



Empty homes standard

1. Purpose and scope

We are committed to ensuring that all our homes are occupied and that periods of non-occupation between tenancies are kept to a minimum. We are also committed to providing quality homes to an agreed standard.

The purpose of this policy is to set out our approach to managing empty homes, including the processes that are to be followed to minimise the time between the end of one tenancy and the start of the next, and the standard that is to be achieved when a home is re-let.

2. Underpinning principles

Selwood benefits

- Minimising rent loss by re-letting homes in the shortest possible time.
- Ensuring that an agreed and well-defined standard is in place that helps to manage costs and delivers homes of an acceptable quality.
- Ensuring that new customers receive a favourable first impression of us.
- Ensuring that robust contractual arrangements are in place so that contractors fulfil their contractual obligations and assist us in meeting agreed targets.
- Enables a coordinated approach to be taken to managing empty homes across the organisation, and that information provided to customers and prospective customers is consistent and useful.

Customer benefits

- Ensures that re-let times are as short as possible and that homes can be re-let quickly.
- Ensures that a well-defined standard is in place so that customers know what to expect from one of our homes.
- Ensures that customers are aware of their obligations to leave their home in a good condition, as required by their tenancy agreement, and that help and advice is available to help them achieve this.



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Environmental benefits

- A well-defined and consistent re-let standard will allow us to return homes to a lettable standard efficiently and create scope for the use of materials and components that reduce environmental impact.
- Dealing with former customers fittings, fixtures and alterations in a pragmatic way will reduce unnecessary waste, as will the recycling and re-use of unwanted furniture and belongings.

3. Policy details

Underpinning principles

The underpinning principles of this policy are:

- To ensure that empty homes are re-let as quickly as possible, thus minimising rent loss, which the board have decided is the key performance indicator for empty homes.
- To ensure that a re-let standard is in place for empty homes and that this standard is delivered consistently.
- To ensure that components will be replaced only if they have exceeded their lifespan and are in poor condition, is implemented in respect of empty homes.
- To ensure that the minimum amount of work necessary is undertaken to empty homes to deliver the re-let standard.
- To ensure that information on our re-let standard is clearly communicated to customers and prospective customers.
- To respond to the needs of elderly and vulnerable customers who require greater assistance to settle into and live in our homes.
- To ensure that former customers are charged when they do not leave their homes in an acceptable condition in accordance with their tenancy agreements.
- To ensure that suitable and sufficient information, help and advice is given to customers who are leaving their homes, to minimise the risk of being charged.



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Responsibilities

The board:

- Will ensure that appropriate policies are approved for us to achieve compliance with the law, best practice guidelines and corporate targets.
- Will ensure that suitable and sufficient resources are provided to permit full and effective implementation of our policies relating to empty homes.

The executive team:

- Will be responsible for ensuring that appropriate policies are in place and applied.
- Will provide leadership in ensuring that empty homes are managed effectively and that suitable contractual arrangements for the delivery of works to empty homes are procured and in place.
- Will ensure that appropriate resources are made available to manage empty homes effectively and to achieve corporate targets, and that such resources are appropriately trained.
- Will monitor the implementation of this policy and that performance targets are being achieved.

The head of housing, response repairs and customer support:

- Will ensure that this policy, together with any associated procedures, is effectively implemented.
- Will ensure that appropriate monitoring arrangements are in place and that corrective action is taken to address any reductions in performance.
- Will ensure that performance is effectively analysed and that opportunities to improve both service and performance are implemented.
- Will closely manage capital expenditure in respect of empty homes to ensure that components are only replaced when necessary.

The contract manager for responsive and voids:



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- Will ensure that empty homes are managed effectively and efficiently by the team.
- Will ensure communication with other teams is timely and effective.
- Will monitor performance and ensure that targets are achieved.
- Will ensure that all statutory and regulatory requirements are complied with.
- Will foster and support a culture of continuous improvement within the team.

Policy implementation

We will ensure that the period between a customer giving notice to end their tenancy and the end date of their tenancy is used effectively, to include:

- Providing information relating to the termination of the tenancy and the customer's obligations in respect of the condition of their home.
- Offering outgoing customers a pre-void inspection so that a voids supervisor can gain an early indication of the condition of their home and provide advice on the avoidance of charges.
- Ensuring that early information is passed to colleagues so that they can prepare to undertake works to empty homes.

We will ensure that works to empty homes are undertaken efficiently and effectively, having regard to the following:

- The relet standard for empty homes.
- Any particular requirements of the incoming customer that need to be catered for, e.g. redecoration for elderly or vulnerable customers.
- The principle that former customer's fittings, fixtures and alterations can remain in the property, provided that they are in good repair and do not represent a health and safety risk. This principle will also apply to such items that are located outside of the property in garden areas.
- That certain works can be carried out after the new customer has moved in. These works might include the replacement of a major component, such as a kitchen, or minor repair works, the non-



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completion of which will not have a detrimental impact upon the customer.

We will ensure that the following actions take place once the new customer moves in:

- If any follow-on works are due to take place then the customer will be given full information on these and when they can expect the works to be completed.
- The customer will be promptly issued with decoration vouchers if the void supervisor has decided that vouchers are due.
- We will promptly identify any chargeable items that the former customer is liable for, and make sure that they are notified of these.
- We will ensure that the performance data from the completed property is aggregated with our year-to-date performance data.
- We will ensure that our housing management system is updated to reflect any new components that were provided in the property.

Former customer's fittings, fixtures and alterations

This policy recognises the fact that many new customers might benefit from, and welcome certain items being left in the property. These might include fittings and fixtures that were left by the former customer, such as carpets and shelves, or alterations that have been made, e.g. the provision of new internal doors.

We will leave all such items in a property, provided that the following criteria are satisfied:

- The item is in a good state of repair and does not compromise the general usability of the home.
- The item does not represent a health and safety hazard.

Any fittings, fixtures and alterations left for the new customer will be gifted to them, which will mean that they take on full responsibility for their repair and eventual replacement. This would also extend to liability for the item at the end of their tenancy, if it is decided that the item must be removed at this time (e.g. on health and safety grounds). A record of



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the items that the new customer has accepted responsibility for will be kept on their tenancy file.

The only exception to the above requirement would be where a component in the property has missed a replacement cycle due to their being a component provided by the customer in situ.

Customer feedback

We recognise the importance of feedback and all new customers will be contacted and asked to provide feedback on the quality of their Selwood home.

Chargeable works

We believe that it is vital that customers who are leaving their homes return them to us in a good condition, having fully complied with the terms of their tenancy agreement. If homes are returned to us in a poor condition then the cost of returning them to the re-let standard will be greater, and they will be empty for longer, resulting in increased rent loss.

Customers will have the right to appeal a charge. The contract manager will manage appeals, which may be delegated to other staff to deal with if appropriate.

Performance monitoring

It is vital that our performance on empty homes is closely monitored to ensure that agreed performance targets are achieved. Effective use of performance data will allow adverse trends to be spotted early and appropriate corrective action taken and will also play a key role in the management of contractors working on empty homes.

The following are the key indicators that will be monitored:

- Rent loss
- Re-let time



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- Average cost
- Customer satisfaction with new home

Targets for the above indicators will be set each year and will be reported on monthly and on a quarterly basis to group audit and risk committee. We may choose to measure other performance indicators from time to time to assist with the overall management and performance improvement of re-letting empty homes.

Record keeping

It is important that full information on empty homes is retained in a readily accessible format. This will assist with the management of the property in terms of both maintenance and improvement and tenancy management and will also assist with the recovery of chargeable items. Records will be held on the housing management system as far as is reasonably practicable and should include the following:

- Information relating to the termination of the tenancy.
- Copy of the pre-void survey form and any information given to the customer in respect of chargeable items.
- Copies of any orders raised for void works, including any agreed variations.
- Financial data, including value of works as raised and final value.
- Performance data, including rent loss, re-let time and cost.
- Photographs of property prior to void works commencing and once voids works are complete (prior to re-letting).
- Details of any chargeable items that the former customer is liable for to include all correspondence, void charge notices, details of appeals and details of any payment arrangements agreed.
- Satisfaction data from new customers.

Sustainability

It is important that we manage empty properties in such a way that the impact of the works on the environment is minimised, and that



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opportunities are taken where appropriate to reduce the environmental impact of our homes. To this end, we will take account of the following:

- Materials and components used for works on empty homes will be selected having regard to their environmental impact but having regard to their cost in the context of financial targets for empty homes.
- Former customers fittings, fixtures and components will be left in the property if they are in good condition and do not represent a health and safety hazard.
- Only the works necessary to comply with the re-let standard and to address the particular needs of elderly and vulnerable customers will be undertaken.
- We will always strive to remove former customers' furniture, fittings and fixtures that are not being left in the property, and reuse or recycle them wherever possible.
- We will consider if we can improve the performance of a property whilst empty, by the introduction of energy saving measures such as increased insulation or renewable technologies.
- We will ensure that all empty homes exceed the corporate target for minimum SAP rating before a home can be let.

4. Signposting

- Lettings policy
- Tenure policy
- Tenancy agreements
- Compliment and complaint policy
- Fencing and boundary management policy
- Environmental policy
- Recharge recovery procedure
- Defective Premises Act 1972
- Health & Safety at Work Act 1974
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995



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Appendix 1: Standard for repair and decoration of empty homes

Location	Key standard	During void	After void
General	Clean property throughout	The cost of excessive cleaning should be recharged to former customer.	
General	Does the property have adequate heating and is it is full working order?	Are radiators fixed securely? Any sign of leaks? In accordance with the Decent Homes Standard properties with non-programmable solid fuel heating should be upgraded and replaced with gas heating, where there is a gas supply in the property, or electric heating otherwise. Otherwise the existing type of heating will be retained and repaired, upgraded or replaced as required. Properties with partial heating systems should be upgraded to full heating. System to be checked for satisfactory operation. Chimney flues to be	Installation of new heating may be ordered via the planned team at the point of void works but may be carried out post letting with the customer being advised of the scheduled work.



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		checked. Chimney to be swept if required.	
General	Habitable rooms should have openable, secure window areas	Windows to be checked to ensure ease of opening and can be securely closed.	
General	Effective remedial measures should be incorporated to eradicate dampness and serious condensation	Any mould to be cleaned and treated. Are appropriate levels of ventilation and insulation provided? Check that trickle vents work properly where provided and that air bricks have not been blocked up. Check extractor fans operate correctly. Remedy any defects	
General	Electrical installations to be certified as safe by qualified inspectors	An electrical safety check and rectification of electrical defects is to be carried out and certificate issued by the contractor. An appropriately located and working shower will be tested to current safety standards, and a new shower head fixed. If customer installed showers fail the test they should be removed. Notify cyclical team and supply safety check record.	



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General	Gas installations to be certified as safe by qualified inspectors	A gas safety inspection and rectification of any defects is to be carried out by the contractor and certificate issued. A copy of the LSGR is to be available prior to the sign-up.	
General	Assessment to be made of asbestos	This should be referred to the compliance team for advice if detected	
General	Lighting (natural and artificial) should be adequate for safety	Check standard and remedy as required	
General	Staircases should be well lit with secure balustrades, handrails and treads.	Check standard and remedy as required	
General	Floors should be generally level and suitable to receive floor covering	Gaps in floors require attention if over 10mm. Loose board should be fixed. Floors should be free of protruding nails, old underlay, and remnants of previous floor covering. Check that solid floors are smooth and even. Any damaged floor tiles should be removed.	



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		<p>Any gripper rods in good condition should be left in situ. Customers are to be informed by the lettings team that these are remaining.</p> <p>Carpets only to be left if in good condition and by agreement. Incoming customer to be advised that they will be responsible for items left.</p> <p>Laminate flooring above ground floor is to be removed at void.</p>	
General	Safety glazing should be provided for glass below 800mm, installed in glazed windows, doors and side screens	Check standard and remedy as required	
General	Window restrictors will be fitted to all windows above ground floor. If restrictors are needed on the ground floor to meet the customers needs, then these will be fitted on request prior to moving in.	Check standard and remedy as required	



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General	Loft space should be checked and empty	The loft space should be clear of items store by the former customer, if not recharge. The inspector should ensure the tanks and pipes are lagged and that there is no water ingress evident. Check for non-plastic roof tanks and notify cyclical team.	If there is less than 200mm depth of loft insulation then this should be referred to the planned programme
General	Exterior doors to individual dwellings should be are lockable with suitable frame fixing	External doors should each have two keys. The cost of replacing lost keys to be recharged to previous customer. Doors to be checked for ease of opening and shutting. Excessive gaps may require a draft strip to be fitted. Are handles broken or loose? If so replace / repair	
Kitchen	<p>Kitchen should provide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Food preparation area• Serviced sink• Easily cleaned worktops• Space for a fridge• Space and connections for cooker (gas and/or electric) <p>At least two double sockets in addition to cooker point</p>	<p>Kitchen units should be repaired if required wherever possible.</p> <p>Minimum: 1000 x 600 sink base, 900 x 600 floor base unit, 1000 x 300 wall units. Larder will be deemed sufficient in lieu of either the wall unit or floor unit. Repair floor coverings if required.</p> <p>Replace only if beyond patching.</p> <p>Consider recharge if floor requires</p>	<p>Additional units should not be installed as this will be dealt with in the improvement programme.</p>



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		replacement and damage not due to fair wear and tear. Repair and renew damaged glazed tiling and mastic. Check and supply fittings for washing machine if necessary	
General	<p>Decorations – Our Tenancy Agreements state that customers are responsible for keeping the inside of their homes in good decorative order. Nevertheless it is important that new customers are given the opportunity to make a good start to their tenancies and in some cases this may mean that a certain amount of redecoration is necessary.</p> <p>Generally speaking we do not undertake the redecoration of void properties but where redecoration is required, we normally pay allowances to the incoming customer to assist them to</p>	<p>Decoration will be deemed as required if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walls are not a neutral colour • Walls decorated to a poor standard • Woodwork needs decorating • Radiators have been painted • Wallpaper is ripped, damaged or stained <p>Issuing decoration vouchers is the standard offer. This will be at an allowance of £50 per room, £70 for halls, stairs and landing.</p> <p>Ripped and torn wallpaper will be removed from that wall only; only this wall will be painted. Walls</p>	



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	<p>purchase decorating materials</p>	<p>where wallpaper is not ripped will not be stripped.</p> <p>Exceptions to this standard will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAT 2 homes where properties will be decorated unless already at a good standard <p>Where customer has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility issues • Disability • Care plan • Other identified vulnerability <p>Lettings coordinator to flag identifies vulnerabilities when identified.</p>	
<p>Bathroom</p>	<p>Bathroom should provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serviced hand wash basin • WC (or separate with additional basin) <p>Bath and / or shower</p>	<p>A safety check of complete hot and cold water, plumbing and waste installation is to be carried out and report from the contractor issued to the supervising officer. Between 31 October and 31 March all properties</p>	



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		should be drained down, where necessary. Sanitary appliances to be cleaned to remove stains. Plug should be provided in both bath and basin. Repair floor coverings if required. Replace only if beyond patching. Consider recharge if floor requires replacement and damage not due to fair wear and tear. Renew toilet seat and repair / renew cistern as required. Repair and renew glazed tiling and mastic, if required	
General	Smoke Detectors	Test detectors (non fire systems only as these are on servicing contracts) and replace battery in battery type detector. Following assessment, if none or replacement required then provide mains operated smoke detector in suitable position. Two smoke detectors should be installed in two storey dwelling – one per floor, both are to be linked	
General	Unwanted Goods should be removed and disposed of appropriately	The former customer should have removed all their own fixtures and fittings. If not the former customer may need to be recharged. Carpets curtains and curtain rails only to be left by the former customer if in	



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		good condition and by agreement. Incoming customer to be advised that they will be responsible for any items left	
Exterior	Wind, rain and water	The property and the grounds are to be checked for general safety, security and resistance to water/moisture ingress by the inspector and work raised if required	The inspector should note any non-urgent external repairs and raise these to the response contractor separately to the void works
	Garden – clear of rubbish	The outgoing customer should leave the garden and the property in a reasonably tidy condition. Any rubbish left or tidying required would be carried out but will need to be recharged to the former customer.	
	Gardens – shrubbery, hedges and grass	Hedges in the void garden will be cut back so that that are manageable for the incoming customer. Grass cutting to be carried out if overgrown	
	Trees	Trees in gardens of void properties will only have work carried out on	



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		them if there is either a health and safety or legal obligation.	
	Fencing / boundary markings	<p>Minimum standard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chain-link fence to secure rear garden• Missing fence panels will be replaced <p>Fencing work may be carried over after void period.</p> <p>If there is an identifiable reason why fencing work cannot be carried out after the void period, Lettings coordinator to flag as soon as possible. This will include making rear gardens secure if there are young children.</p>	Non-urgent boundary work will be carried out after main void works have been completed
General			Any work raised that is due to be completed after the customer has moved must be provided to the lettings



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			team (with description and dates)
General	Post-sign up works	<p>Where it is necessary for works to be carried out or completed after the new customer has signed up, the lettings team will be responsible for communicating this to the customer.</p> <p>The lettings team must be made aware of this work prior to viewing.</p>	
General	Void work feedback	<p>Where the incoming customer identifies additional repairs or items that got missed at void stage prior to them moving in then these should be emailed to the void's admin or voids supervisors who will arrange for the work to be carried out and liaise directly with the customer</p> <p><i>Void call back</i> if the customer has moved in and raised the issue so appointments can be arranged for the work to be undertaken.</p>	
General	Post inspections	<p>Contract manger response repairs or the income and lettings manager to undertake a sample of post</p>	



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		inspections each month to ensure the lettings standard is being maintained.	
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