

9 November 2021		ITEM: 8
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Garage Project Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Peter Doherty, Strategic Lead – Housing Operations		
Accountable Assistant Director: Ewelina Sorbjan, Assistant Director of Housing		
Accountable Director: Ian Wake, Corporate Director for Adults, Housing and Health		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report identifies and updates on the main focuses of the Garage Service developments and improvements over the last year.

1. Recommendation:

1.1 It is recommended that Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive this report for information and comment.

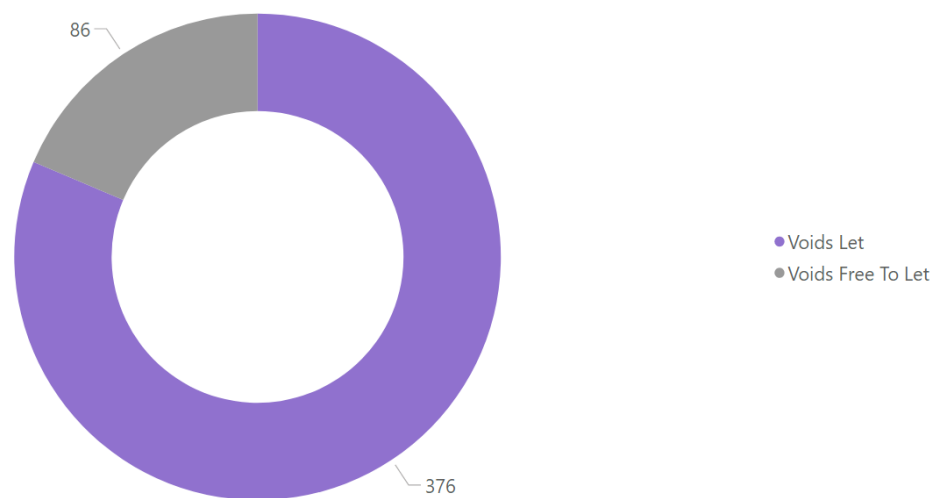
2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock Council holds a stock of 2275 garages and 290 garage plots located across the borough. The garages are brick or concrete purpose-built structures which are located in a number of settings varying from standalone blocks in large sites, to small isolated buildings on small sections of land, to garages located under town houses and blocks of flats. The garage plots are individual hard standings or section of land on which tenants construct their own garages structures or use the space for allocated parking. There are garage plots located on 27 sites across the borough.

2.2 At the end of second quarter of 2021/22, there are 1936 garages let and 339 are void. Of these void garages, there were 86 are free to let and 201 are being held for major works such as structural repairs and roof replacements or are being considered for redevelopment. The remaining 36 are currently being repaired or awaiting clearance. An additional 17 lettings have been carried out in the first week of October.

- 2.3 There are 252 garage plots let and 38 are void. Of these void plots, 6 are free to let and the other 32 are awaiting clearance.
- 2.4 The scheduled programme of works set up to clear the historic backlog of void garages is largely completed. Since the last report in September 2020, 462 garages have been made void, checked, repaired, cleared and made ready for re-let. 376 of these garages have now been let and 86 are free to let. This has also involved carrying out more than 900 void inspections and post-repairs inspections. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of these 462 garages by status.

Figure 1: Voids Since September 2020 by Status



- 2.5 We have been reviewing long term regeneration and development opportunities across the borough. As part of this process, the Council are currently in the process of procuring a professional consultancy practice to undertake a stock condition survey of the garage portfolio. This survey including a structural appraisal is anticipated to commence in early 2022 with a view of receiving the report around May 2022.

The detailed survey and appraisal will allow the Council to firstly ensure that the garage portfolio is being managed and maintained appropriately to ensure all of these assets are in a safe and secure condition. Additionally, the survey will allow the service to fully inform the housing service to take a holistic view of the garage portfolio and inform a longer term investment and management strategy. This strategy will also include a long-term view in regards to what assets can receive the appropriate level of long term investment, but also potentially identify garage sites that are not suitable for significant investment and can be considered for other uses that would better serve the community and the wider Thurrock borough.

3. Garage updates

- 3.1 From the start of the garage repairs contract with Mears in April 2019, repairs and capital works has increased significantly. The table below indicates 2020/21 spend and 2021/22 forecast spend on capital works (i.e. roof replacements, new doors) and repairs (i.e. lock changes, door overhauls):

Budget Type	2020/21		2021/22	
	Budget	Year-end spend	Budget	Forecast Year-end spend
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Capital	212	205	507	507
Repairs & Maintenance	75	93.81	75.75	75.75

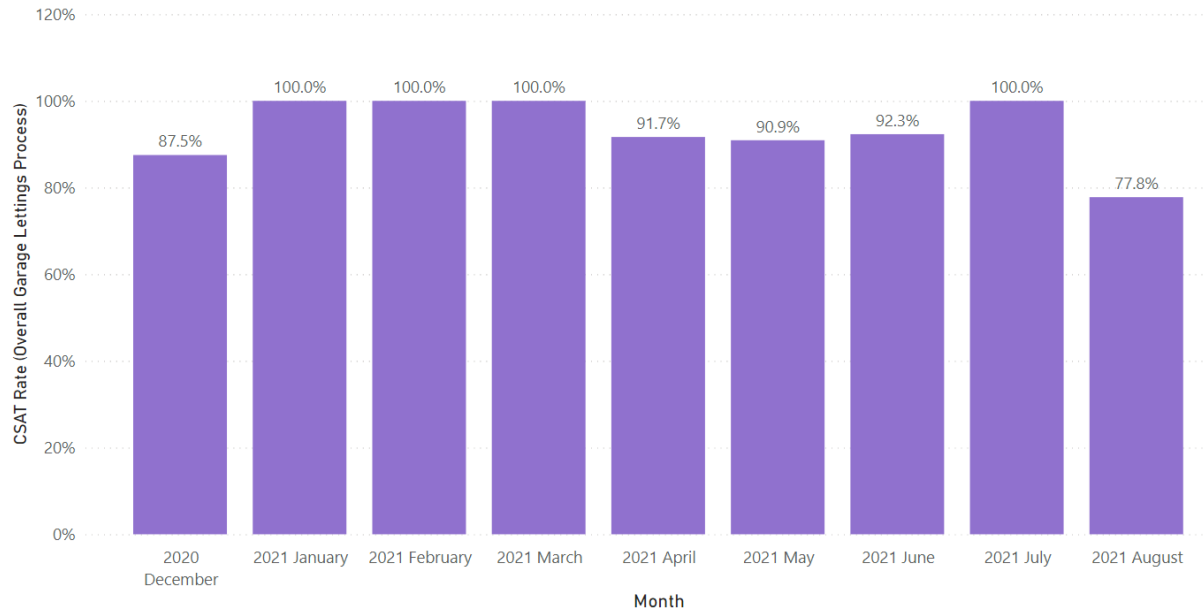
In addition, the garages income generation in 2020/21 and 2021/22 is as set out in the table below:

	Budget	Income	Variance (Under)/Over recovery
	£'000	£'000	£'000
2020/21	879	863 (Actual)	(16)
2021/22	879	959 (Forecast)	80

- 3.2 Garages services back office procedures are under continuous review and a number of documents have been considered and updated to ensure they are robust and fit for purpose. We have streamlined processes and undertaken a number of data cleansing exercises.
- 3.3 We have been reviewing front office processes in order to improve the customer experience of Garages Services. There has been significant progress made to improve the garage re-let turnaround times and many garages that have been unused for years have now been let. There continues to be a very high demand for garages across the borough with approximately 1100 applicants currently on the garage waiting list. In addition, 80 - 100 applications are submitted on line each month, though this does include a number of duplicates. Lettings continue to be carried out in line with waiting list and garage demand. Information on the Thurrock's website has been reviewed and updated to ensure it is sufficient, clear and easy to use and new electronic application and termination forms are available online.
- 3.4 The positive work we have done to improve office processes, continuing to clear the backlog of free to let garages, processing of the garage applications

and carry out lettings is clearly reflected in the excellent performance shown in the Customer Satisfaction surveys which were introduced in December 2020. Figure 2 shows new tenant satisfaction with the lettings process. As at the time of this report overall satisfaction with Garage Services is 92.3%.

Figure 2: Satisfaction With Overall Lettings Process by Month



3.5 Critical to customer satisfaction and building the reputation of the service is improving way we engage with others. We value the importance of good working relationships with internal and external colleagues in order to meet the changing needs of residents and provide a relevant, efficient and customer led service. We do this by working in partnership with the Tenancy Management Officers, Neighbourhood Officers, Mears, Police and local resident groups. In collaboration with Environment Enforcement team and the Police we undertook a very successful joint operation in July 2021 to take action on a number of vehicles which had been left in void garages. Operation Cue was part of a wider Police initiative Operation Caesar to tackle nuisance bikers in the Borough. See link - [Nuisance bikes targeted in joint operation | Thurrock Council](#). The day ended with an excellent outcome of 10 vehicles seized including some vehicles identified as stolen and others abandoned. Another similar operation was carried out in September 2021 and we are planning the next operation in the near future.

3.6 The reduction of garage voids and increased income by improving turnaround for both repairs and lettings undoubtedly demonstrates that we are providing better service for money. Over the last year, we have completed ten major works schemes and have more planned for this year. We have undertaken extensive rooftop overgrowth clearances at six garage sites, this was to reduce the risk of roof damage, damp penetration and structural issues. In addition, and as part of our commitment to social value, working with our partners in the Contracts Team and Aaron Services the garage doors at Tamarisk Road blocks were repainted in September 2021 and this has greatly

improved the aesthetics of the area. We will plan to undertake further painting projects in the coming year.

- 3.7 The HUSK development mentioned in last year's report has now been completed. This innovative and pioneering housing solution has seen the conversion of two existing council garage blocks into two residential bungalows in Delargy Close, Chadwell. This unique and creative design provides much needed elderly persons/ disabled adapted housing on brownfield garage sites that did not contribute to the quality of the area because the garages were not in use and have been subject to vandalism, fly tipping and vehicular damage. Effectively, we turned problem sites into assets. Other similar builds will be considered in the future to replace some garage sites where demand or need is low.

Garage area in Delargy Close – before and after

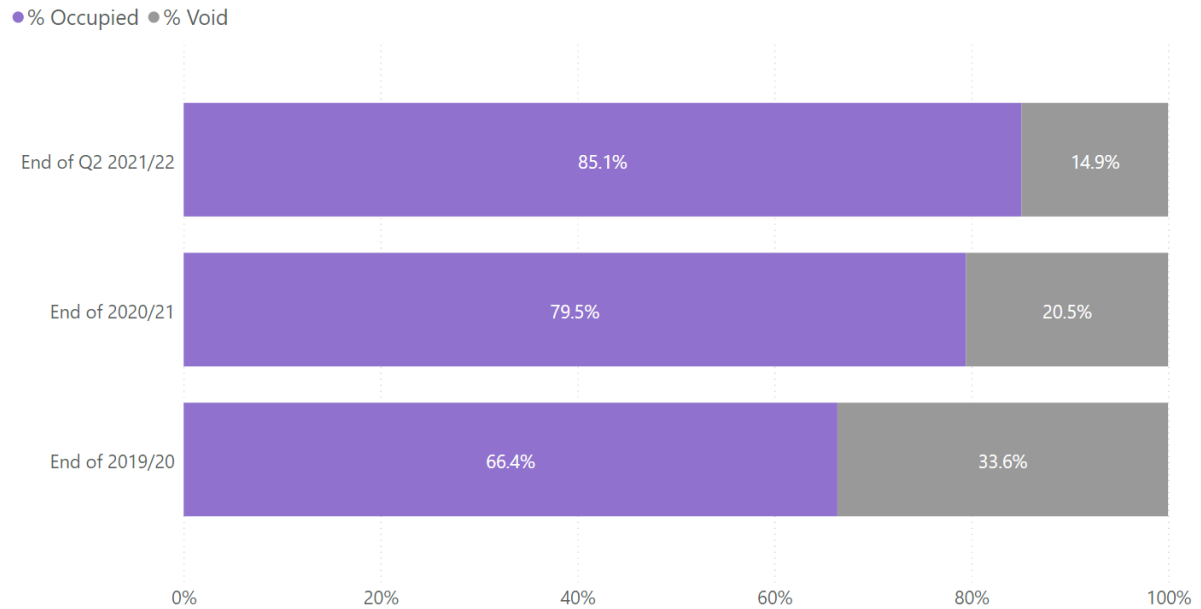


4. Performance

- 4.1 Figure 3 shows a significant increase in the proportion of garages occupied as opposed to void over the last two and a half years. This has meant additional

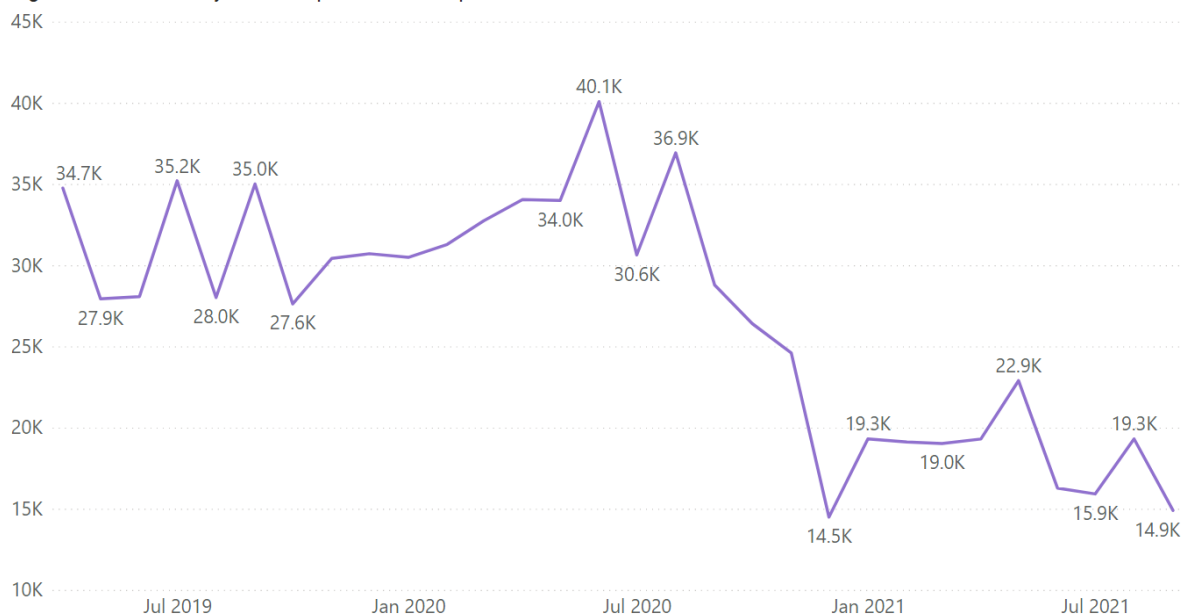
income into the HRA, reducing the garage waiting list and providing residents with a service they want. The hard work of the Garage Services team, particularly during periods of restricted interaction and duties in the pandemic, is evident.

Figure 3: Snapshot of % Occupied and % Void As of End Of Period



4.2 Figure 4 below shows a dramatic reduction in monthly garage void loss. Rent loss has more than halved over the last two years from £34,700 in April 2019 to £14,900 in September 2021. This is primarily due to a continued focus on lettings but also taking out of management a number of long term void garages which are on sites currently being scoped for redevelopment or re-use.

Figure 4: Void Loss by Month (April 2019 to September 2021)



4.3 Working with our colleagues in the Estate Services team, we have cleared over 375 garages of rubbish and abandoned belongings since the last report.

4.4 In line with our commitment to Thurrock's recycling agenda, we have undertaken the following steps to reuse and recycle as much as possible in the garage clearance phase of the void turnarounds. At present we have 26 storage garages across the borough holding a number of donation/ saleable items including furniture, books, scrap metal, kitchen equipment, CDs, DVDs, etc. These garages will be sorted and efforts made to raise revenue, provide much needed household furnishings to families in need over the next year.

5. Reasons for Recommendation and Considerations

5.1 This report has sought to provide an overview of the service improvements, challenges and actions to date, but also an indication of our continued commitment to improving Garage Services for residents and the local community.

5.2 It is clear significant strides have been made over the last two and a half years, despite the challenges of the pandemic. A dedicated team of a Garage Services Manager and Garage Officer has resulted in a significant increase in the number of lettings, high turnover of garages through repairs and clearance in order for them to be re-let and a clear direction of service development for major works, redevelopment and regeneration being established. As indicated in last year's report, we have seen an increase in lettings and therefore rental income, a reduction of the number of voids and therefore a reduction in void loss.

5.3 Some of next year's focuses will be on the following:

- Move forward with the redevelopment opportunities – this includes underutilised garage and plot sites identified with Technical Services and Regeneration teams which could be suitable for redevelopment. Also to build on the success of the pilot HUSK project and consider other similar garage sites with potential for development under this project
- Work with the Police and Environment Enforcement to improve the community safety in garages areas and reducing risks of anti-social behaviour, youth nuisance and crime.
- Continue to improve the appearance of garage and plot sites, including clearing overgrowth, ensuring they are welcoming and attractive and more regularly maintained.

6. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 6.1 This report is an update of garage services in Thurrock, including the current position and planned actions. The Council has undertaken consultation with residents where garages are proposed for redevelopment and this will be further carried out as other redevelopment proposals are put forward.

7. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 7.1 The implications of the recommendations in this report may require a review of local policies and procedures.

8. Implications

8.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Hannah Katakwe**

Housing Accountant, Finance & IT

The Council has an ongoing garages repairs & maintenance budget of £0.075m, and an additional 2021/22 Capital funding of £0.500m has been identified with the HRA capital programme. This will support the delivery of the project outcomes, and is included within the overall HRA business plan.

8.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Gina Clarke**

Corporate Governance Lawyer

Since this is an update report there are no direct legal implications arising specifically from the recommendation set out in this report.

However, where Council has acquired land for one purpose, it cannot be used it for a different purpose unless authorised to do so by statute. Currently,

authorisation is provided by section 122 of the Local Government 1972 Act, as long as the land is no longer required for the purpose for which it had been held before the appropriation. Section 122 of the 1972 Act would require the Council to decide whether or not the land was still required for the purpose for which it was held. In that respect, it has to carry out a conscious deliberative process.

In relation to garages on land held by the Council for housing purposes, which are not part of a house or are not let in connection with a house but are used for more general purposes by members of the public who are not council tenants, an appropriation may be made under s122 of the 1972 Act if the garages are no longer being used by the Council as landlord of Council housing stock. In such a case the Income and expenditure would transfer to the General Fund.

In relation to any garages that are being considered for redevelopment, if it is proposed that the garages are no longer required to be used for the purpose of the Council's housing landlord function, then a decision would be required to appropriate the garages for some other purpose.

Land held by the Council for housing purposes is subject to section 19 of the Housing Act 1985 which requires consent of the Secretary of State to appropriate dwellings from the HRA. Garages are not dwellings, so consent is not required. However, if any redevelopment proposal, proposed use of the garages for other than housing purposes, the Council would have to consider and a decision as to whether the relevant garages are no longer required to be used for housing purposes and appropriate the garages for the proposed use..

By virtue of Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985, in order to deliver its strategic housing role, the Council, as the local housing authority, is empowered to undertake a periodic review of its housing needs, identify housing priorities to reflect trends and dynamics, and the views of local people and stakeholders. In doing this it is imperative that where necessary, the Council should undertake consultation with residents in line with the requirement of the Garage Action Plan, especially where the garages are to be subject to redevelopment.

8.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer

Whilst there are no direct implications at present arising from this report Community Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out in future against proposals where required.

8.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, Impact on Looked After Children

There are no other implications arising from this report.

9. **Background papers used in preparing the report**

None

10. **Appendices to the report**

None

Report Author:

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Housing