

# Housing Property & Strategic Projects Division

## Voids Update June 2024



[sirgar.llyw.cymru](http://sirgar.llyw.cymru)  
[carmarthenshire.gov.wales](http://carmarthenshire.gov.wales)

## Introduction

A sharp increase in the number of void properties within our Council Housing Stock over the Covid era and the preceding years, raised concerns over the effectiveness of the voids service and how improvements could be made post-pandemic.

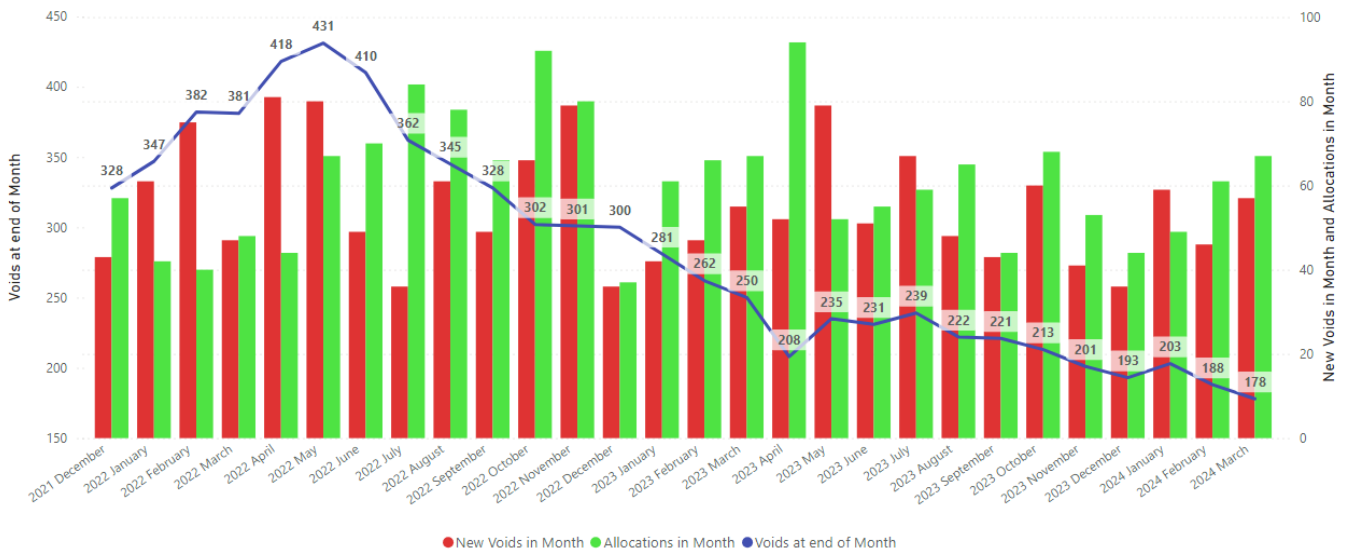
An officer-led Review Report was completed in June 2022 (following consultation with contractors, staff, partners, and peer landlords) that provided a number of recommendations for service improvement.

A Director-led Voids Improvement Board was established in July 2022 to oversee these recommendations and to provide guidance and leadership in making change.

An Independent review of our voids service was also completed by Housemark Consultancy and the recommendations from that report offered further suggestions for improvement, whilst also echoing many of the recommendations from our internal Review Report.

## Performance Improvement

### Voids Over Time

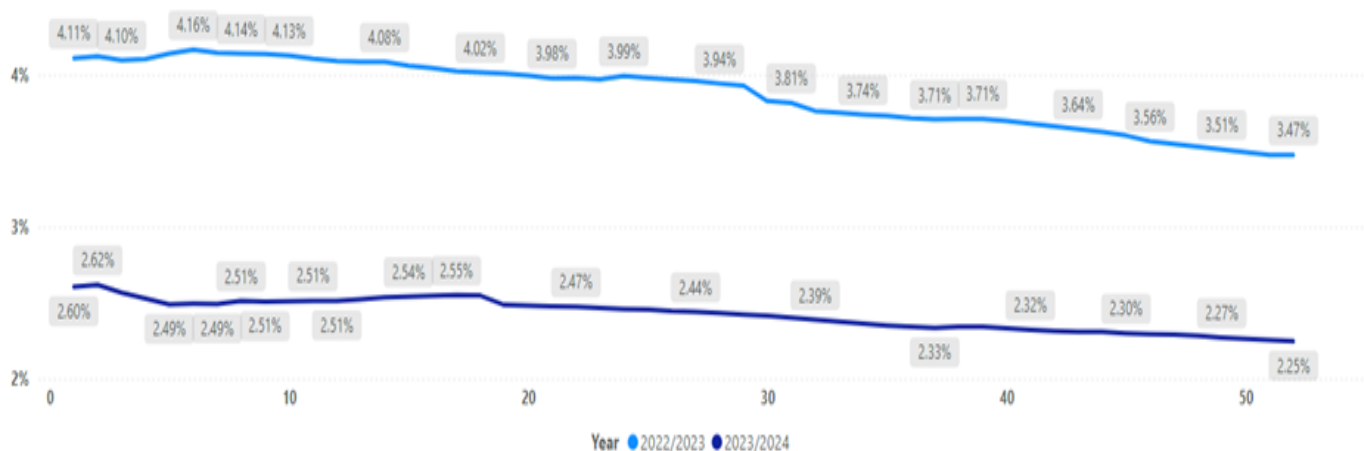


From a low point of having 431 properties standing empty in May 2022, performance has improved. At the end of the 2023/34 financial year, numbers had reduced to 178, a figure that equates to 1.85% of our Housing Stock.

Housemark states that the average % of stock empty, and available to let, is 0.52% across its member Social Landlords throughout the UK. This does not include major void works (which are a significant proportion of the Voids in Carmarthenshire, given the aged stock) and Housemark membership includes a high proportion of housing associations with comparatively new stock). Using the same criteria Carmarthenshire currently has 0.9% of its stock empty and available to let.

## Void Loss

Void Loss %



Void loss has similarly reduced from a high of 4.16% to a year-end level of 2.25%.

It must be noted that every 1% reduction in void loss is worth an additional £0.5m to the Housing Revenue Account in 2023/24. So, the reduction in the number of Voids has led to nearly £1m of additional rent per annum and an additional 250 homes for letting.

## In-House Operative Delivery

As part of the Review, it was recommended that we re-establish an in-house Operative team focussing wholly on void works. Recruitment started in April 2023, with a new team being gradually introduced from June 2023.

## Contractor Performance Comparison

Work delivery	Number of voids let	Average Works Time ( Days)
Combined Contractors	51	54.40
Void Management Team	38	30.16

The table above reflects performance in the first three months of 2024. It shows the average time that repair work is taking on Standard and Substantial voids.

The in-house team, encouragingly, is turning properties around in a much quicker time than Framework contractors.

Housemark's figures for February 2024 show the average works time across the sector is 23.5 days so improvement is still sought. Again, Carmarthenshire's performance reflects the aged condition of our stock, which requires significant more work at void point than many other social landlords.

A closer look at the data shows the following results when looking at Standard Void Turnaround, in isolation, for the same 3-month period.

Work delivery	Number of voids let	Average Works Time ( Days)
Combined Contractors	19	50.68
Void Management Team	17	16.86

This shows a huge difference in performance, highlighting the focus that the in-house team brings to turning around properties with a lower work content and a lower work cost.

This has been accomplished even though there were no plumbers within the team during this period, which has required all jobs with plumbing work to be put out to contractors, a situation that has now been rectified by further recruitment.

There remains the opportunity to divert more work in-house, subject to approval of a business case based on the above findings.

### **Ongoing Service Improvement**

The approved Void Action Plan is due to be completed by November 2024. The VAP contains the following summarised tasks.

- Introduction of Recharge and Incentive Policies for tenants, and improvement in mid-term tenancy enforcement
- Closer working between the Void Management Team and Investment Team over Buy-backs
- Publishing a Lettable standard, considering WHQS 23 requirements
- Re-introducing Tenant Surveys and improving tenant engagement around voids
- Ongoing Procurement - Property Works Framework, Interim services, Void Utility Management Contract

- Creating a Voids Strategy
- Reviewing internal processes, procedures and documentation including Pre-termination practices.
- Improving mobile technology and digital processes

### **Other Future Considerations**

A review of the Voids Management Team structure and staffing levels needs to be concluded, to ensure it is suitable to meet expectations, and robust enough to continue to improve standards and to meet future challenges.

This will include the In-House Operative Team whose successes have contributed towards the improvements shown in this report. It is proposed that the current team of 16 operatives is replicated to create 2 teams, to work in the north and south of the county.

This would also necessitate additional management and support staff, to ensure that the service delivery is efficient and managed.

Any staffing proposals will be taken forward via a business case set out in an Officer Decision Report to the Director for Communities.