

<b>LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN</b>	<b>WARDS:</b> All
<b>REPORT TITLE</b> Void property performance	
<b>REPORT OF</b> Director of Property Management	
<b>FOR SUBMISSION TO</b> Housing Scrutiny Committee	<b>DATE</b> 15 September 2025
<b>SUMMARY OF REPORT</b>  <p>Camden is making good progress on void performance, with improved turnaround times in key stages, additional resources to undertake repairs, a new lettings team, and more properties being brought back into use. As of August 2025, the Council had 461 active voids (1.93% of its stock) and 111 held properties, many of which were linked to Chalcots decants, options appraisals, or major works</p> <p>Over the past year, changes to the lettings and repairs teams, new real-time performance dashboards, and dedicated managers have reduced delays and improved efficiency. Median turnaround times for routine and minor voids are now approximately 53 days for repairs and generally between 25–40 days for lettings.</p> <p>The release of Chalcots homes, alongside completed appraisals of unsuitable or high-cost stock, will greatly reduce the number of ‘held’ voids and support Camden’s £670m Housing Investment Strategy, ensuring resources are focused on delivering modern, family-friendly homes.</p> <p>Camden is turning the corner on voids, improving systems, speeding up lettings, and reducing rent loss while ensuring residents benefit from quicker access to secure housing.</p> <p><b>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to information</b>          No documents that require listing were used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p><b>Contact Officer:</b></p> <p>Tony Castle, Head of Repairs &amp; Operations, <a href="mailto:tony.castle@camden.gov.uk">tony.castle@camden.gov.uk</a> , 79 Holmes Road, NW5 3AX          Gerry Crowley, Head of Allocations, Lettings and Private Housing, <a href="mailto:Gerry.crowley@camden.gov.uk">Gerry.crowley@camden.gov.uk</a>, 5 Pancras Square, N1C 4AG</p>	
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>  That the Housing Scrutiny Committee notes the contents of the report.	

Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Legn'.

Director of Property Management

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> September 2025

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Camden is making good progress on void performance, with improved turnaround times in key stages, additional resources to undertake repairs, a new lettings team, and more properties being brought back into use. As of August 2025, the Council had 461 active voids (1.93% of its stock) and 111 held properties, many of which were linked to Chalcots decants, options appraisals, or major works.
- 1.2 Over the past year, changes to the lettings and repairs teams, new real-time performance dashboards, and dedicated managers have reduced delays and improved efficiency. Median turnaround times for routine and minor voids are now approximately 53 days for repairs and generally between 25–40 days for lettings.
- 1.3 The release of Chalcots homes, alongside completed appraisals of unsuitable or high-cost stock, will greatly reduce the number of 'held' voids and support Camden's £670m Housing Investment Strategy, ensuring resources are focused on delivering modern, family-friendly homes.
- 1.4 Camden is turning the corner on voids, improving systems, speeding up lettings, and reducing rent loss while ensuring residents benefit from quicker access to secure housing.

## **2. Background and context**

- 2.1 At any one time the Council has approximately 400 properties that are 'live' voids which are either in the introductory stage awaiting works (e.g. being cleared), undergoing repairs or are in the lettings process. There is a team in the repairs service that manages the first two stages and there is a team in the housing service that manages the lettings process. All staff are in the same office at the Holmes Road depot.
- 2.2 Just over year ago, changes to the structure were introduced with interim arrangements put in place to speed up the lettings process, and in January 2025 these were made permanent with dedicated Lettings Managers introduced, who directly manage Lettings Officers.
- 2.3 This saw a reduction in the time taken for the lettings process and this will be a continued area of focus, in particular how the Council can make the viewing, bidding and signing up process as efficient as possible. It's noted that the time taken for lettings can vary depending on the number of properties handed over from the repairs service.
- 2.4 Within the repairs service a new dedicated manager started in June 2024, and they brought on board additional supervisory resources and additional supply chain resources to manage the volume of work. The number of homes in the repairs stages has reduced from 331 in August 2024 to 263 in August 2025. The reduction in the number of live voids and the time it takes to turn them around is a priority for the Council as it reduces the rent lost from vacant properties.

2.5 Other improvement work has focussed on:

- Approval of a new void procedure covering all stages of the process
- Review and sign off the Council's lettable standard
- Development of a new live performance dashboard using "Power BI", which provides live tracking and exception reporting for managers

2.6 The data tables in the Appendix 1 show that in August 2025, the Council had 461 live general needs voids (including 10 where letting has been agreed but tenancy not started) and 111 'held' voids. The number of held voids will steadily reduce this year as the Chalcots major works completes and these homes are brought back into use, and the options appraisal process is completed on higher cost or other unsuitable properties now that the Housing Investment Strategy is in place.

2.7 In Appendix 2, the table on the overall number of voids across London shows that the Council is similar to other boroughs with an active regeneration programme, whereby homes are decanted ahead of demolition or, as in Camden, homes made vacant by HS2.

2.8 Appendix 3 provides a selection of management indicators which are captured in the Council's 'Power BI' dashboard using real time data. It shows the decrease in live voids over the year as outlined above, noting that peaks do occur, for example when new build homes are handed over, existing tenants move in, and voids are created.

2.9 The graphs also show the average time voids take in the repairs and lettings stages. The median time in repairs for routine and minor voids has been 53 days over the past 12 months and the time in the lettings stage has generally ranged between 25 and 40 days with a couple of peaks depending on the levels of activity in the month, particularly as more properties complete the repairs stage and enter the lettings stage more quickly. It is noted overall key to key times average around 150 days across the entire process, this will reduce as the improvements set out in this report are embedded and older voids work their way through the system.

2.10 This live data is used actively by managers to monitor the performance of teams and suppliers.

### **3. OPERATIONAL CHANGES MADE TO DATE**

3.1 As outlined above, the development of a live dashboard looking across our main systems (NEC and ROCC) has been a major focus for the Council. This means that staff can view void repair status, key property facts, and repair details all in one place without having to extract data and analyse this in spreadsheets. The dashboard was built by a data analyst dedicated to void properties and they work with the team to develop the functionality such as exception reports on properties taking longer than expected within the process.

3.2 The Council also secured additional supply chain support to progress specific tasks such as clearances more quickly, in addition to additional capacity to

carry out works within properties. In total an additional four suppliers are supporting the work of the two main contractors used.

- 3.3 With regards staffing, the co-location of teams at the Holmes Road Depot allows cross team discussions on progressing empty properties towards a tenancy. They work together to making properties available for letting as soon as a surveyor has assessed that only minor or routine works are needed. Viewings begin to take place as soon as it is safe to do so. Works and lettings are now often happening at the same time.
- 3.4 A dedicated officer is assigned to each property when it becomes empty. The Letting Officers note if there are reasons for refusals of a property to help with information to be included in future adverts for local properties. Another change has been to verify housing applications in parallel to reduce any possible delays during the viewing and sign-up process. Viewings are also being held during the repairs phase where possible.
- 3.5 Where appropriate, the Council has also used direct offers to those in temporary accommodation or those needing an emergency move. This is only used in certain cases, and the Council otherwise operates its Choice Based Lettings methodology for the allocation of homes.
- 3.6 The Council carries out post occupancy surveys three months into tenancies to find out what we could do better with the repairs and lettings process, this data is reported monthly and used to improve service delivery.
- 3.7 Aside from the changes in the Lettings team, the repairs team has also made sure that its geographical teams are fully staffed. The team has also appointed a dedicated “Legacy Voids Manager” who focuses on complex properties that have been undergoing structural works and / or involve work with our insurance provider and issues with utility companies.
- 3.8 A further piece of work looked at a particular challenge posed by squatters in void properties in the Hampstead area. The Council responded swiftly with targeted measures to safeguard homes and keep lettings on track. This included a professional security patrol company to provide a continuous 24-hour presence, backed up by nightly inspections of voids in identified hotspots. High-risk properties were fitted with intruder alarms to discourage unauthorised entry and protect homes awaiting letting.

#### **4. Next steps**

- 4.1 There is focussed work underway to bring a number of held properties back into use. This includes the 44 homes that have been used for decant accommodation for the Chalcots major works project. Now that the work is drawing to a close, these properties can start to enter the lettings process. Other areas of focus are reviewing the small number of homes that have been used as site accommodation.
- 4.2 The Council has dedicated resources to complete the options appraisal work on the 38 homes that are unsuitable for reletting, require extensive works or meet the criteria for consideration under the Family Friendly Housing Purchase Programme which sees smaller unsuitable homes disposed of so

that larger family sized homes can be purchased. Similarly, there are some unsuitable homes with high costs which are to be considered for disposal under the Quality Homes programme, this generating investment for the £670m capital works programme as outlined in the Housing Investment Strategy approved by Cabinet in January 2025.

- 4.3 There is ongoing work to improve the operation of the allocations policy and viewings process which will look at what can be done in parallel to reduce the overall end to end times.
- 4.4 In 2026/27 the Council will reprocore its supply chain for voids. Currently the Council has secured additional support to improve turnaround times and to manage the additional work from temporary accommodation purchase programmes and peaks of activity once new build homes are handed over.
- 4.5 In addition, a periodic roundtable meeting has been introduced involving relevant senior stakeholders to examine older voids and what can be done to unblock or improve performance, for example properties undergoing major works where the Council's insurer is involved in monitoring issues such as subsidence and designing repair schemes.

## **5. Finance Comments of the Director of Finance**

- 5.1 The Director of Finance has been consulted and has no comments to add.

## **6. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor**

- 6.1 The Borough Solicitor has been consulted and has no comments to add.

## **7. Environmental Implications**

- 7.1 There are none.

## **8. Appendices**

- 8.1 Appendix 1 – Data on void properties
- 8.2 Appendix 2 – London wide data
- 8.3 Appendix 3 – Voids management indicators

**END**

## Appendix 1 – Data on void properties (as at 7 Aug 2025)

Location	Active voids to be relet			Held properties
	General needs	% Stock	Sheltered	No.
Camden Town	100	0.42%	5	12
Gospel Oak	114	0.48%	15	14
Hampstead	90	0.38%	14	62
Holborn	59	0.25%	7	10
Kentish Town	98	0.41%	5	13
<b>Total*</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>1.93%</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>111</b>

\* includes 10 properties that have been let, with a start date later than 7 August

Reason for property being held	No.
Chalcots	44
These properties are held for decanting households as we progress the work on the estate. Once the works are complete in the Autumn the properties will be released into the general needs stock and they will be ready to let once minor works, cleaning and other checks are done.	
Emergency Temporary Accommodation	6
Held for Conversion	9
These are non-self-contained studio flats in 5-7 Belsize Grove NW3 4UT which are being assessed for potential conversion into 1-bedroom self-contained properties.	
Undergoing Options Appraisal	38
These are a limited number of unusually small units (usually studios) which have been difficult to let or costly to repair. The appraisal assesses if the best option is to dispose via the Family Friendly programme. This includes undertaking formal valuations, completing a business case for each property and completing internal approvals as soon as possible.	
Legal Cases	6
Retrofit Programme	3
Works usually take can be 2-4 months. 5 different contractors are involved completing the following <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrofit Works Survey</li> <li>• Asbestos Survey</li> <li>• Asbestos Removal (if required)</li> <li>• Fire Safety Survey</li> <li>• Fire Compartmentation Works</li> <li>• Retrofit Works Installed</li> </ul>	
Site Offices	5
Small properties, studios or one beds where major works are being carried out and there is no parking (where a portacabin can be placed) or local welfare facilities for contractors. Two of these are being handed back week commencing 19 <sup>th</sup> May. The other three will be handed back shortly. Using these properties, on a short-term basis, helps major works to be carried out quickly and we usually ask the contractors to refurbish the site offices on behalf of Camden.	
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>

## Appendix 2 – London wide data 2023/24 (24/25 data yet to be published)

Local Authority	Stock 31/3/24	Vacant 31/3/24	% Vacant	Rank by Number	Rank by %
Bromley	36	14	38.9%	31	1
Ealing	10,959	1,230	11.2%	2	2
City of London	451	42	9.3%	29	3
Bexley	238	20	8.4%	30	4
Westminster	12,207	780	6.4%	4	5
Brent	8,798	445	5.1%	8	6
Kingston upon Thames	4,519	205	4.5%	20	7
Haringey	15,139	628	4.1%	7	8
Newham	15,924	648	4.1%	6	9
Camden	22,808	811	3.6%	3	10
Waltham Forest	9,952	331	3.3%	13	11
Southwark	37,663	1,238	3.3%	1	12
Tower Hamlets	11,591	375	3.2%	12	13
Kensington and Chelsea	6,960	215	3.1%	19	14
Enfield	10,356	312	3.0%	14	15
Lambeth	23,929	679	2.8%	5	16
Barking and Dagenham	16,141	437	2.7%	9	17
Merton	83	2	2.4%	32	18
Hillingdon	10,228	227	2.2%	18	19
Wandsworth	17,265	383	2.2%	10	20
Hounslow	13,839	280	2.0%	16	21
Croydon	13,421	247	1.8%	17	22
Havering	9,529	174	1.8%	21	23
Harrow	4,991	91	1.8%	25	24
Islington	25,297	382	1.5%	11	25
Greenwich	20,727	292	1.4%	15	26
Redbridge	4,581	59	1.3%	28	27
Hammersmith and Fulham	12,060	154	1.3%	22	28
Sutton	6,028	67	1.1%	27	29
Barnet	9,977	85	0.9%	26	30
Lewisham	14,159	110	0.8%	24	31
Hackney	21,593	116	0.5%	23	32

The above table includes all Camden voids, including those held for regeneration or decanted for High Speed 2. It shows that the Borough is ranked 10<sup>th</sup> among London Boroughs on the %age of properties void. If Camden just included its active voids, the %age would be c. 1.93%.

It should be noted that this indicator is not audited by a third party (the Government does arithmetic checks only) and therefore some boroughs with active regeneration programmes may not have included their decants.



Appendix 3 – Voids Management Indicators



