



Empty Homes Policy

Policy Name:	Empty Homes Policy
Status:	Final
Approved by:	Board – May 2019
Drafted by:	Jimmy Singh & Alison Holt
Date approved:	21 May 2019
Date effective from:	21 May 2019
Customer consultation:	Property Panel & TC, Feb 2019
Next Review Date:	May 2021

1. Statement and Background

- 1.1 Wythenshawe Community Housing Group (WCHG) will endeavour to maximise the use of available stock through the control of empty properties, thereby minimising rent loss. WCHG will give high priority to turning round empty properties quickly by repairing and letting them within strict timescales. WCHG will provide a cost effective empty homes repairs service with the provision of high quality homes and sustainable lettings.
- 1.2 WCHG will ensure that all properties let meet the acceptable standards as contained within the minimum lettable standard (**appendix A**). Prospective tenants will be kept informed on any work progress throughout the void management process.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all empty properties managed by WCHG.

3. Definition

- 3.1 The term void management is used to describe the various processes which are involved in dealing with a property from the point that it is known that it will become empty, through to the re-let of the property to a new tenant. An empty property can have one of a number of origins:
- The previous tenant has given notice and left, or been transferred to another WCHG property;
 - The previous tenant has left without handing in the keys (abandoned) or without giving notice;
 - The property has been repossessed as a result of an eviction warrant;
 - The property has been badly damaged by fire or is in need of major/structural repair and the tenant has had to move out so the repairs can be carried out (management void)
 - It is a new or refurbished property, which has yet to have a tenant allocated to it and has become one of the Groups assets.

4. Empty Homes Classification

- 4.1 Following the initial inspection, empty homes to be relet will be classified as either;
- Standard Voids – those voids requiring basic repairs and maintenance to reach re-lettable standards (Graded Void Cost Band A & B)
 - Major Voids – those voids requiring major repairs and maintenance to reach re-lettable standard (Graded Void Cost Band C & D)
- 4.2 These categories will be utilised to examine, monitor, set targets and report performance indicators such as cost and time taken. We will also profile reasons for tenancy termination, monitor condition/damage and re-charge outgoing tenants in accordance with the re-charge policy.

On occasions WCHG will have some empty properties that will be vacant but not available for letting, these will include the following;

- Long term voids – where a decision on future investment or demolition has been made
- All units awaiting sale or disposal
- Property ready to let but held to support a specific project or to provide temporary accommodation (decant).

4.3 Where possible, all properties which are to become empty will be inspected and the outgoing tenant will be given details of any work that they should complete before leaving the property, such as reporting any outstanding repairs which may become subject to recharges should they be left when the tenancy is terminated. This will be in accordance with the tenancy conditions. By giving outgoing tenants the opportunity to carry out this work, the amount of work required while the property is void will be reduced.

5. Policy

5.1 All tenants are required to give four weeks written notice to vacate their property. This is the standard notice period. In exceptional circumstances WCHG may accept a shorter notice period contained within the tenancy for example, where an internal transfer has been agreed. When a valid notice has been received all outgoing tenants will be advised of their rights and responsibilities in relation to ending the tenancy.

5.2 Once notice has been received WCHG will arrange to complete an inspection of the property prior to the tenancy ending to:

- Assess the condition of the home and any tenancy breaches.
- Discuss the reward scheme and any qualifying criteria
- Identify any rechargeable repairs and discuss options.
- Identify and notify maintenance contractors of expected volume of work to assist with forecasting and capacity planning
- Identify any factors that should be considered as part of offering the property for re-let, for example, adaptations for disabilities

5.3 WCHG will ensure tenants leave the property clear of all belongings and leave tidy and clean, including external and any common areas. WCHG expect repairs which are the responsibility of the tenant to have been carried out and keys returned on or before the notice expiry date. The outgoing tenant will become responsible for the full cost of any subsequent clearing or cleaning under the term of the Rechargeable Repairs and Recoverable Costs Policy.

5.4 Where a tenant hands back the keys earlier than the given expiry of the notice, WCHG will accept this as a surrender of tenancy by mutual agreement. If the keys are received by noon on Monday (with the exception of bank holidays), the tenancy should be terminated from the preceding Sunday. If the keys are returned after noon on Monday the tenancy should be terminated from the following Sunday. Where the keys are not returned the cost of gaining access to change the locks will be recharged to the outgoing tenant. Where WCHG suspects a property has been abandoned, the abandoned tenancy procedure will

be followed. Void management procedures will be in place and implemented immediately on receipt of the keys to enable the property to be relet as soon as possible.

- 5.5** Once the void management process has been initiated, WCHG will ensure that all empty properties have minimal and non-intrusive security on its properties, using a risk management approach to determine the appropriate level of security. Where there is a high risk of squatting, break-in or vandalism, appropriate security measures will be ordered to protect the property. Where possible the use of steel shuttering will be kept to a minimum.
- 5.6** WCHG will identify and complete any necessary repairs to enable a property to be re-let as soon as possible. All repairs will be completed to a high quality standard, whilst ensuring that costs are kept to a minimum.
- 5.7** All properties will inspected and be issued with both electrical gas safety certification ensuring that the property compliant with the current gas and electrical 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 Groups commitment of it sustainability stragetety and compliance with minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES).
- 5.8** WCHG will take into consideration the prospective tenants preferences at the accompanied viewing, which could include:
- Determining repairs to be completed whilst the property is empty and work that could be completed once the new tenancy has started
 - The urgency of need for rehousing and any vulnerability/disability of the incoming tenant
 - Making efficient use of any existing disabled adaptations. The Adapted Homes team will carry out an accompanied viewing with the Tenancy Management Coordinator once they have identified a suitable applicant.
- 5.9** WCHG may use the period the property is empty 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.
- 5.10** All work to the empty property will be undertaken by Wythenshawe Works or its sub-contractors and post inspected to ensure work is completed to a satisfactory standard in relation to time, quality and value for money.
- 5.11** WCHG recognises that an ageing population demands adaptations to existing homes and in order to make the most efficient use of existing facilities, WCHG will not routinely remove adaptations from empty properties. Where possible WCHG will aim to re-let adapted properties to applicants with disabilities and/or recycle any adaptations that are removed from a property. The decision to remove any adaptations can only be made once every option has been explored to find a suitable applicant and the Adapted Homes team have been fully consulted in accordance with the Equipment & Adaptations Policy and service level agreement (SLA)

- 5.12** WCHG aims to create high quality, sustainable tenancies and achieve a high level of customer satisfaction. All properties let will consistently meet the Government's Decent Homes standard and WCHG's own minimum lettable standard contained in **Appendix A**.
- 5.13** Whilst the property is void, WCHG will arrange an Asbestos survey to the property if there is not an existing compliant survey held by the Group in Promaster undertaken in the last 2 years. This survey will identify if any asbestos containing materials are present and its current condition. It will also make recommendations on whether to remove the ACM or to manage it in situ in accordance with the Groups Asbestos Policy. This information will be shared with the new incoming tenants and the Groups database will be up-dated accordingly.
- 5.14** Prior to the property hand-over from Wythenshawe Works to the Tenancy Management Team, the Group will ensure the water supply/system within each property is flushed and a record is kept of the preventative action undertaken in accordance with the Legionella Management Policy.
- 5.15** Where the decorative condition is poor, WCHG may provide a paint pack voucher to the incoming tenant. The value of the voucher offered will reflect the extent of the decoration required to bring the property to a reasonable standard throughout. WCHG may undertake internal decoration where an incoming tenant is vulnerable or elderly and this has been identified at the time the property was offered and provisionally accepted.
- 5.16** Where properties have been identified as difficult to let WCHG may offer incentives such as carpets, decoration of some rooms or other market incentives as deemed appropriate in order to encourage acceptance of properties.
- 5.17** When advertising a property, WCHG provides all prospective tenants with information about the property attributes and local neighbourhood facilities. When a prospective tenant has indicated their acceptance of a vacant property the tenancy will commence as soon as possible after all essential works have been completed. The tenancy will commence on the day the new tenant receives the keys for the property unless it has been an internal transfer in which case the tenancy will start on a Monday.
- 5.18** The money health check, sign up process and post let visits have a significant impact on the sustainability of the tenancy. WCHG offers a tenancy support service to ensure vulnerable tenants receive the assistance they need to help them move into their new home.
- 5.19** All new tenants will be given the opportunity to provide feedback relating to the void management and Allocations process at the time the property is let by completing a New Tenancy Survey. Feedback and satisfaction will be monitored and reported in accordance with the Groups performance management framework.

6 Performance Management

- 6.1** WCHG will actively manage and monitor the performance and service delivery of void properties. WCHG recognises the financial impact of property turnover and the costs associated with re-let times and re-let

standards. Monthly performance management data will be collated and reported to examine the correct balance of demand, property standards, satisfaction and overall costs to determine decisions.

6.2 WCHG will undertake an annual zero budgeting process to determine the void budget and this will be based upon agreed parameters on anticipated future turnover. A number of mechanisms and reports will be collated including the following;

- Monthly Management Finance Reporting Pack
- Corporate Performance Pack.
- Property Panel involvement.
- Benchmarking Groups
- Post Inspection data on completion of works

6.3 Service Inspectors will aim to complete inspections of 20% of randomly selected properties at handover stage prior to the Relet. Service Inspectors will aim to undertake telephone surveys to 20% of properties within 28 days of the tenancy start date;

- Bespoke surveys targeted at specific service areas
- Organisation wide periodic satisfaction surveys
- Language line and translation services

7 Statutory and Legislative Framework

Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 & 1987

Housing Act 1985, 1988, 1996, 1998 & 2004

Localism Bill 2011

The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012

Defective Premises Act 1972

Occupiers Liability Act 1957

Construction Act 1996

Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015

Right to Repair Regulations 1994

Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998

Housing Health and Safety Rating System

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) 1999

Environmental Protection Act 1990

CRE code of practice on Racial Equality in Housing

8 Associated Policies and Procedures

Allocations Policy

Asbestos Policy

Responsive Repairs Procedure

Gas Maintenance and Safety Management Policy

Electrical Safety Management Policy

Equipment & Adaptations Policy

Legionella Management Policy
Rechargeable Repairs and Recoverable Costs Policy
Customer Complaints, Comment & Compliments Policy Health and Safety Policy
and Working Documents
Environmental Sustainability Strategy
Value for Money Strategy
Customer Complaints, Comments and Complements Policy
Discretionary Compensation, Colleague Guidance Note
Equality and Diversity Policy
Asset management Strategy
Asset Management Plan

9 Equality and Diversity

WCHG has a responsibility to serve the needs and promote the interests of its entire staff and all its tenants/service users. WCHG will provide equal service in accordance with the Equality Act. WCHG works towards developing services, facilities and working practices, which are equally accessible to and appropriate for all its customers, irrespective of their gender, age, race, sexuality, transgender, disability, religion, marital status/civil partnerships or income.

WCHG will make consideration for all identified vulnerable groups when conducting this service.

At the discretion of WCHG consideration will be given to all vulnerable groups, tailoring our service and customer needs. This will be dealt with case by case on an individual need.

We will provide information in languages other than English, in Braille, Large Print, Compact Disc and Audiotape. Our reception and interview room are fitted with a hearing loop system.

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 for, (e.g. kitchen and bathroom replacements, WCHG may choose to undertake renewals once the home is occupied enabling tenant choice in design, colour etc.

General Standards.

1. All areas of the home, including loft space will be cleared with any contaminated bins emptied. The property will be left clean, fresh and tidy with air fresheners.
2. Internal and External surfaces will be cleaned and free from any graffiti.
3. Properties will be checked for energy performance and an energy performance certificate produced.
4. All utility services and fixed appliances, such as smoke detectors, burglar alarms and CO detectors will be fully commissioned and tested prior to the commencement of the new tenancy and the relevant documentation will be included in the handover Pack. Locks to the front and rear doors will be changed and with a minimum of 2 keys made available for each lock. Glazing systems will be fully intact.
5. WCHG will aim to ensure gas and electrical supplies are on at the time of handover and that utility provider's meter key/ card will be left in the property.
6. Ensure controls are in place to ensure the water supply/system within each void property is addressed prior to handover and recording mechanisms are in place.
7. An Asbestos Management Survey will be undertaken on all voids where the Group does not hold any up to date information.

External Works:

1. The property will be secure, wind and watertight.
2. External boundary fences, walls, gates and sheds will be in a reasonable safe condition.
3. Footpaths to and from the property and flag perimeter will be in good condition, free from trips and other hazards.
4. Gardens will be in a cleared safe and tidy at the tenancy start, (subject to inclement weather conditions). All ponds will be removed and backfilled and left levelled.
5. Drainage systems, gutters, rain water pipes and waste pipes will be flowing, functional and free from obstruction.

Internal Works

1. Loose, damp or defective plaster to walls and ceilings will be removed and made good, suitable for decoration.
2. All polystyrene ceiling tiles and decorative poly coving will be removed and made good, suitable for decoration.
3. Floors, stairs and handrails will be checked for stability & safety and will be free from defects
4. Windows will be inspected to ensure ease of opening and closing. Any broken or failed double glazed units will be renewed. Curtain batons will be fitted upon request.
5. Internal doors will be properly fitted with fully working handles and catches. Internal glazed doors will be removed if not to current standard. Associated woodwork, door casings, architrave and skirting will be in reasonable condition.
6. Non-standard items/improvements from the previous tenancy will be removed and replaced with a WCHG fitting if they no longer meet current standard
7. Water outlets will be working correctly and free from leaks or blockages to any pipes. Toilets will be in working order cleaned and the toilet seat will be renewed.
8. Bathroom suite will be serviceable and clean with a new WC seat and shower curtain fitted. Any defective/cracked wall tiles and mastic sealant will be renewed.
9. Kitchens will be serviceable and consist of a minimum of eight unit doors and four meters of worktops. Provision will be made for a standard sized cooker, fridge and washing machine.
10. Decoration will be in reasonable condition and paper adhered to surfaces, a paint pack voucher will be allocated following discussions with the new tenant.
11. If the chimney stack fails the gas spillage inspection, we will remove the gas fire and make good the opening leaving it fitted with a vent, likewise on discovery of faults on an Electric fire Package.