



Date of final approval	10 th May 2023 by CX Committee.
Responsible director	Paul Butterworth Executive Director of Assets
Policy monitoring body	Customer Experience Committee and GLT
Resident input into policy	Great Places Panel. Living Well Panel & Customer Experience Committee
Date for policy review	May 2026
Linked strategies/policies	Gas Maintenance & Safety Management Policy. Electrical Maintenance and Safety Policy. Carbon Reduction strategy. Allocations Policy. Asbestos Policy. Legionella Management Policy. Garden Boundary & Fencing Policy. Fire Safety Management Policy Damp and Mould Policy.
Statutory and Legal Framework	Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. Gas Safety (Installation & Use) Regulations 1998. Control of Substances Hazardous to Health 2002. Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015. Homes Fitness for Human Habitation Act 2018. Building Safety Act 2022
Version/date	Final version May 2023.

WCHG Empty Homes Policy

1. Background

- 1.1. The WCHG Corporate plan includes the Great Place strategic theme that confirms our intention to invest and improve both the communities in which we work and the homes our customers live in. This policy outlines the commitment we have to maximising the energy efficiency of the property portfolio and delivering value for money during the re-let process.
- 1.2. Wythenshawe Community Housing Group will maximise the use of its available stock, by minimising rent loss as a result of empty properties, and prioritising the quick and effective turnaround of empty homes.
- 1.3. We will look to provide customers with high quality, sustainable tenancies ensuring they meet the Government's Decent Homes standard and WCHG's own Empty Homes standard provided below in Appendix A.

2. Scope

- 2.1. This policy applies to all empty homes managed by WCHG.
- 2.2. Void management is the term used to describe the processes associated with the re-letting of empty homes, from when WCHG is made aware that a property is or about to become empty, to when a customer moves in.
- 2.3. A property is classed as empty under the following circumstances:
 - 2.3.1. The previous tenant has given notice and terminated their tenancy.
 - 2.3.2. The previous tenant has transferred to another WCHG property.
 - 2.3.3. The previous tenant has abandoned the property without giving notice or handing in the keys.
 - 2.3.4. The property has been repossessed as a result of an eviction warrant.
 - 2.3.5. The property is a new acquisition that has not yet been allocated to a customer.

3. Empty Home Classification

- 3.1. We will inspect and categorise empty properties as:
 - 3.1.1. Standard Voids – properties requiring basic repairs and maintenance to reach re-lettable standards.
 - 3.1.2. Major Voids – properties requiring major repairs and maintenance to reach re-lettable standard, or need the renewal of at least one major component.
- 3.2. Some empty properties are not available to re-let such as:
 - 3.2.1. Long term voids, where a decision on future investment or demolition has been made.

- 3.2.2. All properties awaiting sale or disposal.
- 3.2.3. Any property that is undergoing improvements as part of our Investment Programme.
- 3.2.4. Properties that are ready to let but are reserved for a specific project or to provide temporary accommodation for decant purposes.
- 3.2.5. An adapted property that may be suitable for a customer awaiting a major adaption.

4. Notice to end tenancy


- 4.1. WCHG expects customers to provide a standard notice period of 4 weeks before they terminate their tenancy. A shorter notice period can be negotiated e.g when an internal transfer is agreed or in exceptional circumstances where the occupants are deemed at risk.
- 4.2. WCHG will acknowledge receipt of notice and advise customers of their rights and responsibilities in relation to ending their tenancy.
- 4.3. We will make an appointment with the customer to inspect the property before the notice period ends, to:
 - 4.3.1. Inspect the condition of the home and check if there are any tenancy breaches.
 - 4.3.2. Discuss the reward scheme and any qualifying criteria.
 - 4.3.3. Identify any rechargeable repairs and discuss options.
 - 4.3.4. Plan the re-let repair and maintenance work.
- 4.4. WCHG expects all customers to leave the property clean and clear of all their belongings including external sheds, gardens and common areas, any exceptions must be mutually agreed prior to the tenancy termination date to avoid possible recharges. In addition, any repairs that are the customers' responsibility, must be carried out and they must return the keys on or before the notice expiry date.
- 4.5. We will accept the early return of keys by a customer as surrender of tenancy by mutual agreement. If keys are received by noon on Monday (except bank holidays), the tenancy will be terminated from the preceding Sunday. If they are returned after noon on Monday the tenancy will be terminated from the following Sunday.
- 4.6. Where WCHG suspects a property has been abandoned, the abandoned tenancy procedure will be followed.
- 4.7. WCHG reserve the right to recharge customers for any costs incurred to clear or clean the property during the re-let process, or to change locks in cases where keys are not returned.
- 4.8. WCHG will ensure that all empty properties have minimal and non-intrusive security in place during the void management process. We will risk assess each case to determine the appropriate level of security.

5. Accompanied viewings and work in empty properties

- 5.1. WCHG will aim to accommodate the preferences of incoming customers at the accompanied viewing of empty properties. These could include:
 - 5.1.1. Determining repairs that will be completed whilst the property is empty, and the work that can be completed once the new tenancy has started;
 - 5.1.2. Understanding the urgency of the incoming customer's rehousing need, and any vulnerability or disability they may have.
 - 5.1.3. Ensuring that the effective use of existing adaptations is assessed.
- 5.2. WCHG may complete scheduled major or programmed improvement works, whilst the property is empty if it is likely to cause major disruption to the incoming customer, or will be difficult to undertake once the property is occupied.
- 5.3. WCHG will work with Manchester City Council Adapted Homes team to identify applicants who's needs will be met by an empty home with an existing adaptation.
- 5.4. Where this is not achievable we will seek to recycle adaptations whenever possible.
- 5.5. WCHG will aim to undertake a stock condition survey of 50% of empty properties to help maintain the quality of our property data.
- 5.6. WCHG will complete works specified within the 'lettable standard' with the aim of achieving an Energy Performance (EPC) rating of band C or above. This aligns with the Groups ongoing commitments as part its Carbon Reduction Strategy and Great Places initiatives.
- 5.7. WCHG will undertake an Asbestos Management Surveys in all properties built prior to 2000 if, one has not been completed within the last 12 months and otherwise as required based on the anticipated scope of works.

6. Re-letting empty properties

- 6.1. WCHG will advertise empty properties including details of the property attributes and local neighbourhood facilities.
- 6.2. The tenancy start date will be when all essential work has been completed and WCHG provides customers with the keys to the empty property.
- 6.3. Customers who complete an internal transfer from our WCHG properties will commence their new tenancy from the Monday following handover of keys.
- 6.4. WCHG may provide new customers with a paint pack voucher, if the decorative condition of the empty property is below the Empty Homes Standard. The value of the voucher will reflect the extent of the decoration required to bring the property to a reasonable standard throughout.

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- 6.5. WCHG may undertake internal decoration to support the individual needs of the customer and this will be considered on an individual basis.
 - 6.6. WCHG may offer incentives to support the re-letting of properties identified as 'difficult to let' such as provision of carpets or decoration.
 - 6.7. WCHG will complete a Money Health Check with customers before the sign-up process to help ensure the tenancy is sustainable.


7. Customer Satisfaction

- 7.1. WCHG will send customers an electronic satisfaction survey shortly after they have moved into their new home and will use the feedback to help make any necessary changes and to help shape the service that WCHG offer.
- 7.2. We will invite the involved customers engaged as Service Inspectors to hold us accountable for achieving the Empty Homes Standard by completing 25% of physical inspections of properties at handover stage or via a telephone survey completed within 28 days of the tenancy start date.
- 7.3. We will report operational performance against this policy to the Customer Experience Committee.

8. Performance Management

- 8.1. WCHG will manage and monitor and report performance on a monthly basis and will share information periodically with customer panels including Great Places and Living Well to help inform understanding of property standards, demand, satisfaction and costs.

9. Equality Diversity and Inclusion

- 9.1. WCHG recognises that colleagues of all races, ages, religions, gender, sexual orientation, literacy levels and disability should be treated equally and fairly. We will make every reasonable effort to ensure that no-one is discriminated against directly or indirectly on the basis of any protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010. We recognise that some protected groups may be disproportionately impacted and will take additional steps in the application of this policy and make reasonable adjustments to ensure compliance with the Act.
 - 9.2. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on this policy.
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10.0 Roles and Responsibilities

There are a number of roles and responsibilities associated with the management of empty homes that are outlined here:

The Customer Experience Committee has the overall responsibility for the final approval of this Policy.

The Senior Contract Manager has management responsibility for the Wythenshawe Works Voids Team.

The Contract Manager is responsible for monitoring the performance achieved against this Policy

The Voids Team is responsible for the day to day management of ensuring empty homes meet the Empty Homes Standard when they are re-let

The Neighbourhood Managers are responsible for the allocation process of customers into empty properties and the ongoing management of their tenancies.

The Neighbourhood Officers are responsible for:

- Arranging to inspect properties during the 4 weeks notice period.
- Ensuring appropriate housing advice is provided to incoming customers and that all relevant checks are undertaken to ensure that their individual needs are considered prior to re-letting an empty property.
- Carrying out accompanied viewing with The Adapted Homes Team (Manchester City Council) when a suitable applicant has been identified for an adapted empty home.
- Completing 2- and 9-month reviews with new customers to help support and sustain the tenancy.

Appendix A - Empty Property Standard

WCHG will endeavour to provide a high quality letting standard and will undertake the repairs before a new tenant moves in., However if it is identified that large component renewals are required i.e. kitchen and bathroom replacements, WCHG may choose to undertake renewals once the home is occupied enabling tenant choice in design, colour etc.

General Standards.

- All areas of the home including the loft space will be clear from rubbish and contaminated bins will be emptied. The property will be left clean and tidy.
- Internal and external surfaces will be free from graffiti.
- All properties will have a valid Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) with aim to reach target of band C wherever possible.
- Both gas and electrical installations including any fixed appliances, such as smoke detectors, burglar alarms and CO detectors will be fully commissioned and tested prior to handover and the relevant documentation will be included in the handover pack.
- WCHG will aim to ensure gas and electrical supplies connected at the time of handover and that any relevant utility company details will be provided allowing for the meter to be topped up by the incoming customer.
- WCHG have controls in place to ensure the water supply/system in each void property is safe prior to handover.
- All entrance will be fitted with either a multipoint locking system or have a minimum of 2 locks fitted consisting of a mortice and cylinder night latch and with a minimum of 2 keys provided.
- The property will be free from any signs of mould and damp.
- Provision will be made for an electric cooker and space provided for a washing machine and a fridge.
- All lighting points will be upgrade have low energy lighting (LEL) in place.
- Loft insulation will be a minimum of 300mm thickness.
- Loose, damp or defective plaster to walls and ceilings will be removed and made good.

- All polystyrene ceiling tiles and decorative poly coving will be removed and made good, allowing for decoration.
- Floors, stairs and handrails will be checked for stable and safe.
- All windows will be in good working order and were lockable will have keys provided, with any broken or failed doubled glazed units replaced.
- Internal doors will be fitted with fully working handles and catches with door casings, architrave and skirting left in a reasonable condition.
- Non-standard items fitted by the previous tenant will be removed and replaced with a WCHGs standard items if they are not compliant with current standards, whenever possible WCHG retain items deemed as tenant improvements.
- Water outlets will be working correctly and free from leaks or blockages to toilets will be in working order cleaned and the toilet seat will be renewed.
- Kitchens will be serviceable and consist of a minimum of eight-unit doors and four meters of worktops were possible.
- A ventilation fan will be fitted to kitchens, bathrooms and separate WCs.
- All loose / hanging wall paper to walls and ceilings will be stuck back were possible or the damaged area will be left stripped ready to redecorate.

External Works.

- The property will be secure, wind and watertight with footpaths clear and free from trips and hazards.
- External boundaries including hedges, fences, walls, gates and sheds will be in a safe condition.
- Gardens will be clear, safe and tidy from the outset of the tenancy (with exceptions due to inclement weather conditions).
- Drainage systems, gutters, rain water pipes and waste pipes will be functional and free flowing.