

Empty Homes Policy



Scope: Housing assets owned by Housing Solutions

Author: Head of Repairs

Legislation: Housing Act 1985
Landlord & Tenant Act 1985
Equality Act 2010
Common hold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002
The Defective Premises Act 1972
Health & Safety at Work Act 1974
Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
Gas Safety (Installation and use) Regulations 1998
The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022
The Secure Tenants of Local Authorities (Compensation for improvements) Regulations 1998
Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015
Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 2013
Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA)
Building Regulations 2010
Decent Homes Standard
Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018
Housing Health & Safety Rating System Regulations 2005.
Social Housing (Regulatory) Act 2023
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Landlord & Tenant Act 1985
Equality Act 2010
Common hold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002
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Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022

Approved by: Executive Team

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Date of next review: 13th October 2028

The Secure Tenants of Local Authorities
(Compensation for improvements)
Regulations 1998
Construction (Design and Management)
Regulations 2015
Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and
dangerous Occurrences Regulations
(RIDDOR) 2013
Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA)
Building Regulations 2010
Decent Homes Standard
Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act
2018
Housing Health & Safety Rating System
Regulations 2005.
Social Housing (Regulatory) Act 2023

**Regulatory/
Governance:** Regulator of Social Housing's Safety &
Quality; Transparency, Influence &
Accountability; Tenancy; and
Neighbourhood & Community consumer
standards.

**Related
Policies:** Asset Management Strategy
Investment Policy
Procurement Strategy
Repairs and Maintenance Policy
New Homes Service Standard
Tenancy Policy
Allocations Policy
Aids and Adaptations Policy
Access Policy
Complaints Policy
Standing Orders and
Financial regulations
Fire Safety Policy
Gas Safety Policy
Electrical Safety Policy
Asbestos Management Policy
Water Hygiene & Legionella Policy
Succession Policy
Assignment Policy

1. Policy Statement:

1.1 The purpose of this Empty Homes policy is to outline how Housing Solutions:

- Manages empty homes (voids) efficiently, responsibly, and in line with its corporate strategy of creating Safe, Satisfied, and Sustainable homes for residents.
- Minimises the number and duration of void properties in order to maximise rental income; reduce homelessness and housing waiting lists; and ensure efficient use of housing stock.
- Meets legislative obligations and Regulatory standards.

1.2 The key objectives of this policy are:

- Preparing homes to a consistent minimum standard that is communicated and understood by residents, kept under regular review and provides value for money
- Minimising the time new residents wait to move into a Housing Solutions home
- Minimising empty home rent loss
- Facilitating repair works as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- Maintaining sector leading empty homes management performance on void turnaround as benchmarked against Housemark sector performance.

1.2 Where the cost of meeting the “New Home Standard” exceeds £20,000, the property will be referred to the IAP panel with a report detailing the works required. The IAP panel will decide whether to authorise the commencement of works or not (see Investment Policy).

2. Scope:

2.1 This policy covers all properties owned and managed by Housing Solutions.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Role / Team	Responsibilities
Executive Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policy approval• To support and ensure the proper application of this policy.• Monthly review of KPI figures
Assistant Director of Property Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To ensure full implementation of this policy.• Be accountable for colleague training, budgetary controls, engaging with involved residents, and managing continuous improvement.• To ensure all work is carried out safely within the company standing orders.• Ensure the service takes account of resident feedback and requirements.

Head of Repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility for the overall empty home repair function • Ensuring compliance with the policy • To effectively manage the DLO and contractors • To ensure VFM in the delivery of the voids service • Ensure KPI performance is achieved. • To ensure the safety of all team members and residents in the delivery of the service. • To undertake effective contractor management
Void Supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To control the work issued and carried out by the DLO and contractors • To ensure consistent quality via spot check and post inspections by both the DLO and our contractors • To be the first point of contact for residents who are dissatisfied with the repair service • Responsible for ensuring empty homes are dealt with in line with this policy • Responsible for key-to-key times alongside lettings • Responsible for KPIs relating to voids and relet times • Being responsible for providing all compliance paperwork associated with the property and completing a signed Empty Homes Checklist • Ensuring post inspection is in line with the new home minimum standard, in addition to ensuring compliance check completion before returning the property for letting
Void Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure relevant void packs including compliance certificates are shared. • Monitoring void volume and timescales to meet target. • To ensure coordination of void repair works
DLO and contractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure they are always working in a safe and controlled manner, following all health and safety advice, guidance and risk assessments in place. • To undertake repairs to meet the New Home Standard
Assistant Director of Housing and Resident Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To deliver this Policy and supporting Letting and Neighbourhood Policies, be accountable for colleague training and engaging with resident forums and manage continuous improvement.
Housing Services Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility for Lettings and Home Ownership Team performance
Head of Income & Tenancy Sustainability and Lettings Team Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure no properties are let below a SAP rating of 55 (Band D) without Executive Team approval • Oversight and management of the Lettings function. • Responsibility for Lettings KPIs and the performance of the team to minimize void turnaround time

Lettings team leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying new residents, in conjunction with our Allocations policy for New Applicants and Allocations for Transfers policy Carry out pre-transfer inspections Responsible for key-to-key times alongside the voids surveyor Adding new voids to energy supplier portals Responsible for KPIs relating to voids and relet times Providing the sign-up pack, including copies of the compliance certificates, EPC, FRA and any other relevant documentation Responsibility for tenancy satisfaction surveys and reporting findings and responding to feedback
Housing Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out all viewings and signups for respective tenant groups. Arranging and carrying out a pre-termination inspection of the property
Head of Contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide VFM and control to services delivered To control and mitigate contractual risk To provide management and repairs data to control spend and quality of materials To support contract management of external supply chains
Surveying Services Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure properties marked for disposal are subject to review and proposed to ET for approval to dispose of when they become void

4. Definitions:

- 4.1 **Void repairs:** take place before a new resident moves into the property, or when no one is occupying the property. This could be a new or improved property, where a previous resident has given notice, an abandoned property or a property becoming vacant following the death of a residing resident. More detail on void repairs can be found in our New Home Service Standard.
- 4.2 **Stock condition survey:** A stock condition survey allows us to collect information relating to the Government's Decent Home Standard, and about the property in general. This is used to identify and programme future replacement works.
- 4.3 **Rechargeable repairs:** Housing Solutions reserves the right to recharge residents for any works caused because of neglect, wilful damage or misuse (including accidental damage) by a resident, their family or their visitors, including any un-authorised alterations to the property during the tenancy, and for the removal of items left in the property. All repairs will be charged at the current version Housing Solutions are using under Natfed rates. Rechargeable repairs may be recovered from any remaining credit on the account at point of termination. More detail on recharges can be found in our Recharge Policy.
- 4.4 **Works order variation:** A set amount that orders issued can be varied by, to allow completion, subject to current standing order guidance.
- 4.5 **Mutual exchange:** A mutual exchange is when residents of the same or alternate housing associations exchange properties. More detail on recharges can be found in our Mutual Exchange Policy.

- 4.6 **National Housing Federation (Natfed) Schedule of Rates:** a comprehensive technical specification with a fully specified schedules of rates for repairs.
- 4.7 **Service Improvement Team (SIT):** the team constructed to ensure our services have a resident's voice, to scrutinise performance and hold Housing Solutions to account, to review services to ensure cost effectiveness and to improve them for all customers, to review new and existing policies.
- 4.8 **Direct labour organisation (DLO):** the maintenance team that work directly for Housing Solutions
- 4.9 **Key to key:** a term used for when Housing Solutions receives the key from the outgoing resident before passing to the new incoming resident
- 4.10 **Gifting:** In some circumstances where items, fixtures and fittings are in good working condition these can be gifted to the new resident. This means that the new resident takes on responsibility for any repair or replacement of that item, fixture or fitting going forward for which they will be asked to sign a disclaimer. All such items will be recorded on the Empty Homes Checklist.
- 4.11 **Vulnerable residents:** Our approach to vulnerability is set out in detail in our Vulnerable Residents Policy. We include in our description of vulnerability, young people under 18; people in need of community care and support services and anyone who experiences difficulties with everyday living or needs additional support to meet their obligations. In shaping and delivering services to vulnerable people we will use a partnership approach building strong relationships with support agencies, developing service level agreements where appropriate, to ensure an effective response to the needs of vulnerable residents.
- 4.12 **Decorations:**
- Housing Solutions may pay a decoration allowance in the form of a decorating scheme voucher based on the inspection by the void supervisor. Residents will be given details of the suppliers where the voucher can be used. The voucher will only be redeemed for decoration packs agreed by us with the supplier.
 - Care and Supported sites, the Void Supervisor will need to take into consideration the condition of the property and may provide a decoration allowance or based on a needs assessment arrange for the flat to be decorated before a new resident moves in.

5. Management of Empty Homes:

- 5.1 Housing Solutions is committed to ensuring a fast, efficient and effective re-let process for vacant properties. In managing the empty homes process we will limit the rental loss by minimising the time that the property is unoccupied. We aim to ensure that when re-let our properties meet our minimum New Home Standard i.e. are safe, clean, in sound condition with all services in working order.
- 5.2 Housing Solutions have clear time deadlines to ensure that the necessary works required for an empty home are completed. By detailing the stages of the empty homes work required we will endeavour to meet these deadlines.
- 5.3 Our approach to managing empty homes includes:
- Requiring four weeks written notice from a resident who is moving out.

- Terminating tenancies on a Sunday.
 - Using our procedures for dealing with properties and possessions left behind where we can evidence a tenant has abandoned their tenancy and the property.
 - Using our Succession Policy to deal with death in occupation with or without a qualifying successor.
 - Dealing with tenancies ended by eviction.
- 5.4 Succession to a qualifying or discretionary successor and assignment will not result in an empty home and are not included in this Policy.
- 5.5 Properties designated for regeneration or disposal in our Asset Management Strategy will not result in a home to be relet and are not included in this Policy.
- 5.6 This Policy relates to all tenure types detailed in our Tenancy Policy and to shared ownership and leasehold. We carry out repairs to:
- General needs properties
 - Sheltered housing
 - Self-contained accommodation with support
 - Shared accommodation with support
 - Key Worker accommodation
 - Accommodation let at a market rent
 - Properties identified for but not yet ready for regeneration
 - Mobile homes owned by Housing Solutions on land owned or managed by us
 - Caravans owned by Housing Solutions on land owned or managed by us
 - The communal areas, services and structure of buildings which include leasehold properties

6 New Home Standard:

- 6.1 **Introduction:** The purpose of this standard is to let homes to a consistent, cost-effective standard that you should expect when moving into a Housing Solutions property. You can find information on our website at www.housingsolutions.co.uk or if you want to ask any questions you can contact us via telephone by calling our Contact Centre on 01628 543101 via webchat or the customer portal on our website.
- 6.2 **Utilities**
- The gas supply (where gas is supplied to the property), and all gas appliances will have been checked by a Gas Safe registered contractor and will be in good working order. A gas safety certificate will be issued to you.
 - Any metered electrical supply and electrical fittings will have been checked by a NICEIC approved contractor and will be in good working order. An electrical certificate will be issued to you.
 - The fuse box will be secure with all fuses intact and clearly labelled.
 - The hot water cylinder and cold-water storage tank will be free from leaks and insulated where applicable.

- The heating and hot water system will have been evaluated and will be in good working order. If there is no gas/electric supply present arrangements will be made for an engineer to do these once supplies have been reconnected.
- Hot and cold-water supplies will be provided to the kitchen, bathroom, and WC.
- The property will be free from obvious infestation.

6.3 Damp & Mould

- Your home will be free from damp and mould.

6.4 External Condition

- External doors will be secure and weatherproof, with all necessary door furniture in good condition.
- All external front doors will have a functioning bell or door knocker unless a door entry system is present.
- All guttering will be in place and is waterproof and secure.
- All access paths within the property boundary will be in good condition and free from trip hazards.
- Any boundary fence abutting the road or public footpath or fence separating the property from a private neighboring property will be in good condition and free from safety hazards.
- All external brickwork will be free from any major defects. The Damp proof course where present, will be checked (visually) to ensure there is no evidence of a breach which may lead to damp penetration.
- All vents will be free from obstruction.
- All sheds and outbuildings joined to the property will be safe and secure and free from water penetration.
- If the communal bins and bin stores are the responsibility of Housing Solutions or the managing agent, they will be in safe and useable condition. Bins that are controlled by the local authority are their responsibility. You can find out more by searching 'refuse services' on the local authority website.

6.5 Kitchen

- All units will be clean, sound with handles and closures (where present) intact and usable.
- All work surfaces will be clean and free from significant scouring and marks.
- A minimum of two double and one single socket (or cooker point) will be provided.
- Where tiling exists, this will be free from major cracks and the grouting will be clean and secure.
- There will be gas and electric cooker points (where the building is supplied with gas)
- Our Kitchens have a minimum expected life span of 20 years based on the quality of the materials we use; this date will be reviewed upon the completion of our stock condition surveys which are conducted every 5 years.

6.6 Bathroom

- All sanitary ware will be free from major cracks and chips, stains, defects and secure with plugs and handles present and in good working order.

- A minimum of two rows of tiling around the bath will be present and in good condition with grouting clean and secure.
- Showers (where present) will have been checked for safety and will be in a usable condition.
- Our bathrooms have a minimum expected life span of 30 years based on the quality of the materials we use; this date will be reviewed upon the completion of our stock condition surveys which are conducted every 5 years.

6.7 WC

- All sanitary ware will be free from major cracks and chips, stains, defects and secure with flush handle and seat present and in good working order.

6.8 Flooring

- Waterproof floor covering will be provided in the kitchen, bathroom and WC and will be secure and free from significant marks and tears.
- All flooring areas will be free from trips and hazards (such as nails or raised boards)

6.9 Internal Doors and Stairs

- All internal doors and stairs will be in a safe and usable condition. Any stairs in the property will have at least a single banister rail that will run the length of the stairs.

6.10 Internal Walls and Ceilings

- All walls and ceilings will be free from any damage which may be a safety hazard and will be in a suitable condition for decoration.
- Any polystyrene tiles will be removed, and the area will be made good.

6.11 Glazing

- Any low-level glass or glass indoors will be fitted with safety glass or protected and free from cracks.

6.12 Windows

- All windows will be in good working order and capable of opening and securely shutting.

6.13 Decorative Standards

- We may provide you based on the decorative condition with decoration vouchers so you can decorate your home in the way you would like to.
- All internal decorations will be clean and free from significant marks with finishes in good condition ready for decoration.
- We will not remove existing wallpaper, if you decide to remove the wallpaper yourself you will be responsible for making good following removal.

6.14 Cleaning

- The property, including all cupboards, loft space and gardens (where applicable) will be cleared of rubbish and debris.
- All sheds and outbuildings will be cleared of rubbish and debris.

- All flooring areas will be clean. All paintwork, cupboards, worktops, and surfaces will be cleaned
- All sanitary ware including sinks, wash hand basins, baths and the WC will be cleaned and free from limescale.
- The entrance and main access paths to the property will be accessible.

6.15 Keys

- You will be provided with a minimum of one set of keys for all main doors, sheds, and window locks where present.

6.16 Door entry system

- The entry-phone system (where present) will be fully operational, and you will be provided with a minimum of two entry keys / fobs. If you need additional keys/fobs, please contact 01628 543101. We will charge £20 for additional communal keys / fobs.

6.17 Sheltered Housing / alert systems

- Where an alert system is installed, a single pendant alarm is provided. Additional pendants can be provided at a cost.
- We will ensure there are light bulbs working in all hard-to-reach areas.

6.18 Furniture, Fixtures, Fittings & White goods

Please note that we let our properties unfurnished. This means that you will need to supply your own white goods, furniture, flooring, curtains, poles and other soft furnishings. Please contact our welfare & benefits team if you need help with the essential costs involved in moving into your new home.

7 End of Tenancy - when a tenancy ends, the property must be returned to a clean and good condition.

7.1 When notice is received for termination of the tenancy

Housing Solutions will carry out a pre-termination inspection while the outgoing resident are still in occupation and in accordance with the New Home Standard and Checklist. We will make outgoing residents aware of their responsibilities to:

- Undertake any repairs that are their responsibility and reinstate any alterations they have made
- Vacate the property by the agreed termination date
- Remove all furniture, personal belongings and unwanted items by the agreed termination date
- Return all keys including shed, window and communal by termination date
- Leave the property and any garden areas in a clean and tidy condition
- Ensure that any outstanding rent and rechargeable repair charges are paid
- Read any meters and advise utility companies that they are leaving and settle any outstanding debts on the utility meters

7.2 When the tenancy is terminated

The Void Supervisor will carry out an inspection within 1 working day of receiving the keys to:

- Assess the condition of the property left by the outgoing resident with supporting inventory and photographs
- Identify and organise repairs required to meet the new homes standard
- Check the gas and electrics and arrange to conduct any necessary compliance checks
- Assess whether there are any other planned maintenance works that must be carried out before the new tenant moves in
- Identify minor repairs that can be carried out after the new tenant has moved in, aligned to our standard repairs and maintenance policy timescales
- Assess the decorative and cosmetic condition of the property and the need for any redecoration or cleaning works
- Ensure the property meets the Decent Homes Standard
- Arrange a stock condition survey if one has not been completed in the last 5 years
- Complete an Energy Performance Certificate
- Complete a Legionella certificate
- Ensure the minimum SAP rating will be 55 (Band D) before commencing works

8. Legislation

8.1 Housing Solutions will comply with all relevant legislation, regulation and best practice.

9. Equality & Diversity

9.1 Housing Solutions recognises the needs of a diverse population and always acts within the scope of its own Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy and that of the Equality Act 2010. Housing Solutions commit to ensuring all residents enjoy a consistent standard of quality and service under this policy when taking up a tenancy with Housing Solutions.

10. Confidentiality

10.1 Under the Data Protection Act 2018, UK General Data Protection Regulation (UKGDPR) 2021, all personal and sensitive organisational information, however received, is treated as confidential. This includes:

- anything of a personal nature that is not a matter of public record about a resident, client, applicant, staff or board member
- sensitive organisational information

10.2 Housing Solutions employees will ensure that they only involve other agencies and share information where there is a legal basis for processing the information.

11. Review and ongoing monitoring

- 11.1 This policy will be reviewed on a 3 yearly basis or more frequently in response to changes in legislation, regulatory guidance, good practice or changes in other relevant Housing Solutions' policy.
- 11.2 All significant repair matters affecting residents' homes, or their neighbourhood will go before the Service Improvement Team which is formed of mainly residents and the Assistant Director of Property Services. The information collected from the residents' feedback is investigated and analysed by the Business Improvement team to see if this could be done differently or more effectively.
- 11.3 Housing Solutions uses Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) to monitor and benchmark its services and performance against set criteria and standards. KPI's are reviewed annually in line with performance with an assumption that performance will continually improve. Our current KPIs include:
- Rent loss due to voids as a percentage of rent due (GN + HfOP)
 - Average number of days to relet void (GN minor only)
 - Average number of days to relet void (Sheltered minor only)
 - Average working days to complete repair works on a minor void
 - Total cost of void works (GN minor and major, and HfOP)
 - Number of residents satisfied with the condition of the property when moving in.
- 11.4 Housing Solutions reports on KPI's monthly to the Executive Team. Performance is reported quarterly to Board and to Residents via our annual report.
- 11.5 Regular reports will be submitted to the Executive Team and Board detailing performance in relation to commissioning and managing the repairs service. This is to ensure that objectives and targets are being achieved. Housing Solutions will ensure that all repair responsibilities, relating Policies, reporting methods, service standards and all other relevant information is readily available to all its customers in easily readable format.