sector (Although outside the remit of this group, valid questions raised by Councillors on the Private Rented Sector prompted members to consider a piece of work on the private rented sector in the next municipal year).</p>	<p>Place Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>This recommendation will be considered by Place Services Scrutiny Committee in the work planning process for the 2024/25 period.</p>