



Empty Property Management Policy

2024-2027

Version Control

Version	Changes	Approval Stage	Date
1	Original Draft	Internal	30/10/2024
2	-	Tenants/Public Consultation	Completed
3	-	Head of Service sign off	1/11/2024
4	Final	Leadership Team	5/11/2024

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Relevant Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localism Act 2011 • The Housing Act 1985 • Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 • Housing Act 1996 (Part 6) • Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 (GSIUR) as amended 2018. Approved Code of Practice and guidance • Health and Safety Legislation including Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 • Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) Regulations 2005 • Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) • Environmental Protection Act 1990 • Building Safety Act 2022 • Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Regulations 2015 and Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendments) Regulations 2022 • Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 • Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 2018 • Electrical Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002 No.2665 • Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 • Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 • Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR • Equalities Act 2010 • Disability Discrimination Act 1995. • Social Housing Act 2023 • Regulator of Social Housing - Consumer Standards April 2024
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1.0 Purpose of the Policy

This policy details Cannock Chase District Council's (the Council) approach to ensuring that there is a consistent approach to dealing with Empty Homes Management across the Council which is in line with legal and regulatory requirements.

The policy establishes the actions the Council will take to ensure all residential empty property in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) stock are brought back into a condition and pre-determined lettable standard in line with the Council's obligations and to meet the requirements of existing and future resident's needs appropriately and in a timely manner.

Aims

The policy will ensure that a forward thinking and strategic approach is adopted to empty property management with the aim to:

- Provide safe, secure and sustainable homes meeting the Lettable Standard
- Minimise the length of time that a property is empty, the amount of rental income lost, and costs incurred
- Meet customers' needs and maximises their satisfaction.
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- Make best use of the empty property period to meet the Council's investment requirements in line with the HRA Housing Asset Management Strategy 2024 - 27
- Ensure the right empty homes are offered to the right customers
- Meet the Council's statutory, regulatory and compliance requirements to ensure properties are fit for habitation and meet the Decent Homes Standard.

2.0 Scope of Policy

This policy should be used by all employees, residents, and stakeholders of the Council to understand the obligations placed upon the Council to ensure that a property is effectively managed when it becomes vacant.

To ensure the property is brought up to the Council's "Lettable" Standard before a new tenant moves in, and that the rent loss is minimised within the whole process.

This policy will always, be aligned to the Council's Allocations Policy to ensure the most effective use of the housing stock to help meet housing need.

Empty property management policy includes the following activities:

- Tenancy Termination
- Inspections and Works
- Viewings and offers
- Creating tenancies
- Management of long-term empty property
- Management of low demand properties

3.0 Definitions

Throughout this policy document, it is inevitable that words or phrases are used that are readily understood by some reader, but which are new to other readers and their meaning is not immediately apparent. The meanings of some words/phrases used in this document are given below in appendix 1.

4.0 Consultation

Consultation has taken place with the following. Their feedback has been considered and the policy update:

- Resident Engagement Focus Group
- Housing Maintenance/Empty Property Housing Team
- Chief Internal Auditor & Risk Manager
- Tenancy Service Manager Housing Property Services Manager
- Housing Property Services Manager
- Assistant Manager Compliance Assistant Manager Asset Management
- Leadership Team

The Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment has been undertaken and shared as part of the consultation process.

5.0 Background and Context

The Council through the HRA is committed to maximising its rental income and making the best use of available stock, through the efficient and effective management of empty properties (also referred to as void property/voids).

As the Council's HRA homes main source of income is derived from rents , steps need to be taken to minimise the length of time between tenancies. The Empty Property Management Policy has been developed to ensure that good performance is both regularly achieved and further built upon.

The primary objective of this policy is to minimise periods between tenancies whilst ensuring a consistent standard of property repair and sensitive letting to develop balanced and sustainable communities.

Empty Property management is based on the Tenancy Services and Property Services managing the process effectively and working closely with the outgoing tenant and as necessary, with other agencies or partners. It involves dealing with three key areas: -

- Tenancy termination
- Identification and completion of any work to the property
- Letting and occupation

This policy, together with the Tenancy Policy, Housing Operational Communal Policy, Repairs and Maintenance Policy and Rechargeable Repairs Policy will guide staff in ensuring that tenants are aware of their repair responsibilities and tenancy obligations.

This policy should be considered in conjunction with the Allocations Policy to ensure that the stock is well used in a way that meets local demand in a fair and equitable way. As the main provider of affordable homes in the District, the Council is committed to reducing homelessness and meeting housing need through maximising the use and occupation of its homes and the effective turnaround of empty properties.

This policy should also be read in conjunction with other related policies and procedures:

- Tenancy Agreement
- Allocations Policy
- Repairs and Maintenance Policy
- Adaptations Policy
- Rent Setting Policy
- Income Collection Policy
- Rechargeable Repairs Policy
- Compensation Policy
- HRA Asset Compliance Policies - covering, Asbestos, Electrical Safety, Fire Safety Gas, Legionella -Water Hygiene and Lifting.
- Housing Operational Communal Policy

6.0 Policy Detail

The following section details the actions taken and measures that are in place to ensure the Council effectively manages empty homes within its stock in order to achieve value for money and make best use of its homes.

These actions and measures demonstrate the Council's commitment to ensuring a safe environment within which our residents can live and within which our staff can work, as well as satisfying our regulatory obligations.

Tenancy Termination

Tenants are required to give the Council four weeks' notice to end their tenancy. This period can be shortened, such as where a tenant is transferring to another property, or extended where there is good reason, at the Council's discretion, especially where this assists with more effective empty property management.

During the four weeks' notice period the Council will undertake a predetermination property inspection.

Pre-Termination Visit

Where tenant's improvement work has been carried out to the property with the prior approval of the Council, the outgoing tenant may request compensation to cover part of the costs within 14 days of the end of the tenancy. Details may be found in the Repair Handbook.

Recharges

The Council will seek to recover from the outgoing tenant (or their estate) any costs incurred by the Council arising as a result of wilful neglect on the part of the tenant and/or any other cost incurred as a result of any unauthorised alterations to the property.

Further information on charges and recovery of rechargeable repairs are contained in the Recharge Policy.

Post-Termination Inspection

A post-termination inspection will be undertaken on all empty properties within two days after the tenant leaves in line with the procedures

Letting an Empty Property

The Council aims to ensure that allocations are made giving full consideration of the customer needs, the property and any issues in the local area, in accordance with the Allocations Policy.

Works to Empty Properties

All properties will meet the lettable standard, as shown in Appendix 2. Prior to any works being undertaken the Council will ensure that there is an appropriate asbestos survey for the property.

Tenants/prospective tenants will only be given accompanied viewings at the property during the works process if it is safe to do so and in accordance with health and safety requirements.

At the point of agreeing the lettable standard works required, planned programme and adaptation works will be considered and a decision made to undertake these at that point or in line with the investment plan programme.

Decoration will be undertaken to all independent living scheme empty homes, properties which are heavily adapted (in those parts of the property affected) and to other homes where this is requested or necessary (such as a property being let to a vulnerable person or where its current decorative state is poor) to assist in effective letting. For all other properties, decoration packs will be offered to all incoming tenant which enables the work to be completed by the tenant without a financial cost for materials to the tenant.

Utilities and Services

All properties will be inspected and be issued with both electrical and gas safety certification in line with regulations. All properties will have a valid Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) in place prior to the letting with a minimum rating of between A to E to mirror the Council's commitment to sustainability and compliance with minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES).

When a property has become empty the Council will cap both the electric and gas supplies in order to reduce any health and safety risks. Wherever possible the supplies

will also be transferred to a preferred supplier in order to reduce any delays in managing the void process. Residents can choose their own supplier thereafter.

Incoming tenants will have a working electric supply at the point of sign up – subject to appropriate levels of payment on pre-payment meters.

The gas supply will not be turned on until the tenant confirms that they have moved into the property, to ensure that any risks of gas build up are minimised. The Council aims to ensure that the gas is uncapped as soon as possible following the request of the resident. When the gas is turned on the tenant will also be provided with the annual Gas Safety Certificate.

The Council will ensure the water supply/system within each property is maintained in accordance with the Legionella and Water Safety Control Management Plan.

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide alarms will be fully tested and installed where required and in line with the current regulations

Empty Property Requiring Routine Works

Where a property becomes vacant and requires minor works to bring it up to the Lettable Standard, this is classed as a routine relet. The property improvements to be undertaken are necessary, timely sustainable and cost effective to enable potential tenants to access properties quickly. Works are classed as day to day repairs including light fitting replacement, replacing broken door furniture, replacing internal doors, rehanging doors, minor electrical and plumbing activities and matters of a similar small scale.

Empty Property Requiring Major Works

Where an empty property requires major works, and therefore a high level of investment is needed to bring it up to an appropriate standard, an options appraisal may be undertaken to assess whether the works should be completed, or if the property should be taken out of use. This process will be undertaken with input from relevant teams including Finance, Tenancy Services, Housing Property Services and Maintenance

Consideration will be given to:

- Level of rent loss if the property is not tenanted and the impact on the Housing Revenue Account
- The level of demand for the property type and area
- The overall cost of the works required

If the assessment finds that the works are financially viable, they will be completed. For properties where the assessment finds that it is not financially viable to undertake the works and there is little demand for the property type and/or area the option appraisal may identify that the property may be disposed of subject to Cabinet Approval.

Adapted Properties

Properties which are adapted when they become empty will be considered in line with the Council's Adaptations Policy with the priority being to ensure best use of the adaptations. In some instances, where a property has major adaptations, the Council may choose to leave the property empty for a longer period until a suitable tenant, who requires the adaptations, can be identified. Decisions to remove major adaptations from properties will be made by Tenancy Services and the Adaptations Teams working together and based on all available information on the demand for the property.

Post Inspection

When all repairs are completed, a post inspection will be carried out, a minimum of ten percent of which will have an audit post inspection in line with procedures. . For all returned and completed properties, the property will be returned for letting in a clean and lettable condition with a handover certificate confirming the property meets the Lettable Standard and with the relevant keys and relevant documentation to include in the welcome pack.

7.0 Responsibility under this Policy

The roles and responsibilities for key stakeholders across the Council are detailed below. Note - these are the roles and responsibilities in specific relation to the delivery of this policy only

- **Chief Executive** has overall responsibility for ensuring the Council's Housing Stock is safely managed. They will discharge their responsibilities for the delivery of services and Health and Safety Duties to the Deputy Chief Executive, Place and Head of Housing & Corporate Assets however the Chief Executive will retain an oversight on progress/performance.
- **Deputy Chief Executive, Place and Head of Housing & Corporate Assets** will be responsible and accountable for the overall implementation and regular reviews of this policy ensuring its objectives are achieved. They will ensure adherence to the empty property procedure ensuring timely action is taken to bring property back into use. They will ensure that any compliance and/or Health & Safety related issues are brought to the attention of the Council's Cabinet and provide regular updates on service delivery against budget to the Housing Board, and the Chief Executive.
- **Housing Board Members** will review reports and/or performance indicators that provide progress updates to the Council's Cabinet to ensure that CCDC is meeting the requirements of its regulatory obligations and the policy measures.
- **Maintenance Manager** will work closely with the **Tenancy Services Manager** to ensure that regulatory obligations and policy measures are being adhered to and services delivered in line with budget. **Tenancy Services Manager, Maintenance Manager and Housing Property Services Manager** will be responsible for the overall implementation, and regular review, of this policy and ensuring its objectives are achieved. They are also responsible for compliance performance reporting to the Head of Housing and Corporate

Assets. They will manage the team members responsible for the day-to-day operational delivery of the empty property service and process to ensure the policy is delivered.

- **Tenancy Service Team and Maintenance Inspectors**, as appropriate, working together will be responsible for the day-to-day operational delivery of the empty property service and process. They will effectively manage the performance of the service including in house operatives and external delivery contractors, proactively monitoring service delivery against targets. They will ensure all works and certification are received and verified to ensure the predetermined requirements and the lettable standard is achieved.

8.0 Risk Management

The Council will reduce risk of non-compliance with the requirements of the Social Housing Act 2023 and the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards April 2024 by delivering the framework and actions set out in this policy including;

- Actions required by the Regulator of Social Housing in line with requirements set out under the Social Housing Act 2023, including the Consumer Standards
- Impact on the overall value of the housing stock and financial viability of the Housing Revenue Account by maintaining properties to a good standard
- Increasing confidence held by all stakeholders in the Council by working with tenants increasing trust and reputation for delivering quality homes and services
- Maintenance of income and expenditure within agreed budget levels while achieving on investment opportunities and promises in new and existing homes.

9.0 Performance and Management of this Policy

The KPI report specifically includes progress on the management and delivery of the empty property management process and monthly report are provide to the Head of Housing & Corporate Assets to be presented to Housing Board for scrutiny.

The reports will include (but not limited to);

- Resident satisfaction - Lettings Service, including property condition
- Number of Voids in the period
- Average time taken to relet properties (by type)
- Average Rent Loss

10.0 Approval

Strategic Lead: Nirmal Samrai, Head of Housing and Corporate Assets

Sign/Date



01/11/2024 (Prior to Leadership Team approval on 05/11/2024)

11.0 Contact

To find out more about this policy please contact:

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E-Mail: hps@cannockchasedc.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix- 1 Definitions

Decent Homes Standard - a standard set nationally which states that a Decent Home is one which meets all statutory requirements in relation to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, is in a reasonable state of repair, has reasonably modern facilities and provides reasonable thermal comfort.

Major Adaptations - refer to changes to the property or equipment provided in order to assist a disabled person to live more independently.

Empty Properties are defined as "houses for which there is a current rent account, but for which no current tenancy exists, thereby incurring a rent loss." This broad definition applies to all empty property, whether the houses are empty for one day or any other longer time period.

Major Works – a major void is one which requires capital investment/works to meet the lettable standard. Planned Improvement Works - include the replacement or renewal of building elements or components due to them reaching the end of their life, for example windows, kitchens and bathrooms.

Post-termination – refers to the period immediately after the tenant has left the property.

Pre-termination – refers to the period after the tenants has given notice to leave but has not yet left the property.

Recharges – is the cost of repairing or putting right damage or neglect to properties. The costs are charged to the tenant and reclaimed.

Tenant Improvements – is the term used for works carried out on the property by the tenant (usually with permission from the council).

Value for Money – is the overall value based on cost, efficiency and effectiveness.

Empty Property Management – is the process of bringing an untenanted property up to standard to enable a new tenant to move in.

The Letting Standard



Policy Statement

Cannock Chase Council will carry out necessary repairs to empty properties to a standard which ensures they are fit for immediate occupation. All properties will be left in a safe, clean and tidy condition. Some work can be carried out with the minimum inconvenience to the new tenant and that work will be completed after occupation.

Aims

This lettings standard aims to ensure that all properties are offered to prospective tenants in a condition which allows immediate occupation whilst also ensuring that the property remains empty for the shortest time possible reducing rent loss.

Decent Homes Standard

The Council aims to complete as many repairs as possible to its properties through a system of programmed maintenance, however, some planned works may be carried out during the empty property period and although this may prolong the turnaround time of a property, it will greatly reduce the inconvenience for the incoming tenant in the longer term.



Internal Works



- ✓ The property will be cleared of household rubbish from the garden area, outbuildings, garages, loft space and all rooms within the dwelling, including white goods. * if excessive rubbish is left at the property, the outgoing tenant will be charged for its removal.
- ✓ The property will be swept clear of repair debris and all surfaces will be disinfected with particular attention to kitchens and bathrooms.
- ✓ The property will be free from damp and mould, and causes of damp and/or mould will be investigated and appropriate remedial work undertaken before the incoming tenant moves in.
- ✓ The property will be free from all insect and rodent pests which could constitute a threat to health.
- ✓ Timber flooring will be secure and free from tripping hazards, treads and nosings to staircases will be sound and secure.
- ✓ Existing handrails and balusters will be secure.
- ✓ Concrete kitchen and bathroom floors and concrete stairs will have floor tiles patch repaired or replaced (if fitted).
- ✓ All other concrete floors will be latex finished.
- ✓ As far as is practicable, walls will be ready for decoration, however, not all walls will have wallpaper removed and so inspection of plasterwork will therefore only be carried out if decoration removed.
- ✓ All polystyrene ceiling tiles will be removed and ceilings made good.
- ✓ Air bricks to suspended ground floors will be checked for blockages.

External Works



- ✓ Access pathways leading to and from the front and rear doors will be even and free from trip hazards and all inspection covers will be sound. The Council will not ordinarily carry out works to front or rear gardens.
- ✓ Locks to external doors, including patio doors and outhouses will be changed and window lock keys provided for existing window locks.
- ✓ Window glazing will be free from cracks and breakages: if glazing is replaced it will be kite marked laminated/toughened safety glass (where required) and subject to the condition, glazing will be replaced following occupation.

Electrical Installations



- ✓ Electricity circuits will be tested and inspected, and the installation made satisfactory
- ✓ Two mains wired smoke detectors (one in bungalows and flats) will be in place and tested and a CO alarm will be fitted to each room where a council owned appliance is fitted.

Gas



- ✓ Gas supply will be "spin capped", all fixed appliances tested, and a gas soundness test carried out, including the provision of a gas cooker point.

Heating



- ✓ All properties should have appropriate adequate space heating.

Kitchens



- ✓ Kitchens, space permitting will have a range of units with a minimum storage space (where possible) and will conform to the governments decent homes standard
- ✓ Broken or missing wall tiles will be replaced, and walls be washable/wipeable.
- ✓ Kitchens identified as not having the minimum storage capacity or they meet the Councils criteria for kitchen refurbishment will be included in the existing kitchen replacement program or replaced during the empty property period.

Bathrooms



Bathrooms, space permitting will have the following:

- ✓ Low level w.c.
- ✓ Wash hand basin
- ✓ Bath or shower (bath will be the standard provision for empty properties)
- ✓ New w.c. seat
- ✓ Existing sanitaryware will be free from defects and securely fixed and sealed
- ✓ Broken or missing wall tiles will be replaced
- ✓ Bathrooms meeting the Councils criteria for bathroom refurbishment will be included in the existing bathroom replacement program, or depending on its condition, replace during the empty property period.

Nonstandard structures, installations or appliances



- Nonstandard structures, installations or appliances will be removed if in an unsafe or unsuitable condition, this includes vehicle hard standings. Those found to be in a satisfactory condition may be gifted to the incoming tenant in agreement with them and they will be advised that they take on full ownership. (Note: Electrical/gas items will be tested to ensure they comply with current statutory regulations).
- Existing TV aerials, aerial sockets or telephone sockets will be left in the property, but they are not installed or maintained by the Council.

Decoration



Each empty property will be assessed by a Housing Maintenance Officer and a schedule of works will be drawn up for any repairs required. Where a property does not require redecoration, a decoration pack will be allocated to the incoming tenant that will allow sufficient materials and accessories to decorate all rooms.

Properties will only be decorated by the Council where the Housing Maintenance and/or Tenancy Services Manager are satisfied that:

- The incoming tenant is unable to carry out the work themselves due to age or disability.
- The property is in such a condition that it would be unreasonable for a prospective tenant to occupy the property until decoration works have been carried out.
- The decoration of the property will aid a quicker relet.
- Properties in our Independent Living Schemes will be decorated.

Maintenance of your new home (relet pack)



A relet pack will be provided to the new tenant including as a minimum:

- ✓ Two sets of keys for each entry/exit door
- ✓ Window lock keys (if the property has existing window locks)
- ✓ Void gas inspection sheet
- ✓ NICEIC periodic inspection certificate
- ✓ Energy Performance Certificate
- ✓ Asbestos location register (subject to survey)
- ✓ Repairs Handbook

This image will
be replaced with
a better quality
version



WARNING

Excessive use of steam strippers can lead to severe damage to plaster wall and ceiling finishes.

Where damage is suspected as a result of inappropriate use of steam strippers a tenant may be liable for recharge.




For further information please contact the
Housing Repairs Team on **01543 462621**



Keep in touch...

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