

### Introduction

The Chair and the Vice Chair of the Places Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee have posed a number of questions to officers, which have been responded to below.

### Question 1

#### **Pre-Void (4 Weeks' Notice Period)**

Explain what currently happens from the moment a tenant gives notice, including how quickly a pre-void inspection is arranged and what checks or surveys take place before key return.

Set out plainly what *could* be done during the notice period but currently isn't: early scoping, provisional void categorisation, early asbestos checks, contractor scheduling, OT triage, pre-advertising, early shortlisting, affordability checks, rent account creation, sign-up pack preparation and provisional viewings.

Be honest about what prevents earlier activity — policies, risk interpretation, IT limitations, capacity, contractor restrictions or organisational silos.

### Management Response to Question 1

When a tenant submits an Online Housing Contact Form to give four weeks' notice, the following typically occurs:

**Notification:** The Re-housing and Terminations team notifies the Voids & Lettings service to begin planning.

**Pre-Exit Inspection:** An Empty Homes Inspector visits the property during the notice period to check its condition, identifying any damage or fixtures that must remain.

**Recharge Identification:** Tenants are informed of potential recharges for damage or left-behind items, encouraging them to clear the property before the Monday 12 noon key return deadline.

**Safety Surveys:** The Council may arrange an asbestos survey during this period to avoid delays once the property is empty.

**Key Return Preparation:** Tenants are notified that a key safe may be fitted outside for the final key handover.

Havering Council's current void performance is significantly stronger than the London average, though it still has room to reach the highest benchmarks through more aggressive pre-void activity. Havering has substantially improved its "key-to-key" turnaround time from 80.2 days in 2020/21 to a current average of 53.7 days.

<b>Metric</b>	<b>Havering Council (Current)</b>	<b>Housemark London Top Quartile</b>
<b>Average Void Days</b>	<b>53.7 Days</b>	<b>66.3 Days</b>
<b>Performance Gap</b>	<i>Outperforming by ~11 Target Benchmark days</i>	

The council moved to a "Day One" model, which eliminated a previously cumbersome 5–10 day delay between receiving keys and raising works orders. All tasks are now bundled into a single "primary void basket rate" works order raised immediately upon vacant possession.

Improved coordination with maintenance partners like Mears has been credited for the faster key-to-key results.

While not fully utilized for all "Notice Period" tasks, the council has begun implementing pre-exit inspections specifically to identify resident recharges (damages), which reduces the volume of work needed once the property is empty.

Havering remains "far from complacent" regarding these figures. Officers have been tasked with investigating the feasibility of further reducing this time by specifically focusing on the period between completion of works and the new tenant move-in.

## **Question 2**

### **Void Types, Costs and Timelines**

Provide a breakdown for the past 12–24 months showing V1/V2/V3 proportions for every bedroom size, including average cost and time taken.

Include General Needs, PSA, Hostels and any specialist stock.

Include recharge amounts billed and recovered.

### **Management Response to Question 2**

Details are included within the main body of the report.

### Question 3

#### Contractor (Mears) Performance

We need a clear picture of how the repairs contractor is performing.

Provide:

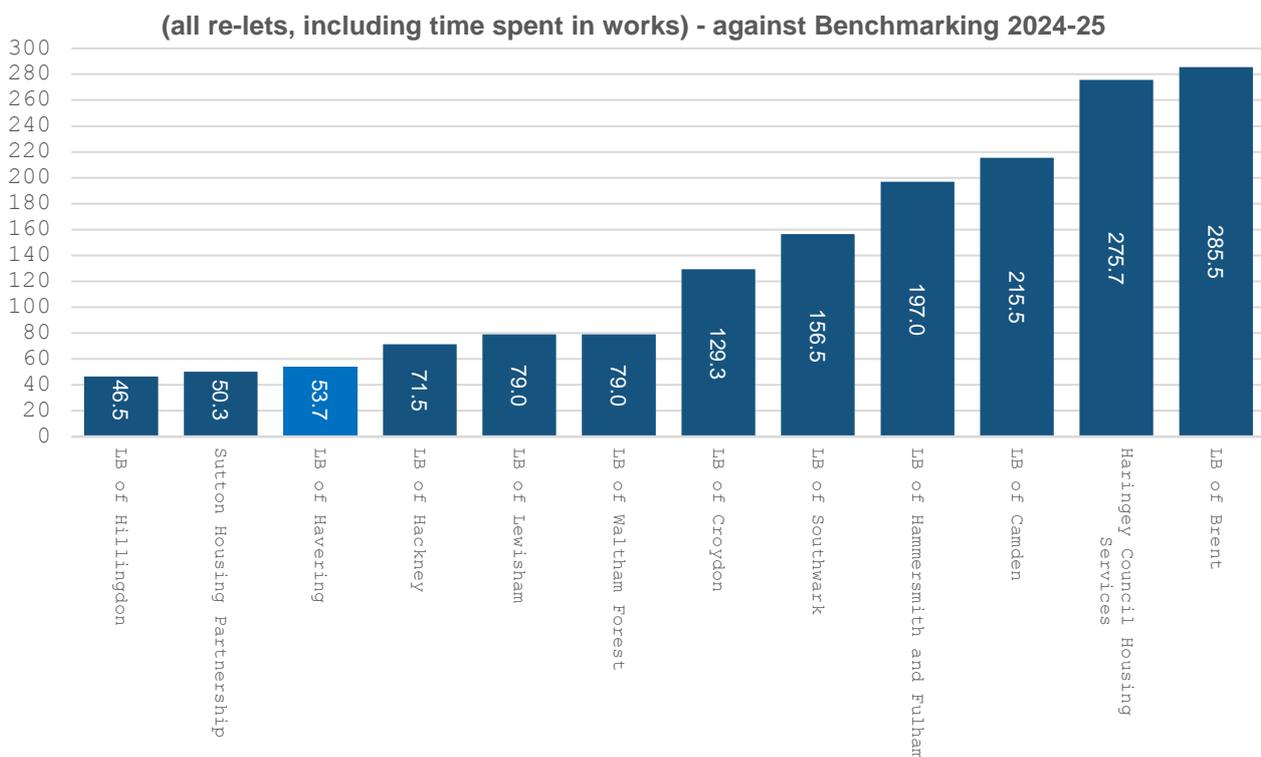
- Performance against contract KPIs for void turnaround.
- On-time vs late completions for V1, V2 and V3.
- Any penalties or deductions issued.
- Frequency and impact of properties being returned late or failing QA.
- How often compliance checks (gas, electrical, fire, water) are delayed due to contractor issues.
- Whether the client team is challenging underperformance robustly enough.

### Management Response to Question 3

The London Borough of Havering’s void performance when benchmarking against our London peers in 2024/2025 fiscal period was not only top quartile performance, but also significantly outperforming top quartile performance.

The Graph below showing HRA re-lets cumulative data from April 2025 to January 26, against 2024-25 Housemark performance data. (2025-2026 not yet available). Benchmarking indicates that Havering has both the processes and structure in place to sustain top quartile performance into 2025/26, subject to forthcoming data.

This outlines a continued and sustained performance level from a services that is striving for continued improvements.



## **Question 4**

### **Variation Orders**

Provide the total number of VOs, the percentage of voids they affect, their average cost, the reasons, how many days they add, and the breakdown by void category and bedroom size.

## **Management Response to Question 4**

So far, this financial year we have received a total of 620 properties with void works and 352 garages with void works.

Havering classifies all void properties as V1, V2, or V3, with the priority level determined by the overall value of works required. All tasks are issued under a single works order, enabling the full scope of the job to be performance-managed efficiently and consistently, including capital work.

Our void surveyors have access to the Council's asset management system, which provides background information on the property. However, the surveyor's primary responsibility is to carry out a comprehensive on-site inspection and determine the exact works needed to ensure the property meets Havering's Lettable Standard before re-let. The final scope of works is based on this professional survey assessment rather than on system data alone.

All variation must be reviewed and approved by a Havering surveyor before it is instructed. At present, we are not forecasting any overspend on the voids budget, as financial control measures are in place and being actively monitored.

## **Question 5**

### **Capital Works**

Where voids require kitchens, bathrooms, rewiring, roofs, windows or structural works, provide:

- The number of voids triggered by major capital interventions.
- Added time and added cost.
- How often capital needs are only discovered after the void is created.
- Whether earlier identification (pre-void) is feasible.

## **Management Response to Question 5**

In the London Borough of Havering, "major works" (V3 voids) are defined by cost and complexity, typically involving significant structural or system renewals. A void property is classified as V3 (Major Capital) if the estimated cost of repairs exceeds £16,500. Common triggers for this classification include:

- Full Kitchen & Bathroom Replacement: Installation of new units, worktops, sinks, and specialized floorings.
- Total Rewiring: Replacing the electrical system and installing new fuse boards and smoke/heat detectors.
- Structural Remediation: Addressing major defects such as brickwork failure, damp proofing, or collapsed floors/ceilings.
- External Enveloping: Major roof replacements, chimney stack repairs, or window and door frame renewals.

Havering utilizes a mix of long-term partnership contracts and specific project tenders to manage these works.

## **Question 6**

### **Cleaning, Waste Removal and Access Issues**

Set out:

- How long cleaning actually takes.
- Delays caused by bulky waste, abandoned items, fly-tipping or pest issues.
- Cases where gaining access delayed inspection or repair.
- Any safeguarding, hoarding or complex cases that slow down turnaround — and how often they occur.

## **Management Response to Question 6**

Voids are categorised by the scale of work required:

- Minor Repairs (V1 - Under £3,500):
- Standard Repairs (V2 - £3,500 to £16,500)
- Major Works (V3 - Over £16,500)

Residents are expected to clear all items before moving. If items remain, the council's contractor is required to remove fly-tipped or abandoned waste.

The updated Pre-Exit process now incorporates recharges, ensuring accountability for damage, unauthorised alterations, or clearance requirements. This process applies to Standard Terminations, Transfers via CBL, Direct Offer moves. There are some exceptions to this. These are:

- Deceased tenants (due to new legal restrictions).
- Tenants with known vulnerabilities, where a proportionate approach is required

The pre-exit visit and recharge assessment support the service in improving property condition at hand back and reducing avoidable void works.

The council now uses the 4-week notice period to conduct "pre-exit surveys," identifying required repairs early to prevent access delays after the keys are returned.

Where there are Complex Cases (Hoarding & Safeguarding), these cases are classified as "complex" and often fall into the V3 category (70+ days).

On average, the council manages approximately 80 voids at any one time. While specific percentages for hoarding are not publicly cited, these cases contribute to the tail of properties that exceed the 66-day London average.

For vulnerable tenants who cannot clear their own items, the Havering Housing Service may appoint a contractor to assist, though this adds logistical complexity to the handover.

## **Question 7**

### **Full Key-to-Key Timeline**

Provide a detailed breakdown of where days accumulate across the entire process: inspection, scoping, repairs, compliance, handover to Allocations, viewings and sign-up. Include data on properties that sit “completed but unallocated” and for how long.

### **Management Response to Question 7**

Details are included within the main body of the report.

## Question 8

### IT System Workflow and Data Issues

Explain how accurately system statuses reflect the true position of a void. Identify any delays caused by manual updates, poor data visibility between teams, or system limitations that force sequential working.

Clarify whether Mears and the Council operate in real time or with lag.

## Management Response to Question 8

Havering Council has significantly modernised its IT workflows for managing void properties, moving from a manual, "cumbersome" process to an integrated digital system. While the Council and its primary contractor, Mears, now operate with high levels of system integration.

System statuses in Havering now provide a more accurate reflection of a property's true position than in previous years due to streamlined workflows. This includes:

- The Council has eliminated a 5–10 working day "pre-void" period. Previously, multiple tasks were required before raising a works order; now, a primary "void basket rate" order is raised and processed on the very first day of notification.
- The integration of the Council's Open Housing management system with Mears' MCM system provides "complete visibility." Staff can now interrogate all jobs, including viewing before, during, and after photos, and approving variations in a more auditable way.
- This digital streamlining contributed to a reduction in "keys-to-key" turnaround times from an average of 80.2 days in 2020/21 to 53.7 days in 2024/25.
- To further improve efficiency, the Council is implementing a "pre-exit process." This identifies resident recharges during the four-week notice period, though it still relies on a sequential flow.

As of early 2026, the London Borough of Havering is undergoing a major transition to sovereign IT services, decoupling its shared infrastructure from Newham (oneSource) to establish its own independent cloud based environment.

Following the "M365 split", Havering now operates its own independent Microsoft cloud environment. This includes standard tools such as Teams, Outlook, SharePoint, PowerBI, and Viva Engage.

Havering currently uses Open Housing as its primary IT system for dealing with housing related matters. This system is currently being re-procured and it is anticipated that this will result in further improvements going forward.

## Question 9

### Allocations KPIs and Performance

Set out the KPIs Allocations is measured against, current performance, and where delays occur inside the team.

If KPIs are routinely missed, explain why.

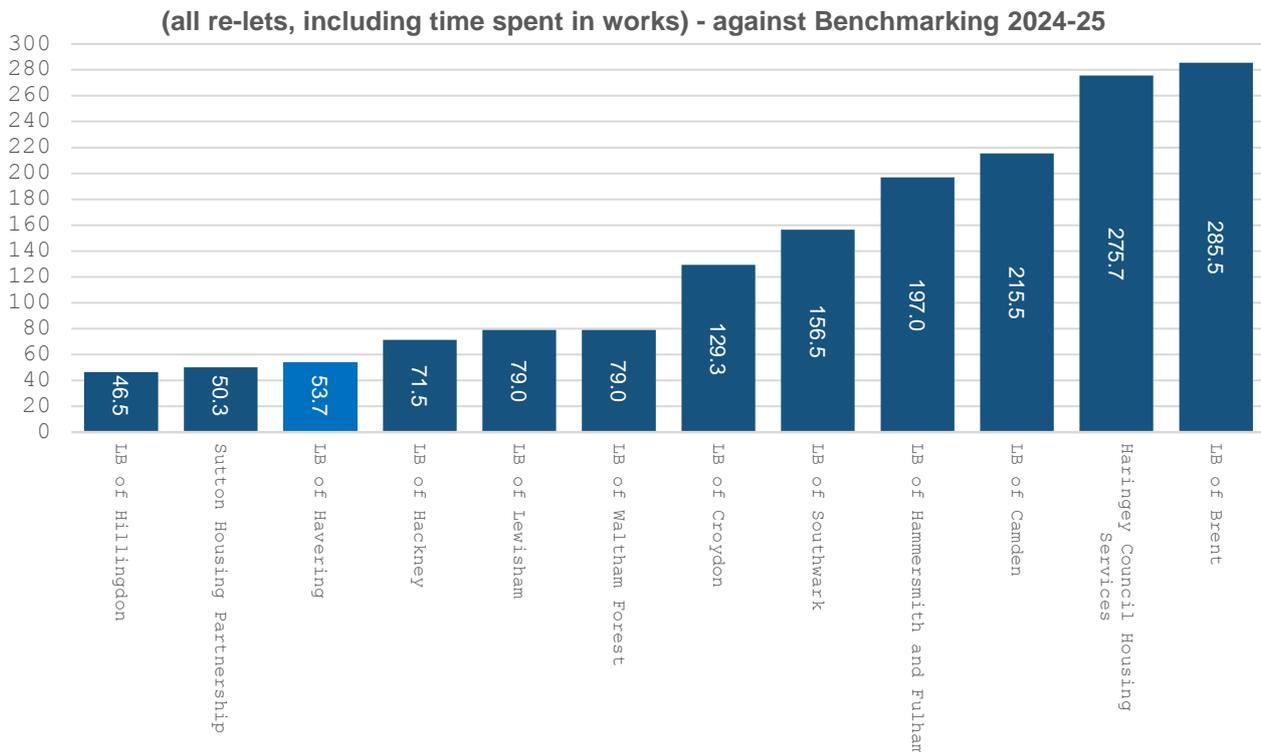
If there are no meaningful KPIs, explain the gap.

## Management Response to Question 9

The London Borough of Havering’s void performance when benchmarking against our London peers in 2024/2025 fiscal period was not only top quartile performance, but also significantly outperforming top quartile performance.

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## Question 10

### Refusals

Clarify how refusal reasons are gathered and whether the data is reliable.

Explain what happens after a refusal — whether the property goes to the next bidder or is re-advertised — and how long each scenario adds to turnaround.

Provide data on repeated refusals, refusals of adapted homes and how many properties are re-advertised each year due to unsuccessful offers.

## Management Response to Question 10

Allocations focuses on the advertisement, shortlist and nomination of void properties to eligible bidders on the housing register via the Council's Choice Based Lettings system, ELLC Choice Homes.

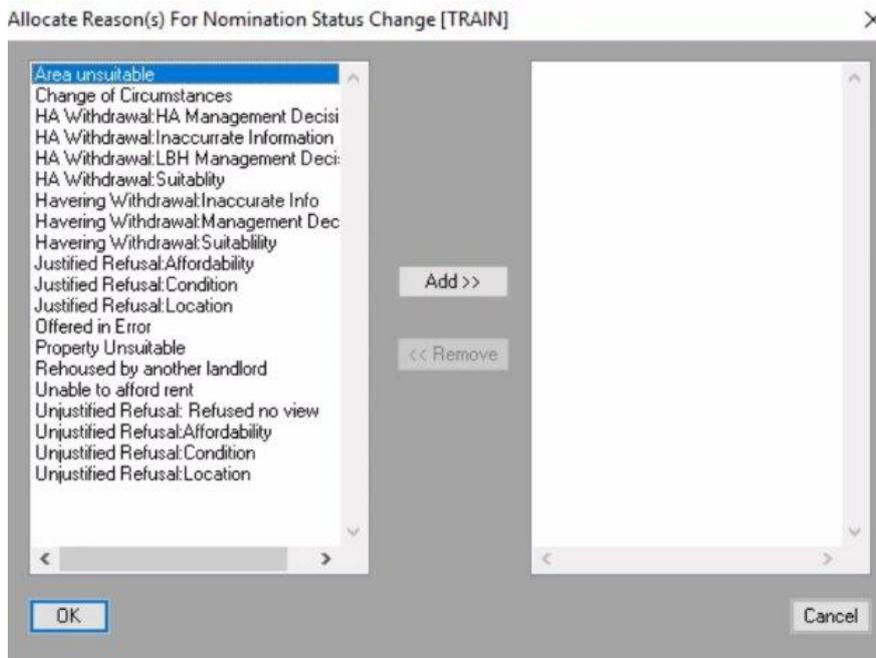
### KPI's & Performance

Based upon group KPI's Allocations does not have a specified end-to-end KPI comparing offer to ready to let date. Rather performance is indirectly monitored through:

- Void KPI's – trends in high turnaround properties – deep dive into bottlenecks
- Housing Performance Scorecards – utilising localised KPIs to identify trends
- Internal Service Standards/Process – Understanding agreed service standard and adherence to set targets.

### Refusals

Refusals are recorded via the Council's housing systems through manual input identifying refusal reasons. Refusal are managed through a number of set parameters as shown below:



Data from refusal is recorded as “Declined” as is evident within reporting mechanism related to void offers.

When an applicant refuses a property, allocations will provide the next available nominee from bidding shortlist with an attached offer letter. Turnaround for such requests is 48 hours

In 24/25 the Council recorded 19 declined properties the below table details the breakdown in bed size:

Bedroom	Total
1 bed	12
2 bed	4
3 bed	3
Total	19

## Question 11

### 360° Tours and Virtual Viewings

Provide a clear assessment of whether virtual viewings could replace most physical viewings and by how much this would reduce void days.

Set out a practical approach using template interior walkthroughs for common layouts, combined with a measured floor plan and a short external photo set of the street and garden (including notes on sheds, ponds or items intended for removal).

Highlight which property types or applicant groups would still require physical viewings and why.

### Management Response to Question 11

The London Borough of Havering currently undertakes video 360° surveys on the completion of all voids. This is primarily to ensure that we have an accurate record of the property at handover stage. This can also be useful if there is a dispute regarding the condition of the property following the tenant moving in. It is also understood that there were certain technical limitations with the allocations software that may prevent this without significant further investment.

Although offering prospective tenants 360° Tours and Virtual Viewings could be useful, it is unlikely to completely eliminate physical viewings. Also, despite the efficiency of digital tours, certain groups and property types require an in-person visit to ensure suitability and safety. These groups include:

- Occupational Therapy (OT) Requirements: Applicants with physical disabilities must test "transfer spaces" (e.g., turning circles for wheelchairs or height of kitchen counters) that a camera lens can distort.
- Vulnerable Adults/Elderly: Those with low digital literacy or those moving from supported housing may need the emotional reassurance of a physical visit to reduce "tenancy failure" risks.
- Large Families: To ensure that the "flow" of a crowded household is manageable in the space.
- Extensively Adapted Homes: Properties with lifts, wet rooms, or specialist hoists.
- Properties with Significant Defects: If a property has a known "quirk" (e.g., a very low ceiling or steep communal stairs), a physical viewing manages expectations and prevents future complaints.

## **Question 12**

### **Move-In Incentives (Paint Packs, Decoration Vouchers)**

Explain how these incentives are used, whether they speed up or delay turnaround, and whether a standard approach could avoid certain cosmetic works and shorten void times. Quantify the likely days saved.

## **Management Response to Question 12**

The London Borough of Havering's Lettable Standard does not require every void property to undergo full redecoration. Instead, a proportionate and needs-based approach is applied. The void surveyor assesses both: the condition of the property, and the needs and circumstances of the incoming resident, to determine whether internal decoration is necessary.

Where a property does not receive redecoration as part of the void works, residents are provided with decoration vouchers. The current allowance is:

£125.00 for one-bedroom property plus £25.00 for each additional bedroom thereafter.

This approach ensures value for money while still supporting residents to make the property their home.

## Question 13

### OT Involvement and Delays

Provide clear data on the impact OT has on void timelines.

We need:

- Average turnaround for voids requiring OT input vs those that don't.
- Where delays occur (assessment, panel approval, contractor capacity).
- Whether notifying OT at the notice stage is viable.
- Whether a dedicated OT for voids would be cost-effective.
- Whether embedding OT within Voids/Repairs would prevent sequential delays.
- Data on adapted properties: refusals, inappropriate bidding and repeat assessments.

Also assess whether maintaining a separate adapted property register would reduce delays and improve matching.

## Management Response to Question 13

Occupational Therapist Involvement and Delays.

OT Voids are not measured separately from standard voids. They are measured in the overall turnaround with detail on long-term adaptation.

Delays on OT voids occur through:

- Late engagement: OT often notified after the void is created, not at notice stage.
- Sequential working: assessment → approval → design → specialist works.
- Specialist contractor capacity sits outside standard void programmes.

Delays in OT Void could be reduced through:

- Early OT notification at notice stage for known adapted stock.
- Dedicated OT resource for Allocations to reduce repeat assessments and rework.
- Direct allocation to most in-need cases – allows early identification of suitable adapted and adaptable stock
- Closer integration of OT with Voids/Repairs to prevent stop-start workflows.
- Adapted property register (for matching, not segregation) to improve first-time offers.

## **Question 14**

### **Temporary Accommodation and Customer Impact**

Explain how void delays increase Temporary Accommodation stays.

Provide data on:

- Extra days households remain in TA due to void delays.
- Cost impact of those delays.
- Any disproportionate impact on vulnerable applicants.
- How many offers the average applicant receives before accepting a property.

## **Management Response to Question 14**

Void delays and the time a Council home remains empty between tenancies does have an impact in prolonging stays in Temporary Accommodation (TA) by preventing households from moving into permanent housing.

Havering has significantly improved its efficiency in returning empty homes to use, which helps mitigate the duration of TA stays.

The council has reduced "key-to-key" turnaround times from an average of 80.2 days in 2020/21 to 53.7 days in 2024/25. This reduction of roughly 25 days per property represents nearly a month of TA time saved for each household transitioning to permanent housing.

Havering is currently outperforming the London council peer group average of 66.27 days.

Relying on temporary solutions due to a lack of available permanent stock is a driver of Havering Council's financial pressure. The average cost for emergency TA has risen to £81 per night (approximately £2,430 per month).

Stays in commercial hotels are more expensive, with averages previously reaching roughly £94.82 per night.

Delays in TA stays disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including victims of Domestic Abuse. Havering has seen a significant increase in domestic abuse cases requiring emergency placement. Extended stays in TA often mean living in "nightly-let" accommodation or hotels, which lacks the stability required for health and education.

## Management Response to Question 15

### Stock Condition and Planned Maintenance

Explain how the condition of the stock influences void repair times.

Set out whether the asset management backlog or lack of planned maintenance is increasing the number of V2/V3 voids.

## Management Response to Question 15

The condition of housing stock directly dictates void repair times through a cost-based classification system, where more significant deterioration leads to higher repair costs and longer turnaround periods.

For the 2024/25 fiscal period, Havering has outperformed its London peers with an average end-to-end "keys-to-key" turnaround time of 53.7 days, compared to a top-quartile benchmark of 66.27 days.

Havering categorises void properties (unoccupied homes requiring repairs) into three main types based on the estimated cost of works. The extent of repairs needed, driven by the property's condition, determines the target timeframe for completion:

Voids are categorised by the scale of work required:

- Minor Repairs (V1 – 11 days).
- Standard Repairs (V2 – 19 days).
- Major Works (V3 70 days).

Properties in poor condition require more extensive "baskets of works" to meet the Council's "ready to let" standard, which ensures compliance with the Housing Health & Safety Rating System (HHSRS), including gas and electrical safety.

Havering Council has a social housing non-decency rate of 3.5% for the 2024/25 period. This performance is significantly better than both the London median and many of its peers.

The median non-decency rate for London housing providers is 7.05%. Havering's 3.5% rate places it in Quartile 1 (top 25%) of performing London boroughs for this metric. Some London boroughs in the bottom quartile (Quartile 3) have non-decency rates as high as 18.23%.

Havering maintains high safety standards, reporting 100% compliance for fire risk assessments, legionella assessments, and communal lift checks.

Overall tenant satisfaction in 2025/26 was recorded at 70.8%, which would place it among the top five London boroughs.

## Question 16

### Team Structure and Accountability (Voids, Allocations, OT)

Provide an honest assessment of the impact of splitting Voids/Repairs (Places) and Allocations/OT (People).

If the structure leads to handover delays, misaligned priorities or accountability gaps, say so plainly.

Assess the feasibility and expected benefits of:

- Bringing Voids, Allocations and OT together as one team.
- Co-locating the three teams in one office.
- Placing all three areas under a single Director with unified KPIs.

If integration *wouldn't* help, explain why — with evidence.

## Management Response to Question 16

The teams are working well together and have made significant improvements to voids performance which has resulted in Havering Council's current void performance being significantly stronger than the London average, though it still has room to reach the highest benchmarks through more aggressive pre-void activity. Havering has substantially improved its "key-to-key" turnaround time from 80.2 days in 2020/21 to a current average of 53.7 days

The current structure has clear lines of demarcation. In addition to this monthly void monitoring meetings take place between the teams to ensure that performance is regularly reviewed and improvements made, where appropriate.

## Question 17

### Parallel Working

Identify all stages that are currently done sequentially but could be run in parallel. Explain what would need to change and the realistic time savings for each.

## Management Response to Question 17

Havering Council has already implemented significant "parallel working" strategies to streamline its housing void process, which has significantly reduced the average key-to-key turnaround time. By eliminating sequential pre-void tasks and consolidating them into a single work order issued on day one, the Council has achieved a top-quartile performance in London.

The following stages have been identified as historical bottlenecks where sequential tasks were consolidated into parallel or streamlined workflows:

□

Stage	Historic Sequential Approach	New Parallel/Streamlined Approach	Requirements for Change	Realistic Time Savings
<b>Pre-Void Notification</b>	Multiple administrative tasks required <i>before</i> raising a works order (e.g., separate inspections and approvals).	All tasks streamlined into a primary void basket rate works order raised on Day 1.	Centralisation of the void order process and adoption of "basket rates" for standard works.	5 to 10 working days saved per void.
<b>Notice Period Utility</b>	Termination of tenancy was recorded, but work only began after keys were returned.	Implementation of a pre-exit survey by the re-housing and terminations team during the 4-week notice period.	Early notification from tenants and a proactive survey team to identify recharges before exit.	Potential reduction in post-exit repair time by up to 4 weeks.
<b>Statutory Compliance</b>	Asbestos surveys, EICRs, and heating checks were often handled by separate teams or contractors sequentially.	Contractor (Mears) now manages all aspects of statutory checks and heating works simultaneously.	Contractual changes to give a single provider end-to-end responsibility for compliance.	Reduced "handoffs" and delays between specialized trades.

<b>Lettable Standards</b>	Repairs and safety checks were often completed before checking against "ready to let" standards.	Defined <b>lettable standards</b> integrated into the Day 1 works order, including HHSRS, gas, and electrical requirements.	Clear, pre-defined standards shared across all maintenance teams to prevent re-work.	Integrated into the Day 1 order process.
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**Proposed and Ongoing Parallel Enhancements**

To further reduce the current 53-day average, the Council is exploring or implementing these additional parallel steps:

- **Parallel Application Processing:** Under the new Housing Allocations Scheme (launched September 2024/25), the Council allows residents to bid for housing using current bandings while their new applications are being processed under the points-based system. This prevents a "blackout" period where allocations would normally pause for administrative reassessment.
- **Early Resource Allocation:** The introduction of the advanced notice period (pre-exit process) allows for the "pre-organisation and allocation of the correct resources" before the property actually becomes empty. This ensures contractors are scheduled to begin on the day of vacancy rather than waiting for an initial post-void inspection.

**Realistic Time Savings**

By moving from a sequential "inspect, then order, then repair" model to a "pre-survey, Day 1 order" model, Havering has already cut 27 days from its total turnaround time compared to 2020/21 performance. The current focus on reducing "handoffs" through a single contractor (Mears) is designed to minimize additional days lost during the repair phase.

## Question 18

### Overall Improvement Options

We need clear, practical proposals — immediate actions, medium-term operational changes and longer-term structural changes — with the expected reduction in key-to-key days for each.

## Management Response to Question 18

Havering Council has already significantly improved its void turnaround times and is among the best in London. The following proposals outline the current and planned improvements across three tiers to further reduce these timelines.

### Current Improvements

- All pre-void tasks have been consolidated into a single "primary void works order" raised on Day 1.
- Re-housing teams now conduct surveys before a tenant moves out to identify necessary recharges and required works.
- Recently launched to gather immediate feedback on void quality, aiming to reduce "right first time" failures.

### Medium-Term Operational Changes

- Implementing detailed tracking of the "completion to re-let" phase and breaking down turnaround times by property type (e.g., General Needs vs. Hostels).

### Longer-Term Structural Changes

- The new housing allocation scheme launched in September 2025. This points-based system prioritises residents with a 4-out-of-6-year local connection, aiming for faster, more transparent matching of tenants to vacant units.