

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

20 July 2026

Housing Voids – Process and procedures For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr G Taylor, Housing and Homelessness

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team:

S Crowe - Executive Director, Housing, Prevention and Communities

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public

1. Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

- 1.1 This report summarises Dorset Council's current approach to the management of void properties and looks at future developments.

It examines the definition, scope and background to the process, void categorization and the important allocations process.

The report looks at targeting and monitoring and work to date on costs.

The report is a joint report between Housing and Assets and Property and therefore is also from Cllr Richard Biggs Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Property Assets and Economic Growth.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to review and consider the contents of the report and make recommendations as appropriate.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 Scrutiny Committee has asked for a report on the process for dealing with empty housing properties; to consider the approach taken and reflect on performance and issues arising. The report sets out the policy background,

the process and identifies matters currently relevant to improvement and ways forward for the future.

4. The report

This report covers the Council's approach to managing voids across the temporary accommodation and wider housing portfolio, including hostels, supported and specialist housing, shared accommodation and self-contained units.

The Council's draft Void Policy is attached at Appendix A. This is due to be submitted for Member approval shortly.

4.1 Purpose and Aims

Dorset Council is committed to:

- Delivering safe, clean, and secure accommodation
- Ensuring legal and regulatory compliance
- Achieving value for money and efficient use of available housing stock
- Applying a transparent and consistent approach to working.

The efficient processing of voids maximises the availability of Dorset Council accommodation and reduces the cost of other more expensive temporary accommodation.

4.2 Definition of a void

The currently adopted definition of a void is a property which is not occupied and for which no legal interest is still in place. Rent cannot legitimately be charged.

For the purposes of this report, the focus is principally on empty residential properties used for Temporary Accommodation. Due to the nature of temporary placements, these properties are frequently vacated and require varying levels of work between each occupation.

The Council has a small number of additional residential properties acquired historically by the predecessor authorities. The management of these and the approach to void turnover is under review and will be subject to agreed processes in due course. Similarly, a small number of properties for care leavers do not go through this process as a result of the nature of the tenancies.

Void properties typically arise from:

- Planned moves or end of licence/tenancy

- Transfers, decants, or move-on
- Lease expiries, property hand backs, or contract terminations
- Evictions, abandonment, or legal possession
- Enforcement actions, death of a tenant, or safeguarding/legal intervention

4.3 Legislative Background

There is a significant body of legislation relating to the condition of, repairs to and work on housing properties and thus to void properties.

By no means an exhaustive list, this includes:

- Housing Acts 1985, 1986
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use Regulations) as amended 2018
- Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) Regulations 2005
- Electrical Safety Quantity and Continuity Regulations 2002
- Building Safety Act 2022
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (Awaab's Law)

4.4 Scope

This policy applies to the various types of properties used or managed by Dorset Council across its accommodation portfolio. This includes:

- Properties owned by Dorset Council
- Properties leased or licensed from private landlords
- Properties managed in partnership with housing associations or commissioned support providers

The policy applies to a wide range of accommodation types, including:

- Hostels (self-contained or shared rooms with communal facilities)
- Shared accommodation (e.g. with shared kitchens and/or bathrooms)
- Self-contained accommodation (exclusive use of all living facilities)
- Supported housing schemes, specialist housing, or Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme (RSAP) properties

4.5 Void Process

The current void process is set out at Appendix B. This is subject to regular review and was most recently reviewed in early June. This section of the report summarises that process.

As the property becomes void, the initial work is carried out by housing, ensuring the property is clear and suitable for contractors and that the Council's housing record system is updated.

The property is then passed to Assets and Property who schedule the work required, assess the appropriate category for the void and pass to the contractor for work to be carried out. For hostel accommodation where there has been a quick turn around after the housing officer inspection it may not need to go to the void works contractor and may simply be cleaned and relet. Where works are required, the normal process is followed.

At present the Council's Void Contractor is Generation One Ltd who were appointed with the approval of Cabinet for a period until the new repairs' arrangements are in place. Members will be aware that the long-term repairs contracts are expected to be in place by the New Year. The Void works contract is being re-procured as part of that process.

On return from the contractor, the surveyor in Assets and Property inspects the work and deals with any quality issues including returning to the contractor if necessary. Work is checked against the scheduled items, and sample checks are made on measurements to enable cost checking against invoice.

4.5 Void Categorisation

The lettable standard which all voids should meet is set out at Appendix C. This standard has been established following detailed discussion and is based on the legislative requirements and good practice. The lettable standard is kept under review.

The Void Categorisation document is part of the policy at Appendix A.

Voids categories for Dorset Council are as follows:

Minor	Minor voids refer to short-term voids that require minimal repairs or no repairs at all. These voids typically involve straightforward tasks that can be completed quickly to prepare the property for new tenant/client.
Major	Major voids refer to voids that require significant repairs or renovations to meet the void standards. These voids involve more extensive work compared to minor voids and typically include the replacement or upgrading of major components within the property.
Exceptional	Exceptional voids involve complex or expensive works that are likely to take longer than standard void repairs. These voids typically do not initially have a known timeframe for completion

	due to the nature and extent of the work required. Examples include major structural repairs, fire damage, subsidence, and reinvestment in planned maintenance programs such as re-plastering, replacement of ceilings and floors, and internal redesigns.
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The detailed Voids Categorisation is included in the policy document.

Exceptional Voids are limited in number, but it is important to retain the category because of the potential circumstances which may arise.

4.6 Allocations

As these properties are designated for use as temporary accommodation the allocation is not through Dorset Homechoice but rather via internal process. Whenever Dorset Council have reason to believe that an applicant is eligible, homeless and in priority need then it becomes subject to the duty under S188 (1) of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) which is to secure that accommodation is available for the applicant's occupation. The S188 (1) may become what is known as the Main Duty under S193 and Dorset Council must secure that accommodation is available for occupation until one of the specified events detailed in the Act brings it to an end. Requests to accommodate under either duty will be made directly to the Housing Solutions team.

Properties in the voids process will be checked and potential occupancy considered for those applicants that have already been accommodated in emergency B&B provision as well as those that have remained temporarily in the accommodation that they approached from.

One of the first criteria for consideration will be the size of the accommodation against household size. A single person household will in the main only be considered for studio or one bedroom accommodation. Under occupation for this group will only be considered in specific circumstances such as accessibility. Family sized accommodation may be under or over accommodated depending on the number of household members and the size related criteria of the property.

Families with dependent children who are already accommodated in B&B will be considered for any void property before those applicants who have remained temporarily in their own home. However, households with specific needs such as a property with some adaptation or location close to specialist educational establishments are likely to be prioritised over those households in B&B.

Accommodation offered under either S188 or S193 must be considered to be suitable for occupation by the applicant. Suitability encompasses a number of factors decreed by both statute and the Homelessness Code of Guidance. One of the

biggest issues in terms of suitability is in relation to the location of the accommodation. S208 of the Housing Act stipulates that as far as reasonably practicable local housing authorities should secure accommodation within its own district. The Code of Guidance suggests that accommodation should be sourced as close as possible to where an applicant was previously living.

Due to the geographical size of Dorset and the location of the designated temporary accommodation there are often challenges made as to the suitability of the accommodation due to the location. Applicants from the west of the county are reluctant to accept an offer in the east and vice versa. These challenges may result in delays to sign up either whilst the nomination is reconsidered and progressed or where the outcome is for a new nomination entirely.

Hostel style accommodation can be difficult to fill depending on the cohort of applicants. Those applicants who have identified risks such as predatory sexual behaviour or violence will not be appropriate for placement in this type of scheme.

The Supported Housing schemes such as RSAP accommodation is subject to a different process for Allocation. Applicants for any potential vacancy will need to be referred and assessed under the relevant pathway. An Allocations panel for RSAP meets monthly to review referrals and agree who will be nominated. This process is important to optimise potential outcomes for these applicants and that includes significant consideration as to the accommodation on offer. As a result, the void time between occupancies is likely to be significantly longer than for generic temporary accommodation.

4.7 Targets

Dorset Council monitors voids across all council-managed accommodation using the following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These targets have been benchmarked and are broadly commensurate with national targets and performance, although slightly more challenging.

The key-to-key targets include all aspects of the void process including the pre-work, the repairs and the allocations process. The contractor repairs turnaround monitors the performance of the void contractor.

Indicator Target or Monitoring Aim		
Key-to-key turnaround (overall)	30 working days (Minor)	45 working days (Major)
Contractor repairs turnaround	20 working days (Minor)	35 working days (Major)

Rent loss per void	Minimise and report monthly	
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The numbers of properties void at any one time is of itself a limited measure of performance as a significant influence on this is the number of voids becoming available. This can be affected by various factors and of course it is important that properties do turn over so they can be relet.

The targets quoted above are much more significant in assessing void performance as these are the key tasks that have to be performed each time. It is, of course, true that slow performance in these areas will lead to growth in the numbers of properties void and unavailable for letting.

4.8 Monitoring

The end- to -end void process is subject to monitoring on a daily basis. Housing staff ensure that voids are checked and passed to Assets and Property. The relevant housing surveyor monitors incoming voids, and following inspection monitors the progress of the contractor. On return the housing team monitor progress with allocations as described above.

Monitoring is carried out at both a summary performance and an individual property level.

On a weekly basis senior staff of both Departments examine the figures and a report is made to the relevant Cabinet Members.

The Council's monitoring has been developing over recent months and is significantly more thorough through the implementation of improved reporting and through improved role clarity.

There are three key aspects to void management, each of which needs careful examination to ensure good performance. These are firstly, the work up to the point when the property is passed to the contractor, which must be done promptly. As an example, Assets and Property staff are requested to complete works scheduling within 24 hours. Secondly, the performance of the contractor is critical as without prompt attention to works and tight management of any additional contractors, void targets will be at risk. The third element is the allocation process after works are finished as described above. If there are refusals, or delays to the allocation process, this again can impact void performance.

This is the first Scrutiny report on this matter, but such performance is a legitimate and not unusual subject for regular scrutiny if members so wished.

4.9 Current Figures

The current figures as at 29th June 2026 are attached as Appendix D.

The figures show a considerable improvement since the problem at the turn of the year, caused by slow inspection performance leading to an excess of void properties.

The number of open voids is decreased and consequently the percentage of the stock void.

Performance against target is improving although there remains work to do.

4.10 Future issues

Going forward there are a number of factors that will improve performance still further.

The reporting and monitoring will be further developed to interrogate trends better and produce stronger data on costs and on performance. A future report to Scrutiny can provide better data on trends and performance in particular.

There is a need to improve understanding of the costs of this part of the service and work will be devoted to this.

As part of the procurement of the new repairs solutions the Voids contract is being retendered. The appointed contractor will have a four- year contract with potential to add two one -year extensions, With the benefit of that length of contract there is the opportunity to work in partnership with the contractor for new initiatives and approaches to improve quality and performance. Contractors may also be prepared to make additional investment over that time period given the potential for return.

We would expect to receive competitive prices based on the length of contract.

Assets and property are working on improvements to the IT systems. All such improvements reduce bureaucracy and demands on time offering opportunity for improved performance.

4.11 Void costs

Current sampling suggests an average void cost of circa £3450.

This is broken down as an average cost of a minor void at circa £1,000.00 and a major at £5800.

Void costs are determined by the amount of work required, the lettable standard and the contractor's pricing.

The lettable standard is kept under review but given the issues described under the allocations section it would not be recommended to lessen this at this stage.

It is expected that the long -term voids procurement will offer competitive prices due to the length of the contract.

Monitoring and understanding of void cost will be further developed.

Last year's lost income as a result of void properties amounted to approximately £300,000 which illustrates the importance of swift void turnaround. It is budgeted and anticipated that this year's figure will be considerably less. The monitoring and benchmarking of this figure is currently under development.

5. Alternative options considered

5.1 The approaches outlined in this report have been the subject of considerable debate and refinement over a prolonged period. They are kept under review. Alternative approaches to the processes may be possible and Members views are welcomed. The key to effective void management is adherence to the process and the quality of staff activities and management monitoring.

There is no alternative to a clear process that delivers safe and compliant void turnaround.

6. Legal considerations

6.1 As described in the report section 4, the Council in its policy, process and arrangements is required to comply with a significant body of legislation relating to the condition of, repairs to and work on housing properties and thus to void properties.

By no means an exhaustive list, this includes:

- Housing Acts 1985,1986
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use Regulations) as amended 2018
- Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) Regulations 2005
- Electrical Safety Quantity and Continuity Regulations 2002
- Building Safety Act 2022
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (Awaab's Law)

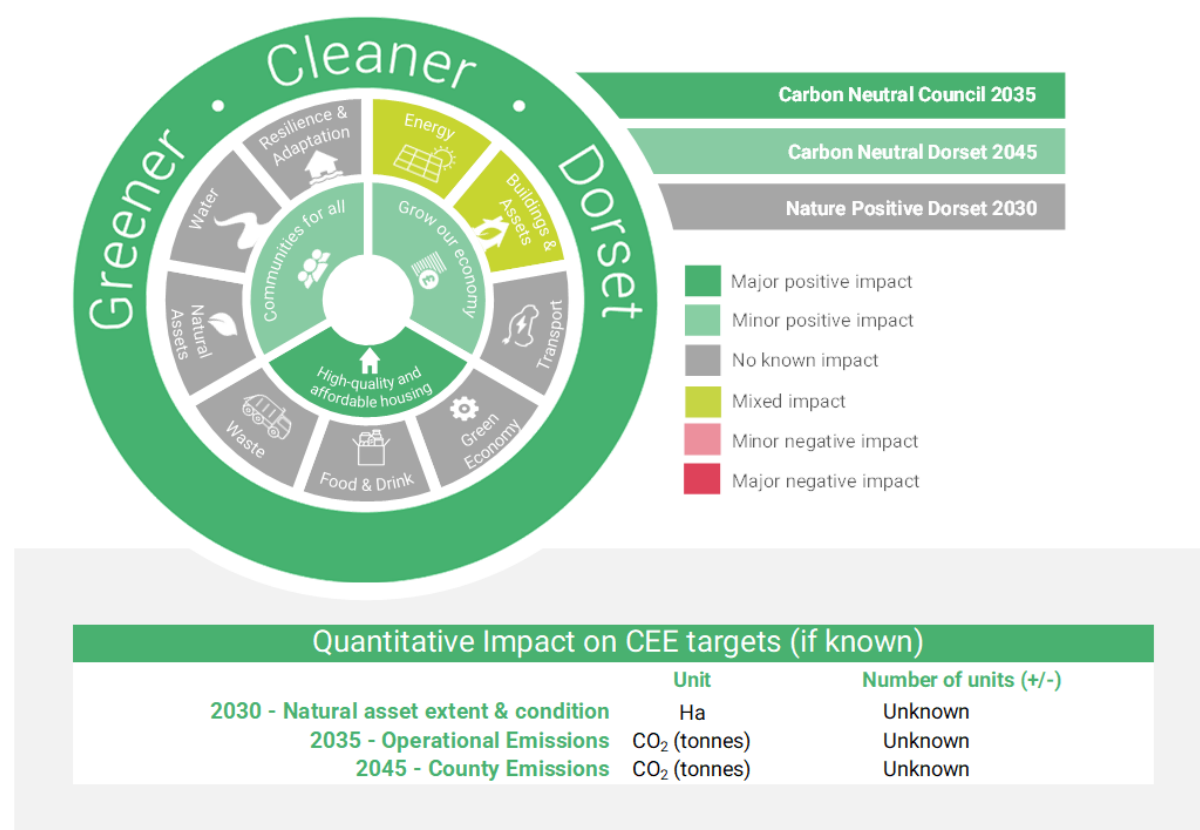
7 Financial implications

7.1 Officers are working to better understand the average cost and to refine the figures based on the current sampling. As noted above current sampling suggests an average void cost of circa £3450, broken down as an average cost of a minor void at circa £1,000.00 and a major at £5800. Monitoring of these costs against allocations and the lettable standard will determine whether this is an acceptable level of cost in the long term.

The importance of good void performance is demonstrated by the fact that if 12.1% of property is void, this means lost rent & displacement into spot purchase arrangements, but more importantly lost capacity for people that need it most.

8. Natural environment, climate and ecology implications

8.1



Those items that have come on the climate wheel as mixed impact are doing so because the purpose of this process is not per se to improve buildings materials or energy performance. However, where it is necessary for example to renew a boiler, modern technology will be used and there will be a positive impact. Modern environmentally friendly materials and technologies are used where possible as a matter of course.

ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments

Impact

Energy	Mixed impact
Buildings & Assets	Mixed impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact
Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	Minor positive impact
High-quality and affordable housing	Major positive impact
Communities for all	Minor positive impact

9. Well-being and health implications

9.1 The provision of quality, well maintained temporary accommodation is a key part of delivering the housing service provided by Dorset Council. The link between health and housing is long established and the ability to call upon a ready supply of accommodation helps mitigate stress and potential effect on health caused by homelessness or spending time in other less secure forms of accommodation. An efficient and effective void process that leads to swift turn- around of empty properties is an important component of ensuring properties are available.

10. Other implications

10.1 None at this time.

11. Risk implications

11.1 There are three key risks associated with this process:

- a) Failure to deal with void properties in an appropriate timetable.
- b) Failure to deliver a safe and compliant property
- c) Rent loss and increased TA costs as a result of the above

All will be mitigated by establishing an effective process and by staff adherence to process and regulation and quality management and monitoring.

At this time current and residual risk would be low but failure to adhere to the principals and process, and lack of management control would swiftly raise the risk level.

12. Equalities

12.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix E.

13. Appendices

Appendix A: Dorset Council Void Policy including categorisation

Appendix B: Void Process Flow Chart

Appendix C: Lettable Standard

Appendix D: Current Figures

Appendix E: Equalities Impact Assessment

14. Background papers

14.1 None

15. Report sign-off

15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)