



## WCHG Empty Homes Policy

<b>Date of approval</b>	11 <sup>th</sup> May 2026
<b>Responsible director</b>	Paul Butterworth - Executive Director of Assets
<b>Policy monitoring body</b>	CX Committee
<b>Resident input into policy</b>	Reviewed by involved residents March 2026
<b>Date for policy review</b>	May 2029
<b>Linked strategies/policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocations Policy</li> <li>Tenancy Management Policy</li> <li>Equipment and Adaptation Policy</li> <li>Disposal Policy</li> <li>Gas Maintenance &amp; Safety Management Policy</li> <li>Electrical Safety Management Policy</li> <li>Carbon Reduction Strategy</li> <li>Asbestos Management Policy</li> <li>Water Management Policy</li> <li>Fire Safety Management Policy</li> <li>Damp and Mould Policy</li> <li>Boundary Policy</li> <li>Environmental Services Policy</li> <li>Continuous Performance Engagement Policy</li> <li>Growing Talent Through Professional Development</li> </ul>
<b>Statutory and Legal Framework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social Housing Act 2023</li> <li>Health and Safety at Work Act 1974</li> <li>Gas Safety (Installation &amp; Use) Regulations 1998</li> <li>Control of Substances Hazardous to Health 2002</li> <li>Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012</li> <li>Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015</li> <li>Homes Fitness for Human Habitation Act (HHSRS) 2018</li> <li>Building Safety Act 2022</li> <li>Safety and Quality Consumer Standard</li> </ul>
<b>Version/date</b>	V3.1 May 2026

## Empty Homes Policy

### 1. Background

- 1.1. Wythenshawe Community Housing Group (WCHG) is committed to delivering all landlord responsibilities including the efficient and effective management of empty homes.
- 1.2. This policy supports the delivery of the empty homes service in line with the priorities set out in the WCHG Corporate Plan, specifically priority one - Great Places and the key commitments of Sustainability and Value for Money.

### 2. Legislation, Guidance, and Regulatory Standards

- 2.1. **Legislation** – The principal legislation applicable to this policy is:
  - Social Housing (Regulations) Act 2023
  - Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
- 2.2. **Regulatory Standards** - We will comply with the Regulator of Social Housing's regulatory framework and consumer standards for social housing in England. The Safety and Quality Standard is the primary one applicable to this policy.

### 3. Risk Management

- 3.1. The WCHG Board annually review the Corporate Risk Register and agree the risk appetite for each one.
- 3.2. The WCHG Audit and Risk Committee is responsible for overseeing the management of corporate risks associated with this policy.
- 3.3. The specific risks associated with this policy are:
  - SR2 - Death, Serious Injury or Harm:** Fail to ensure we effectively protect our customers, WCHG colleagues and visitors. Board Appetite – **Averse**
  - SR3 - Regulatory Standards, laws, legislation and compliance:** Non-compliance with regulatory standards, laws and legislation. Board Appetite – **Averse**
  - SR8 - Asset quality, repairs and building safety:** Failure to effectively manage asset quality and building safety. Board Appetite - **Averse** (but open to innovation)
- 3.4. The risk appetite set by the Board is 'Averse', defined as 'Avoidance of risk wherever possible; preference for safe, compliant, and controlled approaches.' The key focus of the Board is that regulatory compliance continues to be achieved, and the Regulator of Social Housing's Standards and Consumer Standards are met.
- 3.5. We will maintain a suite of procedures and processes, and provide adequate resources to implement them, to mitigate the risk of service delivery failing to adhere to this policy.

## 4. Scope

- 4.1. This policy applies to empty homes managed by WCHG from when the tenancy ends to the point at which it is ready for occupancy, and keys are available for a new resident.
- 4.2. 'Void management' is the sector 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 resident moves in.
- 4.3. Under this policy WCHG will minimise the rent loss by ensuring that the turnaround of empty properties is quick and effective.
- 4.4. The processes aligned to the identification of applicants and the allocation of empty homes, including internal transfers are not within the scope of this policy. They are governed by WCHG's Allocation Policy and Tenancy Management Policy.
- 4.5. Whilst the policy and transactions will be predominantly social/affordable rent homes, the policy is also applicable to market rent homes but standards will vary to align with Garden City homes requirements and private sector market conditions.

## 5. Commitments and obligations

- 5.1. We will provide high quality sustainable tenancies, in homes that meet the Governments Decent Homes Standard and the WCHG Empty Homes Standard provided at Appendix 1.
- 5.2. Empty homes will be fully compliant with all health and safety regulations before it is re-let.
- 5.3. **Empty Homes Classification** - A property is classed as empty under the following circumstances:
  - 5.3.1. The previous resident has given notice and terminated their tenancy.
  - 5.3.2. The previous resident has died and so the tenancy has ended.
  - 5.3.3. The previous resident has transferred to another WCHG property.
  - 5.3.4. The previous resident has abandoned the property without giving notice or handing in the keys.
  - 5.3.5. The property has been repossessed through an eviction warrant.
  - 5.3.6. The property is a new acquisition that has not yet been allocated to a resident.
- 5.4. When a property becomes empty, we will inspect and categorise it as follows:

Void Category	Description	Target re-let time
Minor Void	Requires basic repairs and maintenance to meet Empty Homes Standard	1-14 calendar days

Major Void	Requires major repairs and maintenance to meet Empty Homes Standard; or needs at least one major component renewing	14-35 calendar days
Long term Void	<p>The property:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is not fit for human habitation under HHSRS legislation</li> <li>• Has been identified for future demolition</li> <li>• Is awaiting sale or disposal</li> <li>• Is being improved under our Investment Programme</li> <li>• Requires work that will be difficult to complete after tenant has moved in</li> <li>• Is reserved for a specific project</li> <li>• Is being used as temporary accommodation</li> <li>• Is adapted and being matched to tenant with matching level of need</li> </ul>	35 calendar days or more

- 5.5. **Notice to end a tenancy** - Residents are generally expected to provide a minimum 4 weeks' notice of the intention to end their tenancy. Exceptions are:
- 5.5.1. When a resident is transferring to another WCHG home and a shorter notice period has been agreed.
- 5.5.2. When there is a risk to the residents if they remain in their current home and the notice period is shorter or not claimed.
- 5.5.3. When it is confirmed that a resident has died, the tenancy ends when the keys are returned to WCHG.
- 5.6. When notice is received WCHG will acknowledge this, confirm rights and responsibilities at the end of the tenancy, and agree an appointment with the resident to inspect the property before the notice periods ends.
- 5.7. The outgoing resident is responsible for leaving the property clean and clear of all belongings, in line with the obligations set out in the tenancy agreement. This includes external sheds, garden furniture/ornaments/equipment, and anything kept in communal areas. WCHG may recharge the outgoing resident for the cost of:
- 5.7.1. Clearing the property of abandoned belongings.
- 5.7.2. Completing repairs that are the tenant's responsibility.
- 5.7.3. Re-instating gardens to the acceptable standard.
- 5.8. Empty properties will be risk assessed to determine the level of security measures that are needed during the void management process.

- 5.9. WCHG will complete the work needed to improve the thermal performance of an empty home to achieve an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C or above, depending on the property type.
- 5.10. WCHG will work with Manchester City Council (MCC) as part of the empty homes process to decide if an existing adaptation will remain or be removed on a case-by-case basis, in line with the Equipment and Adaptation Policy. Whenever possible it will be used or recycled to ensure the best use of the investment is achieved.
- 5.11. WCHG will undertake a full management asbestos survey for any empty property:
  - 5.11.1. where no previous survey has been completed,
  - 5.11.2. where an existing survey identifying asbestos-containing materials is more than two years old, or
  - 5.11.3. where work needed to meet the Empty Homes Standard requires a Refurbishment and Demolition Survey.

## 6. Quality Assurance

- 6.1. Before an empty home is confirmed as being ready to let to a new resident, in 100% of cases:
  - 6.1.1. A post inspection and any identified follow up work will be completed
  - 6.1.2. A stock condition survey will be conducted, and any hazards identified will be addressed.
- 6.2. Residents who join the WCHG Service Inspector initiative will assess 25% of properties that are ready to let, against the Empty Homes Standard. This will be a physical inspection before the new tenant moves in or by a telephone survey with the new resident within 28 days of them moving in.
- 6.3. All new residents will be sent a satisfaction survey to complete within 28 days of them moving in.
- 6.4. Data from these resident feedback mechanisms will be used to monitor the outcomes of the Empty Homes service.
- 6.5. This policy will be subject to regular review by External Auditors, in line with the Groups' Internal Audit programme.

## 7. Performance Measurement, Monitoring and Review

- 7.1. We will use a range of key performance indicators (KPI) to monitor and report performance against the Empty Homes service.
- 7.2. The WCHG Empty Homes service performance will be reported internally as follows:

Monitoring Body	Frequency
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WCHG Board	Every meeting – bi monthly
CX Committee	Every meeting – bi monthly
Group Leadership Team	Every meeting - monthly
Leadership Team	Every meeting - monthly

7.3. Performance reporting to all monitoring bodies will be a snapshot position on the last day of the month. Access to live daily data is available to all colleagues with strategic and operational responsibility for empty homes safety, through our performance management system.

7.4. The measures reported will reflect the requirements of the respective governance panel or management team, and will include but are not limited to:

**Data**

- The year-to-date number of Empty Homes.
- The overall average number of days taken from end of tenancy to relet date, split by:
  - Time with Empty Homes Team.
  - Time with Tenancy Management Team.

**Commentary to explain:**

- Current position.
- Corrective action required.
- Trend analysis of performance drivers

**8. Resident engagement**

8.1. We recognise the need to provide residents with effective communications related to how we manage empty homes. When we need to work with residents directly during works to empty homes, we will take into account their communication needs and preferences.


8.2. We will also share information clearly and transparently and make it available to residents through regular newsletters and our external website.

8.3. Residents can volunteer as a Service Inspector to support the implementation, and shape future reviews of this policy.


**9. Roles and Responsibilities**


9.1. The Customer Experience Committee is responsible for setting and approving the priorities of this policy and ensuring it is fully implemented. They will formally review and approve it every three years or sooner if there is a change in legislation or regulation.

9.2. The Group Leadership Team are responsible for monitoring that compliance against this policy is being achieved.


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- 9.3. The Customer Experience Committee receive, and review performance data related to the delivery of this policy.
  - 9.4. The Executive Director of Assets has strategic responsibility for the management of empty homes. They oversee the implementation of this policy.
  - 9.5. The Head of Repairs is responsible for the operational delivery, management and monitoring of this policy.
  - 9.6. The Operational Manager has operational responsibility for the management of empty homes.
  - 9.7. The Contract Manager is responsible for monitoring the performance achieved against this policy.
  - 9.8. The Team Leader is responsible for the on-site delivery of the Empty Homes Service.
  - 9.9. The Empty Homes Team technicians and a range of approved sub-contractors are responsible for the delivery of services within the scope of this policy.
  - 9.10. The Environmental Team are responsible for re-instating gardens at empty homes.
  - 9.11. The Resident Involvement Team manage the Service Inspector initiative,
  - 9.12. The Neighbourhood Management Team are responsible for:
    - Arranging the inspection of properties during the 4 weeks' notice period.
    - Completing the tenancy termination process before passing the property to the Empty Homes Team
    - Completing accompanied viewings with the MCC Adapted Homes Team when an adapted empty home is matched to a suitable applicant.
    - Allocating the property to the new tenant.

## **10. Competence, Training and Professionalism**

- 10.1. WCHG is committed to realising the capability and potential of colleagues by investing in them through learning, training and professional study. Line managers will use the WCHG Continuous Performance Engagement process to ensure that mandatory training and required qualifications are maintained and kept up to date for all colleagues involved in the delivery of this policy.
  - 10.2. Our Board is recruited to meet the requirements of the governance skills matrix to ensure appropriate strategic control and oversight is provided across the Group's operations. Members receive regular and ongoing training to ensure skill and competency levels are maintained.
  - 10.3. The Executive Director of Assets and the senior management team hold or is working towards the Chartered Institute of Housing Level 5 Diploma in Housing, or equivalent.
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- 10.4. We will check our contractors hold the relevant qualifications and accreditations when we procure them, and thereafter on an annual basis; we will evidence these checks and each contractor's certification appropriately.
- 10.5. We will deliver training on this policy and its supporting procedures through mechanisms including but not limited to:
- Team Meetings
  - One to one meeting
  - Toolbox talks.

## **11. Equality Diversity and Inclusion**

- 11.1. Wythenshawe Community Housing Group (WCHG) is committed to providing fair and inclusive services for all our residents.
- 11.2. We will do our best to make sure that no one is treated unfairly because of who they are. This includes any protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010.
- 11.3. We understand that some people may be more affected by our policies or services. Where needed, we will take extra steps and make reasonable adjustments to make sure everyone can access our services fairly.
- 11.4. If you need this policy in another format, such as large print, Easy Read, Braille, audio, or another language, please contact us:
- Phone: 0300 111 0000
  - Email: [inclusionanddiversity@wchg.org.uk](mailto:inclusionanddiversity@wchg.org.uk)
- 11.5. This policy is not a new policy. There have been no significant changes to the policy from the previous full review. An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed at the next full review.
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## **Appendix 1 WCHG Empty Homes Standard**

WCHG aims to make sure that when an empty is let to a new resident it meets the Empty Homes Standard. We will undertake the repairs needed before a new resident moves in. If major work is required for example kitchen and/or bathroom replacements, WCHG may start renewal work when the new resident has moved in so they can make choices about colours and design.

The Empty Home Standards provides residents with a minimum level of expectation and ensures all homes will be compliant with regulatory standards. If residents need additional work to meet their specific needs and circumstances, our Living Well and Financial Support Teams, will collaborate with the Empty Homes Team and liaise with local charities, to identify if these requirements can be met.

### **General**

- 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, depending on the property type.
- WCHG will aim to ensure gas and electrical supplies are connected at the time of handover, and that utility company details will be provided allowing for the meter to be topped up by the incoming customer.
- Non-standard and non-compliant items fitted by the previous tenant will be removed and replaced with WCHG standard items.
- Where appropriate, property improvements made by the previous tenant will be retained if they are compliant with current regulatory standards.

### **Compliance**

- 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.
- Smoke, heat and carbon monoxide alarms will be upgraded to main wired LDI and LD2 systems.
- WCHG have controls in place to ensure the water supply in each empty property is safe before it is allocated to a new resident, for example system and shower head flushing.
- An asbestos survey will be completed if the work needed to meet the Empty Home Standard requires one, or the current survey is more than 2 years old.


- A stock condition survey including an assessment for the presence of any of the 28 hazards under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) will be completed at all Empty Homes
- The property will be free from any signs of mould and damp and any other HHSRS hazards will be rectified before a new tenant moves in.

### **Security**

- All entrances 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.
- All windows will be in good working order, cracked or failed double glazed units replaced and window lock keys provided when required.
- All windows above ground level will be fitted with child safety restrictors, and all window restrictors in multi storey blocks will be checked.

### **Internal**

- Loft insulation will be a minimum of 300mm thickness.
- All lighting points will be upgraded to have low energy lighting (LEL) in place.
- Floors, stairs and handrails will be checked to make sure they are stable and safe.
- Internal doors will be fitted with fully working handles and catches with door casings, architrave and skirting left in a reasonable condition.
- Provision will be made for an electric cooker and space provided for a washing machine and a fridge.
- Gas cooker points, and gas fires will be removed from all empty homes in line with our commitment to sustainability and reduction in carbon emissions.
- Kitchens will be serviceable and consist of a minimum of eight unit doors and four meters of worktops where possible.
- Water outlets will be working correctly and free from leaks and blockages, and toilets will be in working order, cleaned and the toilet seat will be renewed.
- A humidistat ventilation fan will be fitted to kitchens, bathrooms and separate WCs.
- Non slip vinyl floor coverings will be provided in kitchens and bathrooms.
- Loose, damp or defective plaster to walls and ceilings will be removed and made good.

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- All polystyrene ceiling tiles and decorative poly coving will be removed and made good, allowing for decoration.
  - All loose or hanging wallpaper to walls and ceilings will be stuck back where possible or the damaged area will be left stripped ready to redecorate.
  - Electric power showers will be replaced for thermostatic mixer showers to prepare the home for future net zero retrofitting and reduce energy demand, energy costs and improve the EPC rating of the home prior to a new letting.

### **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, rainwater pipes and waste pipes will be functional and free flowing.
  - Where a balcony forms part of the empty home, safety checks will be made to all balustrading and any remedial work required will be completed.
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