



# Maintenance and repairs to empty homes and homes undergoing mutual exchange policy

Housing Landlord Services

HLSPOL08

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# 1 Document history

Name of policy	Empty Homes and Homes undergoing Mutual Exchange Policy
Document ref	HLSPOL08
Purpose of policy	<p>New Forest District Council is committed to providing an effective maintenance service in order to comply with its statutory responsibilities, to ensure high levels of resident satisfaction and to protect the value of its homes. This policy details the maintenance and repair arrangements covering empty homes and those properties undergoing mutual exchange owned by the Council.</p> <p>Gas safety, Electrical safety, Condensation, Damp, and Mould and general Maintenance and Repairs are not covered by this policy. Separate policies covering these respective areas are in place to support this policy.</p>
Policy applies to	This policy and the subsequent arrangements apply to all directly and indirectly employed housing staff within New Forest District Council and, where appropriate, tenants, contractors, and members of the public.
Lead officer	Sophie Tuffin – Service Manager
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Version control	<p>V1.0 1 November 2019</p> <p>V1.1 30 June 2025</p>
Review period	At least every three years from date of issue or because of legislative, organisational change or an incident investigation.
Update overview	June 2025, periodic review, update to structure of service arrangements, roles and responsibilities, updated into new policy template.

## 2 Introduction

- 2.1 This policy details the arrangements for the statutory inspections thereof and the repair, condition and safety standards of empty properties (commonly called 'Voids') and tenancy transfers resulting from mutual exchange to properties owned by the Council prior to letting. It also details the arrangements to reduce the risk of vandalism, theft, flood and arson, as far as reasonably practicable to properties whilst empty.
- 2.2 The Council is responsible for the maintenance, repair and replacement of the structure and common parts of its properties as set out in the Tenancy Agreement.
- 2.3 The Council will ensure that the management and maintenance activities of empty properties reflects the following overall principles:-
- providing a flexible, customer-oriented empty property management and maintenance service that gives priority to the safety, comfort and condition of properties;
  - take all reasonable steps to protect empty properties from the risk of vandalism, theft, flood and arson;
  - ensuring empty properties are turned around as quickly as possible to minimise rent loss and provide homes to those most in need;
  - repairing and maintaining the empty properties to the Decent Homes Standard;
  - meeting the Council's legal and contractual obligations;
  - ensuring that prior to letting, empty properties meet the safety, performance and quality standards set by the Council;
  - ensuring the services provided are cost effective and obtaining the best value for residents;
  - ensuring the principles of health and safety are central to working procedures and practices;

- maximising economic benefits where possible by creating employment and training opportunities in maintenance related work and by purchasing goods and services locally;
- maximising opportunities for resident involvement in determining the quality of the services delivered;
- measuring and monitoring customer satisfaction to continuously improve services.

## 3 Legislative and regulatory context

- 3.1 In addition to complying with the terms of the Tenancy Agreement, the Council will ensure that it complies with best practice, relevant policy and statute when repairing and maintaining its properties.

### **The Building Safety Act 2022**

- 3.2 Introduces sweeping reforms to improve the safety of buildings. It aims to ensure that residents are safer in their homes and that those responsible for building safety are held accountable.

The Act created three new bodies to provide effective oversight of the new regime: the Building Safety Regulator, the National Regulator of Construction Products, and the New Homes Ombudsman.

### **The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023**

- 3.3 The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 makes provision about the regulation of social housing; about the terms of approved schemes for the investigation of housing complaints; about the powers and duties of a housing ombudsman appointed under an approved scheme; about hazards affecting social housing; and for connected purposes.

### **Housing Health and Safety Rating System**

- 3.4 The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) introduced by The Housing Act 2004 is a risk-based evaluation tool to help landlords identify and protect against potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in dwellings.

### **Other Legislation, Approved Codes of Practice and Guidance Notes**

- 3.5 Other legislation, approved codes of practice and guidance notes relating to Landlord responsibilities, but which is not exhaustive:-
- a) The Building Act 1984;
  - b) Section 92 Housing Act 1985;
  - c) Section 15 Housing act 1988;
  - d) The Localism Act 2011;
  - e) The Building Regulations 2010 (as amended);

- f) BS 7671:2018 Requirements for Electrical Installations – IET Wiring Regulations (18<sup>th</sup> Edition);
- g) Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970;
- h) Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012;
- i) Defective Premises Act 1972;
- j) Electrical Equipment (Safety) Regulations 2016;
- k) Environmental Protection Act 1990;
- l) Equality Act 2010;
- m) Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 (as amended);
- n) The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) Regulations 2005;
- o) The Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 (as amended by the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018);
- p) The Leasehold Reform, Housing and Development Act 1993;
- q) The Secure Tenants of Local Authorities (Compensation for Improvements) Regulations 1994;
- r) The Smoke and carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022;
- s) Fire Safety Act 2021;
- t) CDM Regulations 2015;
- u) Homes (Fitness for Habitation) Act 2018;
- v) General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016

#### Approved Codes of Practices

- a) Safety in the installation and use of gas systems and appliances (Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 (as amended))

#### Guidance Notes

- a) Housing Health and Safety Rating System Operating System Guidance - February 2006;

b) A Decent Home: Definition and guidance for implementation – June 2006

3.6 The policy considers recommendations of the Housing Ombudsman Spotlight Report on Damp and Mould and refers residents to the Councils Condensation, Damp, and Mould Policy.

## 4 Definitions

### Competent Person

4.1 Person(s) whilst not required to process specific academic qualifications but:-

- understand the relevant housing 'Landlord' legislation and responsibilities;
- have appropriate training, knowledge and experience in the principles of property maintenance;
- understand the hazards, risk and other relevant factors with occupants at special risk within the premises;
- if carrying out property safety or maintenance surveys, have appropriate training/experience in this field;
- if carrying out property maintenance activities, have appropriate training/experience in their related trade field.

### Duty Holder

4.2 The duty holder is legally responsible for the safety of employees and any relevant persons occupying or using the premises under its control. The duty holder may delegate their responsibilities to another competent person(s) on larger property portfolios.

### Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)

4.3 An Energy Performance Certificate shows how energy-efficient a property is. The document includes estimated energy costs, as well as a summary of the home's energy performance-related features.

4.4 The property will be given an energy-efficiency grade between A and G, with A being the most energy-efficient - and G being the worst.

### Housing Health and Safety Rating System

4.5 The housing health and safety rating system introduced by The Housing Act 2004 is a risk-based evaluation tool to help landlords identify and protect against potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in dwellings. Abbreviated to HHSRS.

### **Inspection**

4.6 A visual inspection of a properties condition to establish whether any remedial works are necessary.

### **Landlord**

4.7 The owner of property (such as houses, land or flats) that is leased or rented to another.

### **Notional Life**

4.8 The expected life expectancy of a component, fitting, product or repair.

### **Home condition report**

4.9 A survey to collect information relating to the Government's Decent Home Standard, and about the property in general. An assessment of the main internal and external parts of the property, which identifies when they are likely to require replacing, gathering information on energy efficiency and conducting asbestos management survey on homes built before 2000.

### **Tenant**

4.10 A person who occupies land or property rented from a landlord.

## 5 Roles and responsibilities

- 5.1 The Council will ensure that all Council housing staff are fully aware of their role in meeting the Council's responsibilities as 'Landlord'.

### Chief Executive

- 5.2 Responsibility for complying with duties as 'Landlord' rests with the 'responsible person'. The 'responsible person' as Landlord is represented by the Chief Executive together with the Strategic Directors who collectively form the 'Executive Management Team'.

### Strategic Director Housing and Communities

- 5.3 The Strategic Director Housing and Communities has overall strategic responsibility for the Council's approach to its empty homes and is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the Housing Act 2004, Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 and supporting Regulations are applied and implemented and to nominate one or more persons to act on their behalf to discharge their responsibilities.
- 5.4 The Strategic Director Housing and Communities also acts as the registered Lead Officer for health and safety with the Regulator of Social Housing.

### Assistant Director - Housing

- 5.5 Nominated Assistant Director Housing to support the Strategic Director Housing and Communities in delivering the Council's strategic housing priorities and approach in maintaining its social housing assets controlled by the Council and is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the Housing Act 2004, Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 and supporting Regulations are applied and implemented.

### Service Manager – Housing Maintenance Programmes and Servicing

- 5.6 Operational responsibility for the overall effectiveness of the Housing Landlord Services including the Empty Homes and Mutual Exchange Policy, arrangements and action plan for social housing controlled by the Council.

### **Housing Service Managers**

- 5.7 Responsible for the delivery of services within their respective areas that impact on the overall effectiveness of the Housing Landlord Services including the Empty Homes and Mutual Exchange Policy and will:-
- support and assist the Service Manager for Housing Maintenance Programmes and Servicing in discharging and undertaking their duties and respond to matters within their respective service areas.

### **Housing Decarbonisation and Programme Manager**

- 5.8 Responsible for leading on housing asset management, maintenance and decarbonisation strategy. Their role also includes responsibilities for developing planned and cyclical maintenance programmes and maintaining property condition data.

### **Gas and Electrical Manager**

- 5.9 Responsible for ensuring the Council's compliance with its landlord statutory duties and obligations, reporting directly to the Service Manager - Housing Maintenance Programmes and Servicing.

### **Maintenance Delivery Manager**

- 5.10 Responsible for the day-to-day management and delivery of responsive repairs and maintenance activities, which are the responsibility of the Council in accordance with detailed arrangements and policy.
- 5.11 Where contractors are being managed, regular monitoring is to be included to ensure risks that could cause harm or injury have been considered and adequate precautions are in place to minimise risk to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.

### **Maintenance Delivery Planning Supervisor**

- 5.12 Responsible for the detailed arrangements necessary in ensuring that empty homes repairs and maintenance activities and statutory inspections, which are the responsibility of the Council are acted upon in a timely manner to minimise rent loss and that empty properties meet the quality standards set out in this policy.

### **Repairs and Void Supervisors**

- 5.13 Responsible for the day-to-day supervision and delivery of empty home activities, which are the responsibility of the Council.
- 5.14 Where contractors are being managed, regular monitoring is to be included to ensure risks that could cause harm or injury have been considered and adequate precautions are in place to minimise risk to as low a level as is reasonably practicable

### **Housing Tenancy Sustainment and Operations Manager**

- 5.15 Responsible for the detailed arrangements necessary in ensuring that repair and maintenance activities, relating to empty homes are acted upon in a timely manner within their respective areas of control.
- 5.16 Where contractors are being managed, regular monitoring is to be included to ensure risks that could cause harm or injury have been considered and adequate precautions are in place to minimise risk to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.

### **Corporate Health and Safety Team**

- 5.17 Responsible for guidance and advice in respect of health and safety to all Council owned housing and will:-
- Conduct audits to ensure that the provisions within this Policy are being enforced to the standard required;
  - Investigate accidents and near miss incidents and introduce controls to reduce the risk of such incidents recurring, to reduce financial loss and to improve overall adherence to health and safety legislation.

### **Employees**

- 5.18 All employees of New Forest District Council, irrespective of their position, has a responsibility for safety and will:-
- take reasonable care for their own Health and Safety and that of other persons who may be adversely affected by activities relating to the repair and maintenance of the Council's homes including members of the public, tenants, visitors, and contractors;

- co-operate with the Council and its managers to enable compliance with this policy and the legal duties it holds;
- remove or reduce hazards that, in their opinion, may present a serious risk to health, of themselves or others;
- report hazards that have been removed or that may present a serious risk to users;
- report concerns where vulnerable residents may be at additional risk.

## 6 Termination

6.1 The Council will deem a property to be empty in the following circumstances, where:-

- the tenant has formally terminated the tenancy by written notice;
- the tenant has died and there is no successor;
- the tenant has abandoned the tenancy, where the appropriate action has been taken to end the tenancy;
- the tenant has been evicted, following court action for possession.

6.2 Upon giving the required notice to quit as per the tenancy agreement, tenancies terminate on a Sunday. Tenants or their representatives are required to deliver all sets of keys to vacated properties to their local housing office by midday on Monday. Where keys are delivered late, unless there are exceptional circumstances, tenants may incur a further week's rent. This decision is at the discretion of the Tenancy Sustainment Manager.

## 7 Empty homes processing

### Objectives and processing principles

- 7.1 Empty Homes (commonly known as voids) will be processed to ensure that properties are turned around at the earliest opportunity, rent loss is minimised and are available to let to a new tenant at an acceptable standard meeting the Council's legal obligations and the terms of the new tenancy.
- 7.2 There are several external factors that may influence the length of time a property lies empty:-
- Moving from temporary or emergency accommodation;
  - Lengthy repair periods (where major repairs are being carried out or if contractors require to order goods);
  - Vandalism or anti-social behaviour.
- 7.3 Five key principles will be applied when processing empty properties these are set out below:-

#### Statutory

To comply with all regulations and legislation as a social housing provider.

#### Safe

Properties will be safe and free of hazards arising from faults or deficiencies which could cause harm.

#### Functional

Properties will be functional for the enjoyment of the incoming tenant:

#### Flexible

Where items left by the previous tenant and found to be in good serviceable condition, and where following inspection are found to be safe for reuse shall be offered to the incoming tenant.

#### Clean and Clear

Properties will be clear of waste and to a good standard of cleanliness prior to letting.

### **Pre-termination inspection**

- 7.4 The Council will carry out inspections of properties at the earliest opportunity. By appointment with the outgoing tenant, a pre-termination inspection may be carried out within 7 working days of a termination notification by the Maintenance Delivery Planning Supervisor or Void Supervisor and where necessary a Tenancy Sustainment Officer or Tenancy Sustainment Assistant to discuss the procedures relating to vacation which must be clearly advised both verbally and in writing.
- 7.5 The pre-termination inspection shall determine the overall condition and whether the property can be re-let following statutory inspections or requires repairs to bring it up to the Council's standard. The pre-termination inspection shall categorise the properties likely 'Ready to Let' status based on the volume of necessary work. Any repairs deemed to fall outside normal wear, and tear shall be the responsibility of the outgoing tenant, and if not completed or not completed to a standard which the Council is satisfied will be recharged in accordance with the Council's 'Chargeable Repairs' section of the Housing Landlord Services Maintenance and Repairs Policy.
- 7.6 The details of the pre-termination inspection shall be clearly recorded, and any chargeable repairs noted and countersigned by the outgoing tenant.

### **Tenant required works and repairs**

- 7.7 The tenant will be advised of repairs they must carry out before they leave where responsibility falls to them under their tenancy agreement, with details being confirmed to them in writing.

## Property condition on departure

- 7.8 Tenants are required to remove all personal belongings, including any waste or debris, before vacating the property. Failure to do so may result in the full cost of removal being recharged to the outgoing tenant. Tenants will be liable for any damage caused to the property, including its distributions systems and associated utilities within the property boundary, for example heating pipework and electrical wiring. In such cases, the full cost of the repair and any necessary works or removals will be recharged to the outgoing tenant. This supports the upkeep of our homes and ensure properties are maintained to a good standard for future occupants.
- 7.9 The property must be left in a clean and tidy condition. If additional cleaning is necessary, the full cost of a professional deep clean may be recharged.
- 7.10 Internal decorations must be returned to a neutral or moderate colour scheme prior to departure.
- 7.11 Any alterations made to the property must be reinstated to their original condition unless prior written agreement has been obtained from the Council. Failure to comply may result in the full cost of restoration being recharged.

## Provisional allocation

- 7.12 The council operates a choice based letting system, a method to allocate social housing in a more transparent and user-driven way. To ensure that allocations are made giving full consideration of the customer needs, the property and any issues in the local area. Prospective tenants will be selected in accordance with the council's Allocations Policy.
- 7.13 Once the required works have been agreed and the prospective tenant has accepted the property, a tenancy start date will be confirmed. When setting this date, consideration will be given to the scope of the work required and any specific needs of the tenant. Prospective tenants will be informed of the agreed date and notified in advance if delays are anticipated—for example, if additional repairs are identified during the course of the works.

- 7.14 The Council will make every effort to complete all essential repairs to a satisfactory standard. In some cases where external gardening works, fencing or concrete slab removal can be safely completed post tenancy commencement, properties will continue to be offered to the prospective tenant who will be invited to sign the Tenancy Agreement. The terms and conditions of the agreement will be clearly explained to ensure the tenant fully understands both their responsibilities and those of the landlord.
- 7.15 The new tenant will also be provided with appropriate advice about:-
- a) paying their rent.
  - b) applying for benefits, if required.
  - c) setting up utilities
  - d) reporting any repairs.
  - e) fire safety
  - f) use of heating and hot water provision

### **Private sector leased (PSL)**

- 7.16 PSL are properties that are privately owned but leased by the Council to provide temporary accommodation, often for people who are homeless or in urgent housing need. While ownership remains with the private owner, the Council is responsible for limited property maintenance of a low value during the lease.
- 7.17 The Council will work with private sector landlords to resolve major defects, repairs and capital component replacement as they arise.
- 7.18 If a property is being returned to the private owner, the Council will complete work, to return it to the condition presented at the start of the let.
- 7.19 If being relet the council will discuss repairs with the private owners ensuring it complies with the Council's empty homes standard.

### **Empty property inspection**

- 7.20 Upon receipt of the keys, the locks to the property will be changed to a temporary key. A full empty property inspection will be carried out to determine the overall condition of the property following vacation and whether any repairs deemed to fall outside normal wear and tear, and the responsibility of the tenant have been actioned or require recharge. The properties likely 'Ready to Let' status will be reviewed and confirmed.
- 7.21 The empty property inspection will confirm the schedule of works required prior to commencement and meter readings will be taken for gas, electricity and water utilities and provided to the current utility providers. All Schedules are returned within 24 hours.

### **Adaptations**

- 7.22 Some adaptations may be completed before the tenancy commences, these will be dependent on the individual needs and must be specified in an Occupational Therapist report.
- 7.23 Adaptations left by the outgoing tenant will be where possible serviced and left for the incoming tenant. Mechanical equipment like stair lifts, through floor lifts or warden call systems, will be assessed for age and condition and removed where there is a risk of failure.

### **Asbestos survey**

- 7.24 Prior to any works being undertaken the council will ensure that there is an up-to-date asbestos survey for the property considered appropriate for the scope of repairs being carried out.

### **Energy performance certification (EPC)**

- 7.25 All homes will be let with an in-date EPC. Where this is missing or expired, a registered Domestic Energy Assessor will undertake an inspection as soon as keys are available.

- 7.26 In support of the Council's Greener Housing Strategy, the Council is committed to improving the energy efficiency of its housing . Aiming to exceed the national Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) By targeting Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) band C by 2028. This proactive approach demonstrates a commitment to sustainability, reducing carbon emissions, and ensuring warmer, healthier homes for our tenants.
- 7.27 Wherever feasible we will retrofit existing homes to meet EPC band C, prioritising a 'fabric first' approach to improve the building envelope. Where appropriate, The Council, will also integrate renewable technologies to boost energy performance and support net-zero ambitions, utilising government funding where available.

### Utility management

- 7.28 Meter readings for gas, electricity, and water will be taken and submitted to TSM Services, who complete empty homes energy management services to include:-
- smart meter installation;
  - electric key/gas card resets;
  - remote top-ups;
  - isolation switch installation;
  - consolidated billing;
  - on-site training.
- 7.29 The Council will work with a third-party energy management service, to aid in the management of debt on utility meters which can contribute to extended relet periods.
- 7.30 Pay as you go (PAYG) meters will be transferred into the Council's name, once operational both gas and electrical meters will be loaded with credit ready for work to start. At the start of the new tenancy, the meter position will be zero for both standing charges and available credit, ready for the new tenant.

### **Quality assurance**

7.31 A full quality assurance inspection will be conducted upon completion of all works. Any identified shortfalls in standards will be addressed as a high priority to ensure the property meets re-letting standards.

## 8 Security and access

### Termination without notice

8.1 Termination of tenancy without prior notice may occur under the following circumstances:-

#### Keys returned without notice

If keys are returned without prior communication, the tenancy will be considered terminated. The notice period will begin from the date the keys are received, and the tenant will remain liable for rent during this period. Where possible, access should be arranged to carry out pre-termination inspections and repairs.

#### Anonymous key return

If keys are returned anonymously, the property will be treated as abandoned in line with the Council's Tenancy Policy.

#### Death of a Tenant

*With No Successor:* The Council will work sensitively with next of kin to arrange property clearance and assess whether to recover related losses.

*With No Next of Kin:* The Council will coordinate with third parties to manage and dispose of personal belongings. In complex cases, a full inventory with photographs will be created, pending approval for disposal.

#### Repossession

In cases of repossession, the tenancy ends on the date specified by the court or through the abandonment procedure. The Council will follow the Empty homes Management Policy, including access arrangements, inventory, storage of belongings, and recharges where applicable.

### Property security

8.2 New locks will be installed on all empty properties. Keys will be securely delivered to a local Council office for collection by the incoming tenant.

- 8.3 The need for securing empty properties will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, considering property type, location, and risk of vandalism, theft, or squatting. While security is essential, care will be taken to avoid creating a negative perception for existing or prospective tenants.

## 9 Empty property considerations

### Major component replacement

- 9.1 The Council will review the lifecycle dates of planned replacement works such as kitchens, bathrooms, and heating systems against Decent Homes and HHSRS (Housing Health and Safety Rating System) standards. The Council will consider current smoke alarm provision ensuring the minimum category LD3 standard is met and potential for upgrading to LD2 standard. This assessment will determine whether components should be replaced while the property is empty, ensuring compliance and improving living standards before re-letting.
- 9.2 The council may also delay the completion of some works if the property is known to be included on a planned programme in the next 12 months.

### Sub-contracted work

- 9.3 To support the capacity of its direct trade workforce and ensure efficient turnaround of empty homes, the Council will engage external contractors to help manage workflow and minimise the duration that homes remain unoccupied.

### Pests and infestation

- 9.4 Where there is evidence of pests and/or infestation, pest control measures will be taken, and any pest control work carried out in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act 2006, Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996 and Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- 9.5 The property will be inspected for structural defects, holes through walls and-the-like and any such defect repaired and/or made good prior to letting.

### Seasonal considerations

- 9.6 The need to take action to protect empty properties in the winter varies enormously between property types, ages and different locations. At the empty property inspection, the decision will be made whether to mitigate frost and flood risk through:-
  - Regular inspections;

- Draining down of any water supply pipes and water heating systems;
- Timed, low-level heating.

9.7 Homes empty for 30 days or longer will be reported to the Council's Insurance Risk Officer to assess and support the identification of risk reducing measures of long-standing empty homes.

### **Legionella**

9.8 Where single dwelling properties have been unoccupied for one week or more, the water system will be thoroughly flushed on a weekly basis with the minimum release of aerosol i.e. removal of any shower heads prior to flushing and prior to occupation. These inspections will be logged, confirming the date, time and person completing each flush. Records will be held by the tenancy sustainment team and made accessible to the Gas and Electrical Manager responsible for legionella.

9.9 Where dwellings have been unoccupied for 2 months or more and have not received regular flushing. Risk will be managed by chemically disinfecting the system prior to occupation (where systems permit). This should take place no more than one week from the proposed occupation date and be undertaken by a reputable contractor. These inspections will be logged, confirming the date, time and person completing each flush, and records will be held by the tenancy sustainment team and made accessible to the Gas and Electrical Manager responsible for legionella.

### **Home condition report**

9.10 The Council will take advantage of the opportunity to undertake a home condition report of a property whilst it is empty, where the Council holds no housing data or where the last inspection undertaken exceeds 5 years or is due to be inspected within the next 12 months.

### **Relet work inspection**

9.11 A quality assurance inspection will be carried out upon completion of all work and any shortfalls in standards identified will be remedied as high priority.

9.12 Meter Readings managed by TSM energy services, will transfer to the incoming tenants.

9.13 New locks will be fitted, and keys delivered to the local housing office ready for collection by the incoming tenant.

### **Completion**

9.14 The Maintenance Delivery Planning Supervisor will ensure communication with the Tenant Sustainment Manager that all empty home records are recorded on the Councils tenancy/property management database, with the date the property is available.

## 10 Ready to let priority

10.1 The Housing Maintenance Service categorise the types of empty homes, expected time scales for the completion of repairs and is reflected in the Councils monitoring. 'Ready to Let' target shall be categorised as:-

**Category A** - Empty homes which are handed back to the council in good condition, requiring minor repairs, which can be relet within 10 working days.

**Category B** - Empty homes handed back in average condition, these are serviceable and functional but require repairs not exceeding 15 working days.

**Category C** - Empty homes handed back in poor condition, requiring significant repair. Time scales are defined by the complexity of work required.

**Category S** - Empty homes handed back, utilising sub-contracted services of local contractors

<b>Category</b>			
<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>S</b>
Good condition	Average condition	Poor condition	Sub-contracted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Statutory inspections;</li> <li>▪ Serviceable and functional;</li> <li>▪ Minor repairs (1-5 days);</li> <li>▪ Clean &amp; Secure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Statutory inspections;</li> <li>▪ Serviceable and functional;</li> <li>▪ Repair schedule (5-10 days);</li> <li>▪ Clean &amp; Secure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Statutory inspections;</li> <li>▪ Non-serviceable or functional;</li> <li>▪ Significant repair schedule;</li> <li>▪ Clean &amp; Secure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Statutory inspections;</li> <li>▪ Serviceable and functional;</li> <li>▪ Repair schedule (20 days);</li> <li>▪ Clean &amp; Secure</li> </ul>
10 working days Or less	15 working days Or less	Defined by Volume of Works  (as soon as reasonably practicable)	20 working days Or less

# 11 Empty property letting standard

- 11.1 Having an empty property letting standard is essential in ensuring a consistent approach is met efficiency of repairs and statutory inspection turnaround, homes are safe, warm and secure, and tenant satisfaction when re-letting properties to achieve a consistent standard.
- 11.2 The Council will provide homes which shall be serviceable, in good working order and free from serious defect. The Housing Maintenance Service shall carry out all statutory obligations in respect of empty property management. Details on individual property component letting standards, can be found at annex 1.

## **Kitchen and bathroom**

- 11.3 Will meet decent homes standard. Be clean, safe and functional with a minimum life expectancy of 12 months or more at the time of letting. Where a kitchen is due to be replaced within 12 months, the Council will decide based on condition to replace while empty or add to a capital replacement programme.

## **Electrical installation**

- 11.4 The Council will take advantage of the opportunity whilst a property is empty, to ensure that the electrical installation meets the minimum design and components standard expected for modern living.

## **Heating and hot water**

- 11.5 A primary source of heating and hot water will be provided which is both safe and reliable. Each habitable room will be provided with a fixed form of heating and be able to maintain a minimum indoor temperature of 18 °C. Hot water provision will provide adequate hot water suitable for washing and bathing.
- 11.6 Heating and hot water systems will be safe and functional with a minimum life expectancy of 12 months or more at the time of letting. Where a heating system is due to be replaced within 12 months, the Council will decide based on condition to replace while empty or add to a capital replacement programme.

### **Fossil fuel – Secondary heating**

11.7 The council will remove secondary sources of heat and associated open flued appliances due to the risks to residents, this includes the removal of gas fires, solid fuel and multi fuel burning appliances and open fires, which supports the council's climate change and decarbonisation targets.

### **Glazing**

11.8 Will be safe and functional with a minimum life expectancy of 12 months or more at the time of letting. Where windows are due to be replaced within 12 months, the Council will decide based on condition to replace while empty or add to a capital replacement programme.

### **Gardens**

11.9 Gardens will be clear and left in seasonal condition. Ground floor flats will be returned to their intended communal condition, with pots, benches, fencing and outbuildings removed. Pedestrian pathways from front gate to front door and rear door to brick built shed (where applicable) will be maintained and free from trip hazards.

### **Fire doors**

11.10 Fire rated front doors and where applicable internal doors within houses and flats, will be visually inspected for integrity and requirements to meet the minimum fire door standards. In circumstances where it is not possible to determine if the required standard has been met, the door(s) will be replaced prior to letting.

### **Occupancy**

11.11 After a new tenant has accepted the offer of a property, keys will only be provided upon completion of the tenancy agreement and all appropriate paperwork.

11.12 The new tenant will be provided with a resident information pack, providing residents with clear, timely, and accessible information as they move into their new home.

## **Welcome Packs will include key information**

11.12 A welcome pack will be provided to all new tenants, which will include key information:-

- Utility setup guidance (including meter readings);
- Key Contact information for repair reporting and tenancy sustainment team;
- Emergency Contact details;
- Copy of gas safety certificate;
- Copy of electrical installation condition report;
- Copy of energy performance certificate;
- Operating instructions for heating system, together with other appliances, as appropriate;
- Asbestos guidance;
- Waste Collection and local services.

## **Tenant Recharges**

11.13 Where damage has occurred which is not considered fair wear and tear, the Council will recharge the tenant the cost of damage. Recharges will be communicated to outgoing tenants at the earliest opportunity. Pictures identifying the damage will be taken and the tenant will be notified of damage and subsequent charge.

## 12 Measuring quality and performance

- 12.1 The Council is dedicated to delivering its repairs and maintenance services to a consistently high standard, with a strong focus on customer satisfaction. To support this commitment, service performance will be regularly monitored and managed using a variety of evaluation methods and performance monitoring dashboards.
- 12.2 Key measures in relation to empty property management are:-
- a) Number of empty properties;
  - b) Average re-let time Category A – S;
  - e) Average empty property costs. Category A – S.
- 12.3 Performance information and benchmarking data will be reported to the council via the governance and scrutiny framework arrangements, including but not limited to: regular portfolio holder briefings, housing statutory compliance board, tenant involvement group and twice yearly through the publication of the Housing Interim and Annual Compliance reporting regime.
- 12.4 Tenants will be given the opportunity to provide feedback relating to the empty property management and allocations process by completing a New Tenancy Survey. Feedback and satisfaction will be monitored with resident comments used to improve service delivery.
- 12.5 The Maintenance Delivery Planning Supervisor will oversee re-let work inspections, which will form the basis of key performance measurements for subcontractors and the Council's own direct trade workforce to monitor quality. Recorded as part of quarterly contract meetings.

## 13 Homes undergoing mutual exchange

- 13.1 This section relates to the repairs, maintenance and compliance effecting eligible tenants who have a legal right to assignment by way of exchange to swap homes with each other, which is commonly referred to as a Mutual Exchange. Supporting the Council to make the best use of its housing to achieve high levels of customer service offered through mutual exchanges.
- 13.2 When tenants apply for a mutual exchange, they are agreeing to swap homes with another tenant. Unlike standard empty homes, mutual exchanges are tenant led. The incoming tenant must agree to accept the condition of the property as seen. The Council will remain responsible for all landlord obligations but will not carry out any improvements or internal decorating unless this work is already scheduled.

### Landlord responsibilities

- 13.3 We will ensure compliance with housing legislation, the Regulator of Social Housing's consumer standards and ensure that mutual exchanges are actioned within the guidelines and time periods specified.
- 13.4 We will subscribe to an internet-based mutual exchange service **HomeSwapper** giving residents free access to view other properties and advertise their own.
- 13.5 We will work with other social housing providers to ensure the smooth process of the exchange.
- 13.6 We will effectively communicate with residents to provide help and guidance ensuring the exchange is appropriate and people understand the implications of an exchange, their rights and their responsibilities.

### Tenant responsibilities

- 13.7 Incoming tenants agree to accept the property in its existing condition at the time of exchange. It is their responsibility to carry out their own inspection of the property prior to the exchange and to make any necessary arrangements or agreements regarding its condition directly with the outgoing tenant.

13.8 After the exchange has taken place, incoming tenants will assume responsibility for any damage or alterations made by the outgoing tenant, as well as for any outstanding repairs deemed to be the tenant's responsibility. This includes missing doors, flooring, garden condition and structures. It also includes tasks such as internal decoration, minor repairs, cleaning, and the removal of any waste or refuse left at the property.

### **Pre-inspection**

13.9 Prior to a mutual exchange, an inspection of the property will be undertaken to identify repairs required, health and safety issues, damage caused by or alterations made to the property by the existing tenant, confirming the property is in a reasonable condition. Where the property is found to be in poor condition or poses a health and safety risk the exchange may be suspended until items are resolved.

### **Data protection**

13.10 Tenant permission is required for the Council to share information with the other landlord. The tenant gives consent for this when they sign the mutual exchange application form.

### **Statutory inspections**

13.11 The Council will ensure the property is safe and legally compliant at the point of exchange. We will ensure our property has valid gas and electrical certificates before approving the exchange and will arrange for the necessary checks to obtain them. Mutual exchanges will not proceed until these inspections have been completed and valid gas and electrical certificates are obtained. We will:-

- Complete a Landlord Gas Safety Record (LGSR);
- Complete an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR);
- Compliance with fire safety regulations;
- Test the safe working of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms;
- Compliance records will be updated in the Council Asset management system;

- A new Landlord Gas Safety Record will be completed once the existing tenant has vacated and before the new tenant moves in;
- Homes with a valid Electrical Installation Condition Report are required to allow the Council access to complete a new report within 5 days of a mutual exchange. Homes without an in-date report will not be permitted to complete a mutual exchange.

### **Home condition report**

13.12 We will carry out an inspection of the property to assess its condition, identify any necessary repairs, and note any damage or alterations that have been made. Both the outgoing and incoming tenants will be informed of any repairs they are responsible for, as well as any works that will need to be completed after the exchange has taken place.

13.13 The Council will endeavour to use this opportunity of access to be transparent with residents involved in mutual exchanges and make the most of every opportunity to identify and address damp and mould, including visits and periods where homes are empty.

### **Repair responsibilities during mutual exchange**

13.14 We will retain responsibility for all repairs that fall under our obligations as the landlord. Any such repairs reported to us will be completed prior to the exchange, unless our surveyor advises in their report that the work can reasonably be carried out after the new tenant has moved in.

13.15 The outgoing tenant will be required to rectify any damage, neglect, or unauthorised alterations caused by themselves, members of their household, or visitors. They must also complete any repairs deemed to be their responsibility before the exchange takes place.

13.16 In exceptional circumstances such as where there is a health and safety concern or a category 1 hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), we may carry out repairs that are not our responsibility. In such cases, the full cost of the work will be recharged to the outgoing tenant. in accordance with the Council's 'Chargeable Repairs' section of the Housing Landlord Services Maintenance and Repairs Policy. The property must be left clean and free of personal belongings, rubbish and debris.

# 14 Appendices

# Annex 1 Letting component standards

Component	Standard	Action
<b>Utilities</b>		
Water	External stop tap functional. Internal isolation valves functional.	Report to Utility provider.  Repair.
Gas	Meter in place & functional. Pre-payment card in place. Debt cleared. Credit on possession.	Utility provder.  NFDC.  Utility provider. Utility provider to refund outgoing tenant.
Electricity	Meter in place & functional. Pre-payment key in place. Debt cleared. Credit on possession.	Utility provider.  NFDC.  Utility provider. Utility provider to refund outgoing tenant.
<b>Statutory Inspections</b>		
Gas	Gas Safety Inspection and obtain certificate. Gas fires.	Repair/Replace.  Remove.
Electricity	Electrical Condition Report and obtain certificate.  Meet Design Standard.	Cat 1 Hazard – Repair/Replace Cat 2 Hazard – Repair/Replace Cat 3 Hazard – Report. Fix, Replace or Install.

Component	Standard	Action
Detection	<p><b>Smoke detection</b> – functional, in date, hard wired and interlinked, 1 per floor in circulation space, 1 in principal living room and 1 in converted loft spaces (where applicable).</p> <p><b>Heat detection</b> – functional, in date, hard wired and interlinked with smoke detection, 1 per kitchen.</p> <p><b>Carbon monoxide detection</b> – functional, in date in each room containing fuelled appliance fixed to wall or ceiling.</p>	<p>Fix, Replace or Install.</p> <p>Fix, Replace or Install.</p> <p>Fix, Replace or Install</p>
Energy Performance	Energy Performance Certificate (Expiry 10 years).	Check/Undertake.
<b>Functionality</b>		
Heating	Functional and no missing components. Test of heating across system	Repair/Replace.
Hot Water	Functional and no missing components.	Repair/Replace.
Gas fires	Service & inspect for safety.	Remove.

Component	Standard	Action
Electric fires	General needs accommodation with gas/oil/solid fuel heating. Older Person accommodation.	Remove.
Kitchen Units	Sink intact. Taps intact. No leaks. Worktop without obvious burns, cracks, breaks or water blown. Door fronts intact. Functional and minimum life expectancy of 12 months or more.	Replace. Replace. Repair. Replace. Replace. Kitchen modernisation.
Cooker space	600 - 620mm cooker space. Gas supply to cooker point. Electrical supply to cooker point.	Provide. Supply and leave capped. Supply.
Washing machine	600 - 620mm washing machine space. No leaks from water supply valves. No leaks from under-sink foul waste connection.	Provide. Cap. Cap.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Sanitary Ware</b>	Clean bathroom suite. No chips or cracks. Taps intact. No leaks. Toilet pan seat. Cistern flushes. Plugs intact. Functional and minimum life expectancy of 12 months or more.	Clean. Repair/Replace. Replace. Repair. Change in all instances. Repair. Replace. Bathroom modernisation.
<b>As Built Fire Place</b>	No visible sign of damage. Blocked up opening.	Repair. Block up and make good.
<b>Security</b>		
<b>Front Entrance Door</b>	Locks. Glass intact. Handles serviceable. Opens and closes easily. Letterbox intact.	Change in all instances. Replace. Replace. Replace. Replace.
<b>Rear Entrance Door</b>	Locks. Glass intact. Handles serviceable. Opens and closes easily. Letterbox intact.	Change in all instances. Replace. Replace. Replace. Replace.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>Windows</b>	Sound glazing units (excluding misted glazing)  Open and close easily. Window restrictors to 1 <sup>st</sup> floor casement. No window locks.	Replace, only where not scheduled on capital work programmes, within 24 months. Repair. Repair.  Remove and replace handles.
<b>Joinery</b>		
<b>Floorboards</b>	No serious squeaks. No boards missing. No blown chipboard. No nails protruding. No unhealthy smells or foul stains. No foam carpet residue.	Repair. Repair. Repair. Repair. Clean. Clean. While the Council will not take on the repair and maintenance of flooring and carpets left by the previous tenant, those which are in good, clean condition will be left. Carpets will be cleaned before occupancy.
<b>Bannister, Handrail and Spindles</b>	Intact. Max 100mm C's on Spindles.	Repair. Replace. Where Spindles do not meet current Council standards, they will be over-boarded.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Action</b>
Internal doors	No holes or visible damage. Handles and latches serviceable. Opens and closes easily.	Replace.  Replace.  Replace.
Internal glazed doors	Glazing under 1,000mm is laminated	Replace or leave for reuse by incoming tenant.
<b>Decoration</b>		
Plasterwork	Unless otherwise agreed the redecoration of the property is a tenant responsibility, including filling small holes and cracks.	Repairs to spalling areas. Remove nails, screws and fixings. Fill holes. Investigate ceiling cracks. All new plasterwork will be left mist coated, ready for tenant to decorate.
Polystyrene Ceiling Tiles or coving	None present in property	Remove.
Papered Ceilings	None present in property.	Remove.
Decoration Ceilings	N/A	No action
Papered Walls	Patterned wallpaper. Painted Anaglypta style papers in good condition.	Leave where condition is good.
Decoration Walls	N/A	No action
Decoration Woodwork	N/A	No action
<b>External</b>		
Roof	Tiled with no leaks.	Repair.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Action</b>
PVCU Fascia's, Soffits and Bargeboards	Functional. Clean.	Repair. Clean.
Guttering and downpipes	Intact and functional. Clear of debris.	Repair. Clear.
Paths	No tripping hazards.	Repair.
Steps	No tripping hazards.	Repair.
Fencing	Intact Council boundary fence adjacent to a public footpath or highway. Intact Council boundary fence between adjoining properties. Intact masonry wall	Repair like-for-like or replace before or following tenancy if safe to do so. Repair like-for-like or replace before or following tenancy if safe to do so. Repair or remove and replace with fencing.  All fencing as per Maintenance and Repair Policy
Ponds	None.	Infill.
Soft landscaping	Acceptable standard for incoming tenant to maintain.	Cut back overgrown shrubby. In season, avoiding times which risk local and nesting birds. Strim and cut lawn.
<b>Disabled and or Elderly adaption</b>		
Stair lifts	None unless advised of incoming tenant need.	Remove or service and leave for reuse by incoming tenant.

Component	Standard	Action
Level access shower	Functional.	Leave for reuse by incoming tenant.
Hard wired alarm services	Functional in Extra Care Schemes. None in general needs.	Test. Remove and make good.
<b>Electrical standard</b>		
Bathroom	1 No. Shower (wet room only). 1 No. Shower Isolator (External or Pullcord - Wet Room Only). 1 No. I.P. Rated Light Fitting. 1 No 1 Gang Light Switch External or Pullcord. 1 No. Continuous Ventilation 3 speed Axial Fan. 1 No Triple Pole Fan Isolator (External or Pullcord).	Fix, Replace or Install.
Bedroom	2 No. Double Switched Socket Outlets. 1 No. Light Pendant. 1 No. 1 Gang Light Switch.	Fix, Replace or Install.
Cupboard Housing Immersion Tank	1 No. 20 AMP Double Pole Isolator Switch.	Fix, Replace or Install.

Component	Standard	Action
Hall	1 No. Double Switched Socket Outlet. 1 No. Light Pendant or Batten Holder. 1 No. 1 Gang Light Switch or. 1 No. 2 Gang 2 Way Light Switch for Landing Switching (if applicable).	Fix, Replace or Install.
Kitchen	1 No. Cooker Isolator and Low-level Connection Outlet. 4 No. Double Switched Socket Outlets. 1 No. Fused Connection Switch and Low-level socket outlet for Washing Machine. 1 No. Fused Connection Switch and Low-level socket outlet for Fridge/Freezer. 1 No. Continuous Ventilation 3 speed Axial Fan. 1 No. 1500 or 1800mm Fluorescent LED Light Fitting. 1 No. 1 Gang Light Switch (additional 2 way switching where room has two entrances.	Fix, Replace or Install.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Action</b>
Landing (Each additional storey)	1 No. Double Switched Socket Outlet. 1 No. Light Pendant / Batten Holder. 1 No. 2 or 3 Gang 2 Way Light Switch for Hall/Additional Landing Switching.	Fix, Replace or Install.
Loft	(If Boiler Located within Loft Space) 1 No. Light Batten. 1 No. 1 Gang Light Switch.	Fix, Replace or Install.
Reception Room (each)	2 No. Double Switched Socket Outlets. 1 No. Light Pendant. 1 No. 1 Gang Light Switch (additional 2 way switching where room has two entrances.	Fix, Replace or Install.
<b>Property Fixtures and Fittings</b>		
Electric over bath shower	Intact and functional.	Electrical check. Remove or leave for reuse by incoming tenant.
Outside lights	Intact and functional.	Electrical check. Remove or leave for reuse by incoming tenant.
External power supplies	Intact and functional.	Electrical check. Remove or leave for reuse by incoming tenant.
Outside tap	Intact and functional with no leaks.	Remove or leave for reuse by incoming tenant.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Action</b>
Fireplace (freestanding)	None.	Remove and dispose
Sheds / Outbuildings	Intact and functional.	Remove, make good base or leave for reuse by incoming tenant.
Conservatory	Intact and functional.	Remove, make good base or leave for reuse by incoming tenant.
<b>Items for reuse (Left by previous tenant)</b>		
Freestanding furniture	Clear.	Remove and Dispose.
Fixed furniture i.e. Built in wardrobes	Good serviceable condition.	Leave for reuse by incoming tenant or remove & dispose.
Carpeting	Good serviceable condition.	Leave for reuse by incoming tenant or remove and dispose. Remove gripper rods from stairs only.
Vinyl floor covering	Good serviceable condition.	Leave for reuse by incoming tenant or remove & dispose.
Laminate floor covering	Good serviceable condition.	Leave for reuse by incoming tenant or remove & dispose.
Curtain tracks/poles	Good serviceable condition.	Leave for reuse by incoming tenant or remove & dispose.
Curtains	Good serviceable condition.	Leave for reuse by incoming tenant or remove & dispose.
Blinds	None.	Remove & dispose.
Freestanding white goods	None.	Remove & dispose.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Action</b>
Built in white goods	Good condition, safe and functional.	Visual inspection of condition, clean and leave for reuse by incoming tenant.
<b>Pre handover</b>		
Internal waste	Clear.	Remove and dispose.
Garden waste	Clear.	Remove and dispose.
Loft waste	Clear.	Remove and dispose.
Cleanliness	Clean for incoming tenant.	Arrange property clean.
Internal windows/casements, door frames and glazing.	Clean for incoming tenant.	Arrange cleaning.
External Windows/casements	Cleaned where service chargeable or tenant responsibility	The Council will not clean the outside of buildings on an individual basis, Cleaning will form part of wider programmed approaches.
Locks and keys	New locks and 2 sets of keys.	Replace and supply.
Toilet seat	New.	Replace and supply.
Light bulbs	Fitted and lighting available for incoming tenant.	Replace and supply.
<b>Post handover</b>		

<b>Component</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Action</b>
<p>Items for Reuse</p>	<p>'Items for reuse' left by previous tenant which remain functional and safe will remain at the property for the new tenant.</p> <p>If the new tenant does not want the 'items left for reuse' Housing Maintenance will remove and dispose of items free of charge.</p>	<p>Incoming tenants must sign a disclaimer for their acceptance with the understanding that the Council will not service or repair these items as part of the Councils repair responsibilities.</p> <p>Items not required by the new tenant(s) must be identified prior to signing for the tenancy and Housing Maintenance will arrange for their disposal</p>