



VOIDS MANAGEMENT POLICY

January 2023

**To be reviewed:
by January 2025**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Voids Management Policy outlines Cambridge City Council's approach to managing and repairing empty (void) properties in order to meet statutory requirements, minimise void times and lost income and to manage tenant expectations when moving into or out of a council home.
- 1.2 This policy covers the following types of stock:
- General needs
 - Housing for older people
 - Temporary Accommodation
 - Emergency Accommodation
- 1.3 Voids are properties which are currently empty either because a tenancy has ended and a new tenancy has not yet started, or a property has been acquired and not yet let. Voids arise due to formal termination of a tenancy, abandonment of a tenancy, the tenant transferring to another tenancy, eviction of the tenant or the tenant's death, or a property purchased from the open market to be made available for letting.
- 1.4 Because rent is not realised on a void, it represents a loss and Cambridge City Council aims to keep this loss to a minimum whilst ensuring that a property is repaired to an agreed standard and then let to a suitable applicant on the Housing Register as quickly as possible.

2.0 PURPOSE

- 2.1 The purpose of this Policy is to:
- 2.1.1 Set out the key principles of the void management service.
- 2.1.2 Outline how the void team will meet local housing demand by turning around an empty property quickly.
- 2.1.3 Show how continuous improvement will be met through the efficient management and repair of a void.

3.0 SCOPE

- 3.1 This Policy outlines how the council will undertake the management of a void from the notification of a tenancy ending to the property being ready to relet, including:

- End of tenancy management, including inspections
- Works to void properties
- Management of major works (Business Case) voids
- Management of unauthorised alterations/rechargeable repairs
- Repair or planned works post-move in.

3.2 This policy does not cover on what basis a property is allocated – this information is outlined on the council's Lettings Policy.

4.0 KEY PRINCIPLES

4.1 This policy aims to ensure that a property is properly managed when it becomes vacant, is brought up to the council's relet standard before a new tenant moves in, and that the rent loss is minimised within the whole process. This policy will, at all times be aligned to the council's Lettings Policy to ensure the most effective use of the housing stock in order to help meet housing demand in Cambridge.

4.2 The policy will ensure that a strategic approach is adopted to void management by:

- 4.2.1 Ensuring that outgoing tenants are aware of their responsibilities prior to leaving the property, in order to keep repair costs to a minimum.
- 4.2.2 Ensuring that tenants who are found to have deliberately damaged the property are recharged for repairs.
- 4.2.3 Reducing rent and council tax loss by minimising the length of time during which properties are being repaired.
- 4.2.4 Ensuring properties are available as quickly as possible for people in housing need.

5.0 END OF TENANCY

5.1 There are circumstances where tenancy terminations will result in properties being classed as empty but without a vacating tenant, such as abandonment or long-term absence, eviction and death. These scenarios are dealt with under their own individual Policies and Procedures.

5.2 When ending a tenancy, tenants must meet their obligations as described in their Tenancy Agreement, including giving the required 28 days' notice and leaving the property in an acceptable condition which as far as practically possible meets the Relet Standard (see Appendix A) with the exception of fair wear and tear.

5.3 Once written notice has been received, or confirmation that the tenant is transferring to another council property, a pre-termination visit will be undertaken. This visit will determine

the condition of the property and highlight any repairs that the tenant is responsible for rectifying prior to leaving the property. Final costs for rechargeable works not rectified will be identified at the void inspection (see below).

- 5.4 At this stage if the tenant has undertaken their own improvements, where permission has not been authorised, the inspecting officer will look for damage to the property. If the outgoing tenant is advised that they need to remove the improvement work, they are liable for all costs associated with returning the property to the original state.
- 5.5 Where improvement work has been carried out to the property (with the appropriate permissions granted where applicable) the outgoing tenant may request compensation to cover part of the costs. Full details may be found in the Tenant & Leaseholder Alterations & Improvements Policy.
- 5.6 The council will recharge outgoing tenants for any repairs required to the property, using a Rechargeable Works Schedule (based on the National Schedule of Rates) to assign a value to the work required, which are due to tenant damage, unauthorised repairs or improvements, disrepair or neglect or for the cost of removing rubbish, furniture or personal belongings.
- 5.7 A void inspection will be undertaken on all void properties as soon as possible after the tenant leaves. The purpose of this inspection will be to complete a checklist on the following:
 - 5.7.1 Ensure the property is empty, and to remove any items that pose a risk to the health and safety of prospective tenant(s) or contractors.
 - 5.7.2 Determine whether prospective tenants can be allowed to view the property once the health and safety check has been carried out (in the presence of the Voids Supervisor).
 - 5.7.3 Ensure the property is secure and arrange for the front and back door locks to be changed.
 - 5.7.4 Identify any outstanding disrepair which may be the responsibility of the previous tenant.
 - 5.7.5 Arrange for appliances and installations to be checked.
 - 5.7.6 Identify whether an asbestos survey is required and arrange for the Asbestos Contractor to attend the property.
 - 5.7.7 Undertake a Decent Homes Survey*
 - 5.7.8 Identify any major repairs that will result in Business Case approval being required.
 - 5.7.9 Identify works needed to comply with health and safety requirements.
 - 5.7.10 Identify necessary repairs which are required to achieve the relet standard.

5.7.11 Identify repairs that can be passed to the day-to-day repairs or planned works teams for completion once the new tenant has moved in.

* in development

6.0 RECHARGEABLE REPAIRS

- 6.1 The Council will recharge any outgoing tenant for the costs of making good or renewing any damage caused to the property (outside of normal wear and tear), undertaking repairs to poorly fitted tenant improvement works and for clearing any rubbish and/or belongings that have been left at the property. Recharges may also be applied for the cost of cleaning and/or de-infesting the property. Photographic evidence will be obtained before the void works are carried out to formally record and prove the need for the recharge.
- 6.2 The City Council will make every reasonable effort to contact the previous tenant to inform them of any outstanding items for which they will be recharged and the available means of payment.
- 6.3 All recharges will be added to the tenant's rent sub-account and may affect any future application for re-housing if they are not cleared.
- 6.4 Further information on charges and recovery of rechargeable repairs are contained in the Rechargeable Repairs Policy.

7.0 THE CAMBRIDGE RE-LET STANDARD

- 7.1 The Cambridge Re-Let Standard states the property will be as follows:
- Safe and Secure
 - Fit to live in
 - Compliant with legal requirements
- 7.2 The void/relet standard is a minimum standard required to let a dwelling and has the core principles of safety and security. It is not a modernisation or improvement standard.
- 7.3 The key elements that make up the Relet Standard are listed at Appendix A and will be made available to tenants at the point of let and communicated via the Housing Website and tenant portal.

- 7.4 The council will ensure that prospective tenants are kept fully informed about the commencement of their tenancy and about any work delays which could affect when they can move in.
- 7.5 In exceptional circumstances and at the approval of the Operations Manager, decoration vouchers will be issued to the incoming tenant.

8.0 BUSINESS CASE VOIDS

- 8.1 If a void property requires major works, and therefore a high level of investment, to be brought up to the re-let standard, a business case will be undertaken and presented to the Housing Management Team in order to assess whether the works should be completed, or if the property should be taken out of use. Consideration will be given to:
- Level of rent loss if the property is not tenanted and the expected impact on the HRA
 - Whether the property is part of a possible future re-development scheme
 - The level of demand for the property type
 - The overall cost of the works required
- 8.2 If the assessment finds that the works are financially viable, they will be completed. For properties where the assessment finds that it is not financially viable to undertake the works, the property will be taken out of use. In some cases, disposal will be considered.

9.0 MANAGEMENT VOIDS

- 9.1 In some instances, the council will hold back empty properties for specific clients on the register. These include:
- Properties that have received significant disabled adaptations
 - Properties that require adaptations to be fitted, as there are no suitable properties currently vacant
 - Properties that meet a specific need for a particular household
 - Properties required to meet demand elsewhere in housing, e.g. a general needs dwelling reassigned for temporary or emergency use, or a special projects initiative such as the Refugee resettlement programme or for temporary rough sleeper accommodation.
- 9.2 There are no targets set for these properties, and the re-let times are removed from day-to-day void monitoring statistics.

10. POST MOVE-IN REPAIRS

10.1 Any repair work, (including replacements) that are identified as being necessary to achieve decent homes but are not a health and safety requirement and can therefore be carried out once a new tenant has moved in will be passed to the Response Repairs Team for action or the Planned Works for scheduling onto an imminent programme. The new tenant will be kept informed of timescales of when the work will be completed.

11.0 LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

11.1 This Void Management Policy and the way in which services are delivered comply with the requirements of the following standards and legislation:

- Localism Act 2011.
- The Housing Act 1985.
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982.
- Housing Act 1996 (Part 6).
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 (GSIUR) as amended 2018. Approved Code of Practice and guidance.
- British Standard 7671 As Amended (Electrical Installations)
- Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR.
- Equalities Act 2010

12.0 GENERAL

- 12.1 The Decent Homes Standard will be adhered to when replacing elements when either the property is empty or post move in.
- 12.2 All void properties will be cleaned, including any mold removed, prior to relet. The agreed cleaning specification is available on the council's website.
- 12.3 To combat condensation and mold, gutters, downpipes, airbricks and extractors will be cleared of debris during the void period and windows will be checked and serviced where required.
- 12.3 In circumstances where items, fixtures and fittings are in good working condition these may be offered to the incoming tenant. This will mean that the new tenant 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 against the tenancy.

- 12.4 When this tenancy comes to an end, the gifted items will be re-assessed for condition and either removed or offered to the next tenant. Again, the tenant file will be updated accordingly.
- 12.4 All properties will meet the Housing Health Safety Rating System requirements and must specifically have an EPC rating of at least band D. Social housing providers have a target to obtain band C or above for all social housing stock by 2030; to help achieve this any empty properties with a rating lower than band D will have improvement work to improve energy efficiency up to band D or higher either prior to reletting, or as part of an imminent planned works programme to achieve a EPC rating of C. This would normally involve improvements to heating systems, windows and insulation. Tenants will be kept informed of when any planned works is scheduled to take place.
- 12.5 This policy works alongside a number of other council's key policies, including:
- Lettings Policy
 - Tenants & Leaseholders Alterations and Improvements Policy
 - Decoration Voucher Scheme Procedure
 - Rechargeable Works Policy
 - Disposal of Personal Possessions Policy
 - Fencing Policy
- 12.6 It should also be considered in conjunction with the Council's other wider policies and policy framework.
- 12.7 The work of the voids team informs and works alongside the Council's HRA Asset Management Strategy, and links to Council-wide objectives in relation to achieving net zero, sustainability and helping residents with the cost of living.
- 12.8 Performance against the void repair and re-letting targets are monitored monthly at Operations Meetings, quarterly at Housing Management meetings and 6-monthly at Tenant & Resident Meetings. The service is also a member of Housemark, the national social housing benchmarking club, and uses comparable peer group data to help inform service levels and targets. Data is shared on the Housing Performance & Datasets intranet pages.

APPENDIX A – The Cambridge Re-Let Standard

This is the Cambridge Re-let Standard for empty properties, where the previous tenancy has ended, and the property is being repaired in preparation for the new tenant to move in. This sets out our expectations for staff and contractors, to ensure that:

- We are consistent in the quality and standard of all properties managed through the void and letting process
- We provide safe properties at an acceptable standard for tenants to start living in their new home
- We achieve value for money in the repairs and investments that we make
- We achieve an efficient relet time, minimise rent loss and reduce other costs associated with an empty property.

The core principles of the Cambridge Re-let Standard are that each empty dwelling when offered will be:-

- *Safe and Secure*
- *Fit to live in*
- *Compliant with legal requirements*

Safe and Secure

- Any garden boundaries will be clearly marked.
- External doors will be secure, weather-tight and in working order.
- Glazing will be intact and windows will be safe, secure and in working order.
- Stairs and staircases will have a secure balustrade, handrail, treads and risers along the whole length.
- Any communal areas will be well lit and clear of any trip hazards.

Fit to live in

- The property (and any communal areas) will be cleaned to the Council's specification (see website for details).
- The dwelling will be checked and treated for damp and mold.

- There will be at least two power sockets in each room (except the bathroom)
- There will be adequate means of heating to all room spaces
- Adequate space will be left to accommodate a washing machine, cooker and fridge freezer where possible.
- The floor will be prepared for you to fit your own flooring.
- Decoration will be the responsibility of the tenant. (We may offer decoration vouchers in exceptional circumstances)
- There will be no rubbish left in gardens, garages or sheds.

Compliant with legal requirements

- Gas, water and electrical installations, includes all smoke and fire alarms, will be tested and certified to say that they are in good working order and comply to current Legislation.
- CO2 and heat detector monitors will be fitted.
- Fire doors and fire prevention mechanisms will be checked and if necessary replaced to the current relevant Legislative standard.
- Roof insulation levels will be checked, and where insufficient (less than 150mm), either added to a roof insulation programme or, if impacting the EPC rating to below a D, rectified prior to reletting.
- Cavity wall insulation levels will be checked.

Appendix B: Temporary & Emergency Accommodation Voids Management

This addendum to the General Voids Management Policy outlines Cambridge City Council's approach to repairing void properties used as temporary and emergency accommodation; used during (emergency housing) and after (temporary housing) the council's assessment of duty to a homeless applicant (please refer to the Council's Lettings Policy for further information). In these properties, the re-let standard has a number of additional specifications that do not apply to general needs re-lets.

Background

The Council uses a range of different types of temporary accommodation; chosen to cover the range of customers, likely length of occupation and overall numbers in need at that time. This means that some accommodation will be provided directly by the Council, whilst other accommodation will be owned and/or managed by external providers.

For the purpose of this Policy, only properties where the council has responsibility for the repairs and maintenance of the property are in scope. These are:

- Separate and self-contained premises owned by the Council used as temporary accommodation.
- Self-contained, leased accommodation (Leased accommodation means privately owned separate and self-contained premises (flats, maisonettes and houses) which the Council has leased for the purpose of providing temporary accommodation and is responsible for all repairs and maintenance
- Hostel Accommodation, which the Council has leased for the purpose of providing temporary accommodation and is responsible for all repairs and maintenance

Re-Let Standard

The Re-let Standard general needs and sheltered housing is the same for temporary and emergency accommodation. However there are some additional requirements specific to temporary and emergency accommodation, as summarised below:

- The council's temporary accommodation will be furnished with a cooker, fridge, bedframes, mattresses and curtain track, as it is not always possible for homeless applicants to take all of their furniture into temporary or emergency accommodation.
- Emergency accommodation will be furnished as above, but with the addition of crockery and cutlery, and the offer of duvets, pillows and bedding where required (see above).
- Flooring will be cleaned and if necessary, replaced.

- Locks for loft hatches to be in place as no access is granted to roof spaces.
- Fire extinguishers in shared houses will be present, operational and within the certified test date.
- The property will be cleaned to the Temporary accommodation (including housekeeping) cleaning specification (details available on the council's website)

Re-chargeable works

- Damage to furniture, fixtures and fittings provided in temporary and emergency accommodation will be charged according to the council's Rechargeable Works schedule (available on the council's website).