



Uttlesford District Council

Housing

Empty Homes Management Policy

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Empty home (Empty Homes) Management Policy

1.0 POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 This policy covers the management of the empty home process from receiving notification of the existing tenancy ending, to the re-letting of the property to a new tenant.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 The following definitions are used in the empty home management policy.
- **Empty home** - An empty property caused by the ending of a tenancy.
 - **Minor Work Empty homes** - Properties that require minor works only, with some being carried out whilst a tenant is in occupation.
 - **Major works** - Requires significant works to meet the Decent Homes Standard
 - **Capital Works empty homes** - Properties requiring re-configuration, significant works, and/ or are unsuitable to let or held vacant for decant and/or regeneration/refurbishment projects.
 - **Ready to let** - Property that is ready to be re-let with few if any repairs.
 - **Lettable standard** - Outlines the standards that prospective tenants can expect in their new home.
 - **Decent Homes Standard** - Empty home works will be carried out in accordance with the Decent Homes Standards. A revised Decent Homes Standard is imminent.

3.0 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure that empty properties are re-let as quickly as possible and in accordance with our Lettable Standard for the benefit of incoming tenants and so that rent income is maximised.

4.0 AIMS OF POLICY

- 4.1 Manage empty home properties to ensure an efficient and customer focused service, as set out within UDC's lettable standard.
- 4.2 Minimising empty home rent loss and maximising rental income by achieving target turnaround times.
- 4.3 To ensure that the empty property is safe and in a good condition when let.
- 4.4 Comply with statutory requirements when letting the property.
- 4.5 Striking a right balance between speedy turnaround of empty properties and ensuring that they are of a standard that is acceptable to new tenants.
- 4.6 Seeking to minimise the number of empty properties, the time that properties stand empty and the resulting rent loss.

- 4.7 Applying the agreed lettable standard as guidance to achieve a consistent level of work across all empty properties. This sets the standard which new tenants can expect when moving in.
- 4.8 Demonstrate a strategic approach to letting properties that are deemed “**hard to let**”.
- 4.9 To continually improve the service by monitoring the performance in empty home turnaround time and tenant satisfaction with their new home.

5.0 Effective Working Practices

- 5.1 Empty home management involves tenants, the housing/maintenance team and the Council’s repairs contractor. The council will seek to achieve clear and effective communication and joint working between all parties involved in the process, to deliver the best possible service. For example, the council will:
 - establish a lettable standard for empty properties, so that an appropriate balance is struck between minimising expenditure and establishing reasonable standards for customers.
 - involve customers in setting standards (e.g. by discussing with them policy matters such as the lettable standard and the number of offers of rehousing which applicants may receive)
 - pre-allocate properties before they become empty, wherever possible
 - set targets for each aspect of dealing with empty properties and monitor its performance in achieving these.
 - compare its performance with that of other local authorities (benchmark)
 - aim to achieve continuous improvement in its performance and in the standard of service offered to customers.
- 5.2 The council will adopt practices that achieve the appropriate balance between speed of turnaround, cost and satisfaction and these will be under constant review.

6.0 Tenancy Termination

- 6.1 All tenants are required to give four weeks written notice to vacate their property. Where residents are transferring internally the agreed notice period is varied.
- 6.2 When a valid notice is received, all outgoing tenants will be advised of their rights and responsibilities in relation to ending the tenancy. Where possible, officers will also arrange a pre-vacation inspection of the property together with a Repairs Surveyor prior to the tenancy ending to:
 - Agree any improvements (made by the tenant) which are eligible for compensation.
 - Identify any rechargeable repairs.
 - Identify and notify the repairs team of expected volumes of work to assist with forecasting and capacity planning.
 - Identify any factors which should be considered as part of offering the property

for re-let, such as special adaptations.

- Identify repairs that the tenant may be able to carry out before they leave, for example, redecoration, clearing gardens.

- 6.3 Tenants are encouraged to leave the property, garage and garden areas in a clean and tidy condition, allow minor repairs to be carried out and return keys on or before the notice expiry date. The outgoing tenant will be responsible for the full costs for clearing out the property or other rechargeable repairs if applicable.
- 6.4 Where a tenant hands in the keys prior to the termination of the Notice to Quit, the council will accept this as surrender by mutual agreement. Empty home property procedures will be implemented immediately on receipt of the keys to enable the property to be re-let as soon as possible.
- 6.5 Where the keys are not returned, the cost of gaining access to change locks will be recharged to the outgoing tenant. The tenancy end date will be extended as required.

7.0 Empty home Security

- 7.1 The council will take reasonable steps to ensure that all empty home properties are both safe and secure at all times using a risk management approach to determine the appropriate level of security. The overall aim will be to introduce minimal and non-intrusive security on its empty home properties.
- 7.2 Where a property is likely to be empty home for a lengthy period and/or is considered to be in a vulnerable condition, security measures such as steel sheeting to windows and doors will be used.
- 7.3 Additional precautions may be taken during the winter months such as e.g. regular inspections, draining down of pipes and heating systems or maintaining heating at frost settings, as appropriate.

8.0 Tenancy Sustainment

- 8.1 We will seek to minimise abandonments through our tenancy sustainment processes procedures, by supporting tenants with financial inclusion advice, by the installation of adaptations so that tenants with particular needs can remain in their home, and by signposting tenants to the relevant resources for the provision of housing support.
- 8.2 The council will be mindful of households likely to abandon their property, particularly those with rent arrears, those facing legal action, first-time tenants, and vulnerable people.
- 8.3 Whenever possible, we will offer financial advice and other support to tenants who are at risk in order to reduce the likelihood that a property will be abandoned.

9.0 Abandonment

- 9.1 Where it is suspected that a property has been abandoned, the following process will be followed.
- 9.2 Abandonment checks carried out may include:
- Speaking with neighbours.
Getting in touch with any contacts/or next of kin
 - Liaising with relevant departments regarding rent, housing benefits, and council tax payments.
 - Check whether the property has furniture
 - Checks made with housing benefit and local utilities companies
 - Checks with the police, local hospitals and social work departments, as well as with neighbours and employers (where appropriate)
- 9.3 If it is established that a property has been abandoned a notice will be served on the tenant of the council's intention to recover the property. If the property remains abandoned at the end of this notice period following all checks, the Council is then entitled to take possession of the house without further proceedings.
- 9.4 Two members of staff should be in attendance when property is recovered, with both compiling a written inventory of goods remaining in the property which will be stored for 3 months. Copies of all relevant papers will be stored electronically in the tenant/s' file.
- 9.5 Where a forced entry is required the Council will request police attendance.

10.0 Pre-Inspections

- 10.1 All empty home dwellings should be pre-inspected to identify any repairs or renewals required.
- 10.2 Work in progress inspections should be carried out throughout the duration of works and documented. A post inspection should be carried out by a supervisor to ensure works have been completed to a quality standard within 1 working day of completion.

11.0 Empty home Categories and Empty home Repairs

- 11.1 The council will identify and complete all necessary repairs to enable a property to be re-let as soon as possible. All repairs will be completed to the council's lettable standard, whilst ensuring empty home costs are kept to a minimum.
- 11.2 Throughout the empty home repair process, repairs surveyors will take a proactive approach in ensuring that colleagues dealing with the letting of the property are kept closely informed of progress with repair works, and the anticipated date of the property being available for occupation.
- 11.3 They will also advise whether properties which are undergoing empty home repair works can be viewed by the prospective new tenant, before repair works have

been completed. Health and safety factors are paramount in assessing whether properties can safely be viewed by prospective tenants during the empty home repair period.

- 11.4 All properties will be issued with electrical, gas safety certificates and EPC certificates in compliance with legal requirements.
- 11.5 Empty home Repairs will be classified into two categories:
 - Essential repairs that must be completed while the property is empty (including safety checks); and/or
 - Non-essential or minor repairs that can be completed once the new tenant has moved into the property.
- 11.6 The condition of the properties major components will be surveyed to ensure that the planned life cycles are in line with the needs of the property.
- 11.7 The Council will use the empty home period to bring forward any work that may cause major disruption to the incoming tenant or may be difficult to undertake once the property is occupied, such as major or programmed improvement works.
- 11.8 All empty home work will be undertaken by the council's own work force or appointed contractors and post inspected to ensure work is completed to a satisfactory standard in relation to time and quality.
- 11.9 We will endeavour to provide the scope of works to be carried out in our empty homes both to the housing officer and residents who have been offered and accept the property.

12.0 Managing Adapted Empty homes

- 12.1 In accordance with the council's Disabled Adaptations Policy when a property has been adapted for a disabled person the adaptations will remain in place and the adaptations will not be reversed. The council will not routinely remove adaptations therefore from empty properties to allow for future use.
- 12.2 The council will aim to re-let adapted properties to applicants with disabilities, and/or recycle any adaptations that are removed from a property.

13.0 Sustainability and Environmental Considerations

- 13.1 The council will provide a valid Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) on all empty homes; a copy of the certification will be issued to the prospective tenant that will enable them to understand the energy performance of their home.
- 13.2 All new homes should achieve an energy performance rating of Band C. Where a home does not meet this rating, an appraisal will be undertaken.
- 13.3 Any empty homes that require major component replacement are checked against the council's planned works programme at the survey stage. This ensures a more effective decision making process as to whether to complete component

updates ahead of the schedule whilst the home is empty. With the aim of minimising both the impact on the future tenant and the council's cost.

14.0 Damp

- 14.1 The dwelling should be free of damp and mould. It will be inspected for damp (both internally and externally) and any damp that is detected should be addressed as part of empty home works. Any signs of damp and mould will be cured, and plasterwork treated or renewed prior to re-letting.

15.0 Targets for Empty home Repairs and Relets

- 15.1 To ensure that empty home management practices are as efficient as possible the council will work to target timescales in managing empty home properties which will be recorded on the empty home path of the housing system and/or the empty homes spreadsheet.

15.2 The targets for different categories of voids are as follows

- Standard Voids – 5 days
- Major Works Voids - 20 days

16.0 New Tenancies

- 16.1 The Council aims to create sustainable tenancies and achieve a high level of customer satisfaction.
- 16.2 Prospective tenants will be selected in accordance with the Council's Allocations Policy. They will receive a provisional offer of housing, subject to tenancy references and/or conducting a home visit to verify the information in their housing application. We will provide a copy of the lettable standard with your offer letter.
- 16.3 They will need to advise the council within 7 days whether they intend to accept this offer. The acceptance will be subject to them being able to view the property before making their final decision. At the viewing, the prospective new tenant will then need to advise the council whether they do accept the offer.
- 16.4 When a prospective tenant has indicated their acceptance of a vacant property, the tenancy will commence as soon as possible after all essential repairs are completed.
- 16.5 All tenancies start on a Monday currently. The plan is to move towards tenancies starting on any day of the week.
- 16.6 The sign-up process and visit can have a significant impact on the sustainability of tenancies. The Council will have supporting procedures to ensure effective measures are in place.
- 16.7 All new tenants will be given the opportunity to feed back their satisfaction with the empty home management process and standard of the property when let. This will normally be during a new tenant visit from their housing officer within the first six

weeks of their tenancy starting.

- 16.8 Where a property is '**hard to let**' and has been refused on numerous occasions, the Council can take the following action to improve its prospects of being let:
- Carry out improvements to the property such as redecorations or in some circumstances upgrade the kitchen.
 - Let to a lower priority case or consider a direct let to a locally based tenant.

17.0 Performance Monitoring

- 17.1 Weekly internal monitoring meetings will be held to check the progress of all empty home properties against the Performance Indicator target times for the re-letting of properties (number of days from tenancy termination to new tenancy start date).
- 17.2 These meetings will identify reasons behind delays in re-letting, including tenant refusals, and seek to identify solutions.
- 17.3 Targets have been set for the re-letting of properties in the following categories. These take account of both the scale / extent of works as well as factors relating to lettings:
- Empty homes not requiring major works
 - Empty homes requiring major works
 - Empty homes that are Sheltered/elderly properties
- 17.4 Systems will be in place to monitor progress against agreed targets and reported via the Housing Board on an quarterly basis.

18.0 Monitoring and Targets

- 18.1 The council will monitor this policy by the following KPI stated within its performance framework.
- Council Housing: Average re-let time in days (all re-lets including time spent in works)
 - Average total re-let time in days - major works units (including time spent in works)
 - Average re-let time in works - major works units
 - Average re-let time in lettings - major works units
 - Average re-let time for all re-lets housing management re-lets
 - % of standard empty homes let within target turnaround time
 - Average total re-let time in days - standard works units (including time spent in works)
 - Average re-let time in works - standard works units
 - Average re-let time in lettings - standard works units

18.2 Broader measures of performance include, tracking the rent loss of an empty home, the total cost of repairs, and the satisfaction and feedback of customers moving into empty properties.

- Empty home rent loss (as a % of annual rent due)
- Empty homes as a % of total stock
- The satisfaction of tenants moving into the property
- Empty home turnaround time against the annual performance target
- Number of refusals and reasons for refusal

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

| Role: | Responsibilities: |
|---|--|
| Strategic Director, Housing, Environment and Communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of the policy |
| Property Services Director | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Retains the overall responsibility for the ▪ implementation of this Policy. |
| Property Services Director, Housing Operations Manager and Head of Housing & Communities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Responsible for the operational delivery of this policy and the associated procedures. This includes responsibility for monitoring and reviewing, staff awareness and training, policy development and communication to tenants. |

KEY CONTACT

- Lead Officer: Simone Russell
- Service Area/Directorate: Housing, Environment & Communities.
Landlord Services
- Lead Member: Councillor Arthur Coote

LINK TO CORPORATE PLAN PRIORITIES

| Corporate Priorities | Yes/No |
|--|--------|
| Putting residents first | Yes |
| Protecting and enhancing our environment | No |

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Building strong communities | Yes |
| Encouraging economic growth | No |

| Document History | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|----------|
| Date | Amendments Made | By Whom | Approval |
| 09/05/2025 | 2 nd Version | A. Alexander | |
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CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Update Overview

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years or if there are any major changes in legislation that may impact on this policy.

Legislative Context

Localism Act 2011
 Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
 Construction Design and Management Regulations (CDM 2015)
 Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 GSIUR as amended 2018.
 Approved Code of Practice and guidance.
 British Standard 7671 As Amended (Electrical Installations)
 Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR.
 The Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
 The Housing Act 2004
 Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
 Regulator for Social Housing: Consumer Standards
 Regulator for Social Housing: Decent Homes Standards (under review)
 Housing Health and Safety Rating System 2006
 Equalities Act 2010
 The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012

Local Government Context

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 introduced new Consumer Standards that all social housing landlords are required to meet. The Safety and Quality Standard consumer standards April 2024 state that registered providers must provide an effective, efficient and timely repairs, maintenance and planned improvements service for the homes and communal areas for which they are responsible.

The provision of good quality council housing is one of the Council's key priorities. The effective turnaround of empty home properties through a fit for purpose empty homes service is an essential part of maintaining and improving housing supply. Maximising rental income and reducing maintenance costs are essential in achieving these objectives.

UDC Policy History

This Empty home Management Policy replaces the earlier Void Management policy of 2017.

Policy Scope: Resident and/or Internal

This policy provides guidance to residents on how the Council will provide a day to day repairs and maintenance service.

Related Policies & Corporate Governance Matters

Vulnerable Persons Policy
Reasonable Adjustments Promise
Repairs & Maintenance Policy
Dampness & Mould Policy
Disrepair Policy
Recharges Policy
Allocations Policy
Corporate Complaints Policy

POLICY MONITORING

The policy will be monitored by the Strategic Director, Housing, Environment and Communities

The policy should be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that compliance is achieved.

COMPLAINT, CHANGE & MODIFICATION

Complaint

Complaints made in relation to this policy, or its application shall follow the Council's corporate complaint policy

Modification

Minor changes will be signed off by the appropriate service Director following CMT approval.

Substantial changes will be referred to the CMT for approval.

The decision on what changes will constitute minor or substantial change will be determined by CMT.

Change

The Strategic Director, Housing, Environment and Communities shall be responsible for reviewing /updating the policy in accordance with changes to best practice, statutory guidance and legislation.

Substantial changes made shall be presented to CMT for formal approval.

Reference Section.

APPENDIX A – Equality Impact Assessment

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