

**Housing Communities Scrutiny and Overview Panel – 17
September 2025**

**Maintenance and repairs to empty homes and homes
undergoing mutual exchange policy for housing
(Landlord Services) periodic review**

Purpose	For Review and Consideration
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	This report presents an updated policy for the maintenance and repair of empty homes and homes undergoing mutual exchange. Following a scheduled review, the policy has been rewritten to reflect current standards and responsibilities. It sets out how the Council will meet its legal duties for safety, compliance, and essential maintenance across its homes, managed under the Housing Revenue Account. The revised policy is included in Appendix 1.
Recommendation(s)	That Members: Approve a revised Maintenance and Repairs to Empty Homes and Homes undergoing Mutual Exchange Policy.
Reasons for recommendation(s)	The Council must meet legal safety standards in its housing. This policy supports that by making sure empty homes and those involved in mutual exchanges are properly maintained. It helps keep homes safe, warm, and decent, protects the long-term value of Council owned homes, and ensures tenants receive a high-quality service.
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Steve Davies – Housing and Homelessness
Strategic Director(s)	Richard Knott – Housing and Communities
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Introduction and background

1. The Council owns over 5,200 properties and has a legal duty to inspect, maintain, and repair the structure, fixtures in its homes. This includes empty properties, which must be safe, compliant, and ready for occupation. Maintaining these homes properly helps meet statutory safety standards, protects the long-term value of Council owned homes, and ensures new tenants move into homes that are warm, decent, and fit for purpose.
2. This report outlines the Council's core responsibilities for statutory safety, compliance inspections, servicing, and maintenance for empty homes and mutual exchanges. It introduces a revised policy HLSPOL08: Maintenance and Repairs to Empty Homes and Homes Undergoing Mutual Exchange for review and approval, following a scheduled policy review.
3. This policy better reflects the current legislation and expected standards following a comprehensive review of the Council's Empty home processes. There has been a shift in terminology from 'void' to 'empty home' and 'Stock condition Survey' which is now home condition report.
4. The policy introduces a new category of void standards, allowing for more tailored and consistent approach to incorporate the Council's decarbonisation goals. The revised policy also aligns with current service delivery, making sure the Council offers a realistic, transparent and aligned service offer and resources.
5. The Council is committed to providing an effective maintenance service to comply with its statutory responsibilities, including but not limited to the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (as amended) and the Housing Act 2004.
6. The Housing Maintenance Teams, operate under a suite of policies covering the core statutory compliance areas as set out below:-
 - HLSPOL01 Fire Safety
 - HLSPOL02 Gas Safety
 - HLSPOL03 Legionella

- HLSPOL04 Lifts and Lifting Equipment
 - HLSPOL05 Maintenance and Repairs
 - HLSPOL06 Playground and Play Equipment
 - HLSPOL07 Electrical Safety
 - **HLSPOL08 Void and Mutual Exchange**
 - HLSPOL11 Mobility Scooters
 - HLSPOL18 Condensation, Damp, and Mould
7. The Housing Service, introduced a suite of Microsoft 365 digital performance dashboards in April 2023, providing key performance and analytical data across a range of activities which is used to monitor and improve performance.
 8. The council's Housing Statutory Compliance Board, which regularly monitors operational compliance and is made up of senior housing officers and is chaired by the Strategic Director – Housing & Communities and last met on 2 April 2025. Compliance reports are also submitted to the Portfolio Holder on a monthly basis, twice yearly to EMT and the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Panel, and annually to the Council's Cabinet.

Social Housing Regulation Act (2023)

9. The Social Housing Regulation Act 2023 introduces several key measures to ensure compliance and improve the standards of social housing. Here are some of the main principles:-
 1. Safety and Health Standards;
 2. Performance Transparency;
 3. Complaint Handling;
 4. Professional Standards.
10. These measures aim to rebalance the relationship between landlords and tenants, ensuring that tenants feel safe, listened to, informed, and supported in their homes. Compliance with these regulations is crucial for maintaining high standards in social housing.

The Tenant Satisfaction Measures

11. In 2023 the Council submitted its first set of results to the Social Housing Regulator under the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023. The new Consumer Standards, place greater emphasis on tenant safety, and improved tenant services. All registered providers report annually to the Regulator of Social Housing on a wide range of matters, including performance with statutory compliance measures.

Periodic review

12. A periodic review this policy has been undertaken to ensure that it remains fit-for-purpose, sufficiently address the 'Landlord' duties and responsibilities and structured to ensure the Council complies with the requirements of respective legislation covering the Maintenance and Repair of Tenants' homes and empty properties.
13. This policy has been updated to reflect:
 - Changes to job titles and responsibilities.
 - Updates to regulations and building standards.
 - Additions to incorporate relevant definitions.
 - Processes checked by Officers, to confirm adherence to current working practices and procedures.
14. The Policies salient points cover:-
 - i. Legislative and regulatory context;
 - ii. Definitions;
 - iii. Role and responsibilities;
 - iv. Tenant responsibilities;
 - v. Transparency, influence and accountability;
 - vi. Arrangements; and
 - vii. Procedures.

Corporate plan priorities

15. The Council is committed to its legal and moral obligations as a Landlord of social housing. Every Tenant has the right to a warm, secure, safe and decent home and to be treated with dignity and fairness.
16. This policy supports the council's People Priority 3; meeting housing needs and People Priority 2: Empowering our residents to live healthy, connected and fulfilling lives. We are working with our housing tenants to understand their needs and provide high quality service standards in line with the government's new Social Housing Charter and regulatory regime measured through the percentage scores for the 5 safety and compliance management Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs).

Consultation undertaken

17. Consultation has taken place with a wide range of housing officers, including the tenant engagement team, in shaping the revised document. Consideration has been given to national best practice,

Ombudsman spotlight reports, Regulatory Notices, and the learning from corporate complaints.

18. The revised policy draft was presented to the Tenant Involvement Group (TIG) on 7 August 2025 and were positively received. The Tenant Involvement Group receive regular service updates on our approach in dealing with the maintenance and repairs of their homes, and in shaping our tenant guides and content published in Hometalk and on our website.
19. Due to significant changes to the existing Void and Mutual exchange policy, a draft version of HLSPOL08, was sent to TIG for review. Feedback has welcomed changes in terminology. A list of alternative resident friendly words will also be recommended by TIG for future adoption.
20. It is intended that the revised Policy is formally adopted thereafter by Portfolio Holder for Housing and Homelessness Decision.

Financial and resource implications

21. The Housing Revenue Account Budget and Housing Public Sector Capital Expenditure Programme 2025/26 was approved by Council at its meeting on 22nd January 2025. The policy activities proposed are all contained within existing budgets.
22. It was agreed for there to be an enhanced level of capital spending of £18.939 million to deliver an increased level of improvement works, to include fire safety and statutory compliance as well as decarbonisation works and energy efficiency measures.
23. Funding of £2.234 million was approved for 2025/26 cyclical maintenance budget to include resources for the mainstream statutory safety requirements, such as gas and electrical inspections.

Legal implications

24. There are significant risks and implications for the council should the council fail in its compliance duties in any area, including unlimited fines and punitive legal action that can be taken against it.
25. An increased number of complaints may lead to greater intervention by our legal teams and increase in the risk of maladministration findings by the Ombudsman. The Housing Ombudsman can also issue unlimited fines for serious failings or maladministration and will refer wider breaches to the regulator.

26. Poor quality or unmaintained homes increase the risk of tenant harm and property damage.

Risk assessment

27. The policies recognise and acknowledge the serious impact to safety risks and well-being of residents that can arise when statutory regimes are not undertaken:-
- a) **Increased Risk of Accidents and Injuries:** Without proper safety measures, buildings become more prone to accidents, leading to injuries or fatalities.
 - b) **Legal Consequences:** Non-compliance with safety regulations can result in legal actions, fines, and penalties for individuals and the council.
 - c) **Financial Losses:** Accidents and legal issues can lead to substantial financial losses due to compensation claims and increased insurance premiums.
 - d) **Damage to Reputation:** Failure to adhere to safety standards poses the risk of suffering reputational damage, affecting relationships and resident trust in the Council as Landlord.
 - e) **Operational Disruptions:** Safety incidents can cause significant disruptions to operations, leading to delays, decreased productivity and additional cost.
28. The Council foster a collaborative partnership culture to support our tenants and seek to resolve issues raised swiftly. This collaboration supports our tenant engagement strategic priorities of '**listening to our tenants**', '**putting tenants first**', '**knowing our tenants**', and '**how we communicate with tenants**', to ensure everything we aim to achieve is supported by the tenants' voice, and those who will implement the actions.
29. In certain limited circumstances, it will not be possible for the Council to meet the timescales set out within the policies for reasons beyond our control, but we will take all reasonable steps to do so.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

30. The Council will implement data collection and insight measures, making every contact count to assist with informing us of the possible risks to our properties and residents so that we can undertake proactive measures and prevent repeated visits or reparation work.

31. The Council considers climate change as part of the tender evaluation questions for every tender. Allocating a percentage of the awarded scores to contractors who are working towards a reduction in carbon emissions, or through other improvements like recycling of packaging or commitment to reduce paper-based activities.

Equalities implications

32. Some future tenants may be more vulnerable due to age, health, or other factors, and may struggle to identify or report issues with repairs or equipment. The Council's approach to maintaining empty homes considers these needs by ensuring properties are safe, well-prepared, and compliant before re-letting. Our Tenancy Sustainment Team also plays a key role in helping vulnerable tenants settle into their new homes and maintain their health and wellbeing.
33. Where utility supplies are capped for safety reasons in empty properties, the implications are managed under the Council's Gas and electrical Safety Policy. While this policy focuses on compliance, it also ensures that welfare assessments and practical support are in place for incoming tenants affected by such actions, helping to ensure a safe and smooth transition into their new home.

Crime and disorder implications

34. It is important for housing providers to ensure that statutory safety work is carried out to a high standard. Poorly performing landlords can be fined or prosecuted for failing to take the necessary measures to protect tenants.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

35. The council's asset management system holds all records for the council's properties, the responsive repairs system is used to log all repairs, and the dynamic scheduling system plans all appointments for operatives. These systems are in the process of being replaced due to aging software and potential security concerns.
36. Careful consideration of resident data and their individual needs is critical in maintaining high levels of compliance in all areas.
37. The council receives digital compliance records from several external providers, with these managed with data sharing agreements and internal control procedures.

Conclusion

38. The revised policy sets out how the Council will meet its legal responsibilities as a landlord, ensuring homes are safe, well maintained, and compliant. It clearly defines roles and responsibilities and provides a transparent framework that enables residents to understand our approach and hold us to account.
39. The council prioritises the safety of its tenants and its homes, which is reflected in this report, performance measures, TSMs, its corporate plan, and transformation journey.

Appendices:

1. HLSPOL08 Maintenance and Repairs to Empty Homes and Homes undergoing Mutual Exchange Policy

Background Papers:

None.