

*Tendring*  
District Council



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# Empty Council Homes Management Policy

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December 2024



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**Appendix A: Empty Council Homes Standard**

## **1. Overall Objective**

The purpose of this policy is to set out the way in which Tendring District Council's Building Services will control and manage empty (void) properties within its housing stock.

The primary purpose of the service is to provide decent homes to people in the community. Clearly this cannot be achieved by holding empty homes. Additionally, The Housing Revenue Account's (HRA's) primary source of income is rents, and therefore the number and duration of empty homes is a substantial factor in the affordability of services. The Empty Council Homes Policy must ensure that procedures are in place that reduce the length of time that a property is empty, containing this to within the 2% revenue loss modelled in the 30 year Business Plan.

The policy will ensure a forward looking and strategic approach to Empty Council Homes management that will: -

- Minimise rent loss through reducing the length of the empty period
- Minimise any repair costs and recharge in line with the recharging policy.
- Set out the Empty Council Homes Standard ensuring that all staff, contractors and tenants are aware of exactly what condition the council expects of its empty properties.
- Ensure that properties are let in a state fully in accordance with the standards
- Set in place systems for monitoring the standards of empty properties and customer satisfaction with homes.

## **2. Process for works to empty Council properties**

2.1 Promptly on receipt of keys from the Allocations Team, the surveyor will arrange for a key safe to be fitted to contain keys to the property and will attend the property to inspect it. If necessary a site clearance will be arranged and a re-inspection conducted. The surveyor will record the condition of the property and necessary works using the standard inspections form including photographic evidence. The surveyor will decide whether to progress with remedial works or to refer the property to managers for consideration within the Asset Management Plan and the Acquisitions and disposals Policy.

2.2 Unless a recent satisfactory survey is already held on file, before any work can be carried out a Refurbishment and Demolition (RAD) asbestos survey must be completed and received back from the asbestos company, appointed by the Council to complete this work. Where identified, all asbestos where practically possible, will be removed from the property. Any other asbestos containing materials shall be recorded on the database, encapsulated (if appropriate) labelled and recorded.

The initial or revised survey must be sent over to the appointed contractor(s) with the works order(s).

2.3 The Empty Property Inspection Sheet will be filled in complete including:  
Electric & Gas meter readings  
Asbestos survey  
Energy Performance certification  
Condition of the premises Required work  
Any recharges.

2.4 The Empty Council Property Inspection Sheet may be sent to the contractor(s) before the official order has been raised as a guide and aid to resource planning only.

A Surveyor will ensure that empty properties are checked against the planned works programme to make the most cost-effective use of resources.

2.5 The surveyor will raise orders with appropriate contractor(s) using the Oneserve system. The surveyor will monitor the progress and quality of works undertaken and ensure that appropriate service standards are adhered to, that any periodic tasks such as water flushing are completed and that certificates where required are issued.

2.6 Work carried out will be of high quality and in accordance with the Tendring Empty Council Homes Standard (see Appendix A). Costs for each job raised will comply with the schedule of rates (cost per job) or other pricing where this is not applicable, agreed with the contractor.

2.7 Tendring District Council Building Services will not sign-off the empty property as complete and ready for payment until all works on the original order have been completed to a satisfactory standard with all certificates present, such as Gas and Electric certificates.

2.8 Generally the contractor will complete all works specified on the empty homes sheet and order(s) before the property will be accepted as ready to let and signed off. However, there may be rare occasions when not all works will be completed prior to the new tenant taking up residency of the property. In these cases, a timescale for the works to be completed must be agreed with the tenant and a new works order raised.

2.9 The surveyor will record the condition of the completed property including: Meter readings and copious photos including of the meter readings where applicable and of all the property inside and out

2.10 The surveyor will ensure that all empty properties must have at completion:

- a RAD Survey,
- Gas and Electrical Certificates
- an up to date Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)

before they can be deemed as ready to be signed off and that these are saved and collated for inclusion in the tenancy pack.

2.11 When fully satisfied, the surveyor will arrange for the key safe code to be reset and the Allocations team notified that the property is ready to let. Wherever possible, the surveyor will give advanced notice to the allocations team that the property will shortly be handed over.

### 3. Standard of Repairs to Empty Council Properties

3.1 Tendring District Council Building Services aims to identify and complete all necessary repairs to enable a property to be re-let as soon as possible.

3.2 All repairs will be completed to the Empty Council Homes Standard (see Appendix A) and to a high quality.

### 4. The property must be safe

4.1 The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) is a risk assessment tool used to assess potential risks to the health and safety of occupants in residential properties in England and Wales. The legislation came into effect in England on 6 April 2006.

4.2 The assessment method focuses on the hazards that are present in housing. Tackling these hazards will make housing healthier and safer to live in. The surveyor will ensure, as far as reasonably practical, that the property is free from hazards due to the following, in accordance with the HHSRS: -

#### Hazard Profiles

1.Damp and mould growth
2.Excess cold
3.Excess heat
4.Asbestos and MMF (Man Made Fibres)
5.Biocides
6.Carbon Monoxide and fuel combustion products
7.Lead
8.Radiation
9.Uncombusted fuel gas
10.Volatile Organic Compounds
11.Crowding and Space
12.Entry by Intruders
13.Lighting
14.Noise
15.Domestic hygiene, pests and refuse
16.Food Safety
17.Personal hygiene, sanitation and drainage
18.Water supply
19.Falls associated with baths etc
20.Falling on level surfaces etc
21.Falling on stairs etc
22.Falling between levels
23.Electrical hazards
24.Fire
25.Flames, hot surfaces etc
26.Collision and entrapment
27.Explosions

28.Position and operability of amenities etc
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29.Structural collapse and falling elements
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4.3 The electrical installation will be tested and if found to comply with current electrical (IEE) regulations, the appropriate certificate will be issued. If, in the opinion of the inspecting officer, the installation is in such a poor condition, the supply will be isolated until urgent work can be completed. All repairs or upgrading will be completed within the works and revised certificate issued.

4.4 The Gas installation and any fixed appliances will be tested and certified safe and the appropriate certificate issued. If this is not possible, the supply will be shut off and the appropriate notice affixed until urgent work can be completed, all repairs or upgrading will be completed within the works and revised certificate issued.

4.5 Adequate ventilation for the safe use of any fixed combustion heating appliances must be ensured.

4.6 Fixed space and water heating appliances installed by the previous tenant(s), which are found to be safe, and in reasonable condition may be retained following testing.

4.7 Any abandoned electric or other portable appliance will be removed from the dwelling and disposed of. Showers over baths will be removed unless fitted as a disabled adaptation.

4.8 Any alterations/additions or installations that have been installed by the outgoing tenant will be removed if in the opinion of the inspecting surveyor they are not suitable or are unable to be cost effectively maintained by the council.

#### **5. The property must be reasonably clean.**

5.1 The property must be free from litter, debris, excessive dust and dirt and discarded or stored materials and equipment, this includes gardens, garden sheds, roof space, outbuildings and linked garage.

5.2 The property will, if appropriate, be treated for obvious signs of biohazard, pests, infestation or vermin. All sanitary ware will be left clean and disinfected.

#### **6. The dwelling must be in reasonable decorative order**

6.1 Property or individual rooms that are heavily soiled or where the decorations are substantially damaged by other works will be fully redecorated.

6.2 Graffiti will be obscured or removed.

6.3 Alternatively, where urgency dictates and where agreed with an incoming tenant, a decoration allowance may be given as an alternative in respect of the whole or of parts of a property.

#### **7. The dwelling must have adequate thermal insulation.**

7.1 Except where such work is identified as being included within a current or future planned maintenance scheme, insulation quilt (or equivalent) must be installed

in the roof space of the dwelling to a thickness of 250mm, where appropriate, feasible and applicable.

- 7.2 All hot water cylinders are to have a British Standard insulation jacket fitted, where the cylinder is not pre-lagged.
- 7.3 All exposed or vulnerable pipe work and cisterns will be lagged to minimise the risk of freezing.
- 7.4 Property left empty in winter periods shall at the discretion of the surveyor and with regard to current or pending weather conditions be fully drained down to prevent freezing of pipework.
- 7.5 Refilling and flushing of systems will be undertaken prior to re-letting.

#### **8. Additional requirements for sheltered Housing units adapted properties.**

- 8.1 The dwelling shall be fully redecorated by the Council (except where the condition is considered satisfactory).
- 8.2 All appliances (such as cookers/fridges) supplied by the Council will have a "Portable Appliance Test" carried out and shall be clean and in a serviceable condition.
- 8.3 Showerheads will be fully dismantled, cleaned of lime scale and disinfected, and where taps require major overhaul or replacement, they will be replaced with lever handle type fittings.

#### **9. Policy review**

9.1 This policy will be reviewed 5 years from the date of implementation, latest review date, or any change in legislation, which will be the date the policy is adopted by Cabinet, or earlier if deemed appropriate. In the event that this policy is not reviewed within the above timescale, the latest approved policy will continue to apply. In reviewing the policy, feedback from customers about their satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of the servicing and repairs service will be considered.

## Appendix A

### Empty Council Homes Standard

<b><u>Plumbing</u></b>	
<b>Toilets</b>	Replace Toilet seats. Make sure pan and cistern are secure and free from cracks and chips, and that flushing mechanism operates correctly.
<b>Water Storage Tank</b>	Check Storage tanks for possible leaks, splits and make sure overflow is not running.
<b>Kitchen</b>	Check washing machine trap or install if not in place Sink unit should be clean. Taps: Renew with lever taps to bathroom and kitchen
<b>Bathroom</b>	Bath should not be chipped or split. Must be clean, have sealant intact and panel should be in place.
<b>Wash Hand Basin</b>	Should not be chipped or split. Must be clean and make sure that waste is showing no signs of leakage. Plug and chains are fitted to all sanitary ware
<b>Shower</b>	Shower to be checked, removed if unnecessary or over bath. Shower head to be renewed. Shower curtain to be replaced, with 2 if does not reach wall to wall and must reach the floor
<b>Outside Toilet</b>	Toilets to be removed externally where found.
<b>Tiling</b>	Should be clean, should not be cracked and there should be no missing or loose areas of the tiles. Where mould has been problematic it is likely to be found in either half or fully tiled in the bathrooms/kitchens.
<b><u>Electrics</u></b>	
<b>Light Fittings</b>	All fittings should be present and clean, there should be no kinks in any cables and no loose wires. Pull cords to be replaced. LED Enclosed fittings to be fitted in bathroom & kitchen.
<b>Socket</b>	Outlets: There should be no burn marks, sockets should be securely fixed to the wall and there should be no splits or damages on the outlets.  Double socket outlet to be fitted next to all TV aerial points, single sockets changed to doubles and 2 doubles to be in each room where possible.



<b>Switches</b>	Must make sure that the switches operate correctly, they must be clean and there should be no damage to switches.
<b>Extractor Fan</b>	<p>Must make sure grills are clean and that the fan works quietly when switched on. Extractor fans to be fitted in bathrooms and kitchens</p> <p>Cooker Make sure cooker panel operates, has no cracks and is free from heat damage.</p> <p>If cooker is below or near to window or no landing space either side, a new position for cooker must be arranged.</p>
<b>Smoke Alarm &amp; Carbon Monoxide alarm</b>	<p>All properties must have LD2 alarm systems installed;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Radio LINK &amp; Alarm controller to be fitted to hallway</li> <li>Carbon monoxide alarm to be fitted in any rooms where there is a solid fuel burning appliance.</li> <li>Heat alarm to be fitted to kitchen (heat and co combined if gas in kitchen)</li> <li>Smoke alarm to be fitted to Lounge and all hallways.</li> <li>All alarms to be AICO 3000 Series</li> </ol>
<b>Cylinders</b>	Thermostats and immersion heaters to be tested and replaced with the non-resettable type to conform to the current regulations.
<b>Consumer Unit</b>	Must ensure that the Consumer unit is a metal unit and surge protection device (SPD) is fitted all Residual Current Breaker with over current (Rcbo`s), Residual Current Device (RCD) and Miniature Circuit Breaker (MCB) must be marked accordingly to be fitted to comply with current regulations.
<b>Externally</b>	All Electrics to be disconnected to outside sheds / garages unless suitably installed and to comply with current regulations. All DIY Electrics to be removed.
<b>Storage Heaters</b>	<p>Electrics to be disconnected to outside sheds / garages unless suitably installed and up to current regulations, all DIY electrics to be removed.</p> <p>Should be clean and free from damage, controls should be present &amp; functional.</p>
<b>Main Entrance</b>	<p>Make sure that the locks on the front door &amp; communal doors operate correctly.</p> <p>Make sure patio &amp; rear door locks are changed and operate correctly.</p> <p>Ensure that safety glass toughened / laminated is present in front and back doors. If there is any doubt, then safety film should be fitted.</p>
<b><u>Joinery fittings</u></b>	

<b>Internal Doors</b>	<p>Ensure doors open and close smoothly. Make sure all handles are intact and operate correctly if self-closer fitted ensure closes properly.</p> <p>Ensure glass is sound to door and ensure glass is toughened / laminated. If there is any doubt then safety film should be fitted. Holes to doors to be filled where possible.</p>
<b>Thresholds</b>	<p>Ensure all thresholds are in place, replace where missing.</p>
<b>Windows</b>	<p>Must have clean opening mechanisms, sash cords and hinges are in good order. Windows must open and close with glass sound. Restrictors to be fitted to all first floors and above windows, plastic or wooden.</p> <p>Where window glass is below 800 mm, these must be safety glass or a safety film applied.</p> <p>Ensure handles are intact, operate correctly and lock where locking type fitted.</p> <p>Trickles vents to be present and in good working order.</p>
<b>Stairs</b>	<p>Must ensure handrail, newel posts and balusters are securely fixed with no more than 100mm gap between balusters.</p> <p>Ensure treads and risers are undamaged and free from splits.</p> <p>Stairs to be boarded in where ranch style rails are fitted.</p>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	<p>Borrowed lights to be replaced with ply or toughened glass</p> <p>Curtain battens to be fitted above all windows.</p>
<b>Flooring</b>	<p>Floors must be clean and sound, ensuring kitchen and bathroom have sealant around edges.</p> <p>Laminate flooring to be removed on all first floors and above levels.</p> <p>Ceramic floor tiling to be removed and replaced with Camaro.</p> <p>Camaro flooring to be laid in kitchen and bathroom of all sheltered accommodation voids with Altro Aquarius flooring in wet rooms.</p>
<b><u>Heating / hot water</u></b>	
<b>Gas fire</b>	<p>Gas fires to be removed and fire surround/hearths removed with fire opening blocked up.</p> <p>Where a back boiler is fitted, this is to be removed and a new boiler installed. Any redundant back boilers which are left should be removed.</p>

<b>Central Heating Boiler</b>	<p>Must be clean, case should be undamaged; controls, timer etc. should be ok.</p> <p>Safety information sticker should be displayed</p>
<b>Hot water cylinder</b>	Remove all cylinders that are not foam lagged and replace with pre lagged cylinders
<b><u>Decoration</u></b>	

<b>Ceilings</b>	Should have no water stains, should not bow or show any major cracking and the finish intact.
<b>Walls</b>	<p>Should have no water stains, no flaking / blown plaster and no dampness.</p> <p>Wallpapered walls to be stripped and ready to receive decoration, this will depend on the condition. When kitchen refurbished, room will be fully decorated</p>
<b>Woodwork</b>	Should be sound and clean.
<b>Mould/condensation</b>	Should be no signs of mildew or mould growth. Where found this must be cleaned and walls / ceilings treated with mould inhibitor.
<b>Asbestos</b>	<p>Cold water storage asbestos tanks/ Cisterns must be removed from all empty Council properties.</p> <p>Doors which have an asbestos backing must be removed and replacement door fitted.</p> <p>If decorative textured coating is flaking, this should be tested if required and repaired, skimmed over or replaced.</p> <p>Where damaged floor tiles are proved to have asbestos content. They are to be removed and latexes replaced. Composite floors if damaged to be tested where no records exist.</p> <p>Where boxing is deemed to contain asbestos, these are to be removed replaced with ply or similar appropriate product for the area.</p>
<b><u>Clearance</u></b>	
<b>Clearing</b>	<p>The property must be free from litter, debris, excessive dust, dirt and discarded or stored materials and equipment.</p> <p>Roof space to be checked and cleared of debris, rubbish or furniture. The property will be appropriately treated for obvious signs of biohazard, pests, infestation, needles or vermin.</p>

<b>Cleaning</b>	Flooring to be thoroughly cleaned with disinfectant, Light fittings, switches sockets to be thoroughly cleaned. All sanitary ware and kitchen units to be disinfected. Window frames and internal mechanism to be cleaned.
<b><u>External</u></b>	
<b>Garden</b>	Grass to be cut to below 50mm high at the end of the empty period. Bushes, brambles to be cut back or removed. Ponds to be filled in at all empty properties.
<b>Paths</b>	Concrete paths to be free from trip hazards anything above 25mm, where areas are considered to be a trip hazard a strip either side of the cracked paths will be patched and repaired. Where the garden
	path or patio is beyond reasonable repair these are to be removed and infilled with soil and grass seed.
<b>Shed / outhouse</b>	Shed to be cleared or removed completely if less than sound condition.  Make sure roofs are sound and are free from leaks and damage, repair /replace damaged asbestos sheets. Make sure outhouse walls free from extensive cracking.
<b>Fencing, walls and gates</b>	Make sure fencing is secure and in reasonable condition. If boundary fencing beyond reasonable repair record it for future replacement..  When fencing replaced this will be to the fencing standard in the Council's Fencing and Paving Policy. Make sure boundary walls are safe and secure, rebuild or remove if any areas beyond reasonable repair. Ensure half brick walls taken down to height of 450mm minimum or remove completely.
<b>Gutters, Downpipes and Gulley's</b>	Ensure guttering has no apparent leaks, alignment has correct falls and stop ends, shoes, outlets, and downpipes are all connected. Ensure all external gulleys are unblocked and surrounds are sound.
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cut all concrete canopies above front doors and make good. Record where this is carried out.</li> <li>• Make sure pointing to damp course is in good condition.</li> <li>• Ensure loft insulation is to current standard.</li> <li>• Only in sheltered units fire safety notice to be secured to wall.</li> </ul>