

Empty Homes Policy

DESIGN HEADER TO INCLUDE POLICY NAME AND DATE RANGE

INFORMATION

Policy Name	Empty Homes Policy
Effective Date(s)	May 2024
Approved By	David Wood
Approval Date	May 2024
Policy Owner/Dept	Head Repairs & Maintenance, Head of Housing, Head of Housing Older Peoples Services
Policy Author	David Wood/Heidi Hewitt
Review Date	May 2026
Version Number	V2

Version Control

Version	Date	Changes	Approver
V1	March 2024	Reference to Ombudsman Spotlight on Noise Complaints: YHG self-assessment: additional entry in regard to leaving carpets in situ and additional checks for historic reports of noise transference when repairing and allocating a vacant home.	Aaron Hammersley

Your Housing Group Strategic Priorities			
Safe	☒	Viability	☒
Landlord	☒	Growth	☐
People	☒	Technology	☐

Relevant National Standards or Regulation	Please State if the Policy aligns to any of the Regulators Standards: • Governance and Financial Viability Standard • Value for Money Standard • Home Standard • Tenancy Standard • Neighbourhood and Community Standard • Consumer Standards • Decent Homes Standard
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Relevant Legislation	The Empty Homes management policy will be subject to the following legislation: • Building Regulations Act 1984 • Construction Act 1996 • Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2007 • Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 • Data Protection Act 2018 • Decent Homes Standard 2006 • Defective Premises Act 1972 • Environmental Protection Act 1990 • Equality Act 2010 • Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 • Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 • HCA – The Regulatory Framework for Social Housing in England from April 2012 Page 8 of 8 • Housing Act 1988 • Housing Act 2004 • Housing Health and Safety Rating System 2006 • Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 • Localism Bill 2011 • Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 • Occupiers Liability Act 1957
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1. Purpose of the Policy

This Policy sets out the way in which Your Housing Group (YHG) will repair and let homes to new and existing customers. YHG will endeavour to maximise the use of available stock through the control of empty properties, thereby minimising rent loss. We will give high priority to turning round empty homes quickly by repairing and letting them within specific timescales. YHG will provide a cost-effective empty homes repairs service with the provision of high-quality homes and sustainable lettings.

2. Scope of the Policy

This Policy applies to all YHG staff, anyone working on behalf of or undertaking work or volunteering for YHG who are responsible for their part of delivery of the empty homes end-to-end process. I.e. receiving notice to end a tenancy, repairs period, up to the letting of the home.

3. Consultation

In achieving the aims and objectives of the **Tenancy Standard and Home Standard** (and any subsequent **Consumer Standard** to replace this), consultation on this Policy has taken place with:

- Key Internal stakeholder across Housing Management Operational Teams.
- Members of the Customer Connect Panel.
- YHG Legal Panel, Customer Focus Groups, Risk & Compliance Group.
- Key internal stakeholders including Income Collection, Money Advice, Asset, Governance, and Risk & Assurance Teams.
- Customer Services Committee.

4. Background and Context

As a Registered Provider of Social Housing, YHG's provision to customers is regulated by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH).

The Tenancy Standard states that: Registered Providers shall minimise the time that properties are empty between each letting.

The Home Standard sets expectations for registered providers of social housing to provides tenants with quality accommodation and a cost-effective repairs and maintenance service.

This policy sets out how YHG will ensure compliance with the regulatory standards.

Make better use of customer insight (new lettings and reasons for terminations / dissatisfaction)

YHG is responsible for managing our housing stock including the maintenance, management and letting of its properties. The policy sets out how we will manage homes which are currently empty because a tenancy has ended, and a new tenancy has not yet started.

The Policy aims are to:

1. Ensure that properties which become empty are re-let as quickly and efficiently as possible, with due regard to the needs and requirements of outgoing and incoming customers and the need to maintain our properties to the agreed, safe lettings standard whilst retaining a sustainable homes and neighbourhoods.
2. Ensure compliance with our regulatory framework and that our homes are safe and are re-let to an appropriate standard.
3. Balance the need to ensure maximum occupancy of homes and minimum void re-let times with the needs of customers.
4. Ensure our void periods are used as part of an overall asset management approach that is efficient as possible to deliver works required as cost-effectively as possible.

5. Minimise rental loss, void periods, and void repair costs through effective coordination of housing management, maintenance, and redevelopment operations to re-let properties within agreed target times.
6. Ensure effective, efficient, and accountable management of properties, and have effective monitoring and reporting of void management and service delivery.
7. Ensure that customers are aware of their tenancy obligations in relation to ending the tenancy, e.g., requirement to give 28-days' notice, to return all keys promptly, and to fully clear the property and leave it in a clean, acceptable condition.
8. Ensure that repairs to homes are undertaken to enable YHG to re-let to the lettings standard and that where appropriate "rechargeable" repair costs are met by the outgoing customer or pursued post termination of tenancy.
9. Make effective use of void periods to carry out upgrading, or major repairs as appropriate and to co-ordinate with the investment programme team.
10. Ensure incoming customers are given all required information, documentation, and advice to allow them to move into the home promptly at the agreed tenancy start date.
11. Leave carpets left by the previous customer in situ at the incoming customer's request. We will clean carpets prior to letting the home to the new customer.
12. Remove any hard flooring, i.e., laminate and wood left in situ by the outgoing customer in properties above ground floor level to avoid complaints of noise transference from existing customers.
13. Ensure that additional checks are conducted during the allocation of vacant homes to establish any historic reports of noise transference linked to the particular property / building or previous tenancy.
14. If so, interventions will be considered as part of the repair works such as floor coverings, door closers, anti-vibration mats, and other interventions on a case-by-case basis.
15. Achieve high levels of customer satisfaction with the condition of properties at the beginning of the tenancy.

16. Give customers confidence and maintain our organisational reputation and credibility across our neighbourhoods, by managing the surrounding areas while the property is empty.

5. Policy Detail

YHG will adhere to the aims and objectives set out in the above points 1-16 of this policy. These principles will be reflected in any subsequent procedures associated with allocations and lettings and in our operational service offer to our customers.

The Legal Framework and Context

The policy enables compliance with the mandatory Decent Homes Standard and the Consumer Home Standard set out by the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). This legislation and standards cover what social landlords should be achieving in all their properties in respect of decency, modernisation, repair, and safety.

The Neighbourhood and Community Standard

Following publication of the Social Housing White Paper in late 2020, the Social Housing Regulation Bill became law in 2023, impacting the regulatory framework for social housing and introduced a new proactive, consumer regulation regime focussed on meeting the needs of customers. This standard forms part of the regulatory framework for social housing and is relevant to how providers manage and re-let homes and in what standard.

Another aim of the legislation and new regulatory regime is to ensure that providers of social housing, such as YHG, keep homes and estates safe and clean. These new standards are there to ensure people feel safe and secure in their homes.

6. Inspections

6.1 The re-let process will commence immediately on receipt of notice.

6.2 Wherever possible a pre termination inspection of the home will be arranged with the outgoing customer to get an early assessment of property condition. The majority homes will be inspected when the tenancy ends to determine what repairs are required to re-let the property. This may include but is not limited to:

- Compliance works that may need to be completed (e.g., fire compartmentation works).

- Identifying any aids and adaptations.
- Agreeing any recharges with the customer.
- Agreeing any improvements which are eligible for compensation or need removing.
- Determining if the property requires major works or component replacements.
- Divestment discussions and decisions aligned to our Strategic Asset Management Strategy.

7. Responsibilities under this Policy

All YHG staff responsible for the end-to-end process of managing empty homes are required to adhere to this policy. Any request to deviate from the principles of this policy requires escalation for review and approval consideration to the Head of Repairs and Maintenance, Head of Housing, and Regional Service Manager.

- The Lettings Team is responsible for making provisional and full offers of accommodation to customers.
- The Repair Managers are responsible for carrying out inspections to the property. They will assess and scope the works that are needed to return the property to a lettable standard, order any routine works, component replacements, carry out safety inspections and post works inspections following completion of the works.
- The Repairs Team will be responsible for checking that asbestos works, electrical, legionella, gas safety checks and EPC inspections are carried out and providing any necessary certification to the Compliance Team.
- The Repairs Team is responsible for completing and managing the repair works, completing safety checks, and cleaning the property.

8. Risk Management

The headline risks associated with this policy are:

Risk Description	Risk Impact
Failure to comply with statutory requirements and rules and guidance issued by the Government and their departments.	Regulatory intervention, legal action, adverse publicity, and potential financial impact on the organisation.
The policy links to the following strategic risks:	Failure to meet landlord health, safety, and compliance requirements.

ID 497 Repairs Service is not delivered to the required standard to the satisfaction of customers. ID 589 Customer Service & Satisfaction	Reputational damage if we don't deliver to expected customer satisfaction levels. Risk of financial impact to the business.
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9. Data Protection, Record Storage and Retention

YHG understands that confidentiality is important to customers and will treat all information relevant to each customer in the strictest confidence.

We approach the protection of personal data in a comprehensive manner in line with the Data Protection Principles of the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA), collectively referred to as the Data Protection Legislation.

YHG's Data Protection Policy will also be adhered to in following this policy during our repairs and lettings activities. We will collect, store and process personal information of our existing and potential new customers, (applicant/s) and recognise that the correct and lawful treatment of this data is necessary to provide for the continuance of successful business operations and maintain confidence in YHG.

Any personal information relating to applicants and customers is stored on YHG systems which are compliant with the principles of GDPR and YHG's Data Retention Policy.

10. Equality and Diversity

This policy meets the requirements of the equality impact assessment and is compliant with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

This means that we will not discriminate against customers on the grounds of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

Your Housing Group will only participate in allocations schemes that are compliant with the Equality Act 2010 and which offer fair access to housing for all applicants. We assess our policies and provision of services to make sure all decisions are in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

We will on request, provide translations of any documents, policies and procedures in different languages and other formats to suit requirements and support reasonable adjustments for easy access to our service.

11. Communication

This policy will be stored on YHG's intranet and will be communicated to all staff involved in the allocations, lettings, and tenancy management processes. The policy will also be made available on YHG's website to provide easy access for customers and our partners.

12. Learning and Development

YHG is committed to putting arrangements in place that ensure effective training of all staff.

This policy and the procedures that support it will be the subject of a mixed platform of training across YHG and include all stakeholders. The bespoke training will include:

- Team Briefings, for those who need to be aware of it but not actively involved in the delivery.
- On the job training, for those who need to adhere to this policy and use the accompanying procedures in their daily roles.
- Regular Toolbox refreshers, for those using the procedures.

13. Performance Management of this Policy

We will use the following non-exhaustive list to measure and monitor our performance with a continued focus on service improvement:

- Empty Home performance is monitored daily by the relevant lettings and repairs teams. Operational teams will meet weekly to review all properties. The group will discuss any operational issues, update and agree return dates for each property to relet.
- Details of all Empty Homes properties and associated performance information are reported weekly to the Executive Team.
- Colleagues from across the business meet monthly to review overall performance and to identify areas for improvement.
- Satisfaction with new tenancies is measured via customer surveys which are monitored to ensure customer satisfaction meets the agreed KPI targets.
- The Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and Operational Performance Indicators (OPI) are monitored monthly and KPIs are reported to the Board via the quarterly performance report.

14. Review of this Policy

The policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if required by statutory / regulatory / best practice changes, emerging developments, or circumstances arising from reviews of other Group wide policies.

Related Documents

Document Type	Name
Connected Policies and Procedures	Access to Housing Policy Succession Procedure Ending Tenancy on Death Procedure Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy Data Protection Policy Data Retention Policy Data Privacy Notices Allocations & Lettings Procedure Management Move Procedure Neighbourhood Management Policy Domestic Abuse Customer Policy Safeguarding Policy Adaptations Policy Voids Standard / Lettable Home standard Repairs Policy Rent Setting Policy Decent Homes Standard
Forms and Letters	Pre-Post End of Tenancy Form Safety Culture Form

Checklist

(To be completed as far as possible by the Policy Author before submission for quality checking by Research and Policy Manager prior to Risk and Compliance Group)

Policy Name: Empty Homes Policy				
Version No: V2		Effective Date: May 2024		
Status: Existing Policy Review				
Previous Policy Name (where appropriate) Void Policy				
Brief Summary of Changes from Previous Version:				
Internal Consultation Groups: • Internal key stakeholder consultation • Equality Impact assessment • Customer Focus Group • Customer Connect Panel • Customer Services Committee		Customer Consultation: ☒		
		Date of Customer Consultation:		
		Customer Consultation Brief Details: Consultation with key internal stakeholders', colleagues, and customers. Approved via written resolution CSC 16.05.2024		
Link to Consultation Document(s):				
Date Initial Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken:		Equality Impact Assessor name(s): Sharon Wheeler		
Reason for Decision: No impacts identified, and policy EIA approved.				
Date Full Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken: 27.05.2024				
No areas for change identified. No detrimental impact on diverse communities, customers, or groups.				
Data Protection/ GDPR Implications: ☐				
Brief Outline of Data Protection/GDPR Implications: None identified.				
Legal Implications: ☐		Legal Panel Consulted: ☐		Date:
Risk Implications: ☐		Risk Logged on Datix: ☐		Date:
Resource Implications	People: ☐	Finance: ☐	Asset: ☐	Other: ☐
Brief Summary of how Resource Implications have been addressed: No impacts on current resource.				
How will communication on this Policy take place: Intranet YHG Website/ Email/ Face to Face Training				
Policy Owner: (Department) Housing & Repairs Services			Policy Author: David Wood/Heidi Hewitt	
Policy Signed Off by: (service manager or sponsor): Heidi Hewitt				Date: 03.05.2024

Policy Quality Checked by Research and Policy Manager: Vicky Byrne	Date: 24.9.24
Policy Approved by Risk and Compliance Group:	Date: N/A
Policy Approved by Customer Services Committee	Date: 16.05.2024