



The Trust

EMPTY PROPERTY MANAGEMENT POLICY

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This policy is to set out the principles and guidelines that Peaks & Plains Housing Trust (the Trust) commit to in terms of managing empty properties, under social and affordable rents.
- 1.2 This policy applies to the management of properties following tenancy termination; void properties for re-letting, requiring major works or evaluation prior to investment or disposal.
- 1.3 The purpose of the Empty Property Management Policy is to facilitate the efficient and effective repair of empty properties where they are to be re-let or to require prompt decision making if disposal is required. The process starts as soon as any information of a tenancy ending is given by the outgoing tenant or is triggered in some other way, and is completed when the property is re-let or disposed of.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1 The purpose of the Empty Property Management Policy is to:
 - Minimise the number of days properties remain empty
 - Ensure empty properties are safe and secure and help to improve the neighbourhood
 - Bring void properties to a standard of repair to meet the lettable standard
 - To deal with abandoned properties
- 2.2 This policy applies to residential properties let at social and affordable rent levels. Market rent, PRS and commercial properties are excluded from this policy and are managed in accordance with separate procedures, unless otherwise stated.
- 2.3 Properties excluded from the void period are mutual exchanges which has a separate policy (Mutual Exchange, Assignment and Succession Policy).
- 2.4 Where a decision has been made to consider selling, demolishing or reconfiguring/renovating a property, these properties will be classified as a void that is out of management property (Disposal Policy).

3. LEGAL & REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

- 3.1 This policy complies with the Trust's duties under the following legislation:
 - Equality Act 2020
 - Human Rights Act 1998
 - Housing Act 1985, 1988, 1996, 2004
 - Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013
 - Decent Homes Standard 2006
 - Gas Safety (installation and Use) Regulations 1998
 - Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
 - Social Housing Regulation Act 2023

- 3.2 The Trust is committed to the provision of an affordable housing programme in conjunction with the [Regulator of Social Housing \(RSH\)](#). Registered providers are expected to have a strategic approach in ensuring the best use of their stock and whether they should be used to support the generation of additional capacity through sales and conversions.
- 3.3 This policy supports compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Consumer Standards, as introduced under the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, in particular the Safety and Quality Standard, the Tenancy Standard, and the Neighbourhood and Community Standard, where these relate to the management and re-letting of empty homes.

4. DEFINITIONS

- 4.1 An **Empty Home** is any property in management which is not let. A property is empty when a tenancy ends and ceases to be considered an empty home when a new tenancy starts. It may also be referred to as a "void".
- 4.2 **Vacant Property (In-Management)** is a property that is unoccupied but remains within active housing management and is intended to be re-let. These properties form part of the Trust's lettable housing stock and are managed through the void and re-let processes. Vacant properties in-management are:
- Included in void turnaround and re-let performance reporting
 - Subject to inspections, void works, and statutory compliance checks
 - Actively progressed toward re-occupation through allocations processes
- 4.3 **Vacant Property (Pending investigation)** is a property that is unoccupied and under investigation for potential options appraisal, significant repair work or redevelopment. These will be temporarily removed from active housing management, meaning it is not currently being progressed for re-let but may return to management in the future. Vacant properties (Pending investigation) are:
- Generally excluded from routine void performance measures
 - Not undergoing void works or marketing
 - Typically awaiting a decision, review, funding, or resolution of specific issues
 - Retained within the wider housing stock but inactive for letting purposes
 - Managed to endure safety, security and statutory compliance whilst vacant
- 4.4 **Vacant Property (Permanently Not In-Management)** is a property that is unoccupied and formally removed from housing management on a permanent basis, with no intention to re-let. These properties no longer form part of the organisation's lettable housing stock. Vacant properties permanently not in-management are:
- Permanently excluded from void and re-let performance reporting
 - Typically approved for disposal, demolition, redevelopment, or transfer
 - Managed only to ensure safety, security, and statutory compliance while vacant

5. OUR POLICY

- 5.1 The Trust recognises that effective management of empty properties is important to maximise the availability of affordable homes and avoid any negative impact on communities and neighbourhoods. In addition, there is also the important financial impact to the Trust in having empty properties.
- 5.2 The Trust is committed to meeting the local housing need and maximising rental income by having the lowest number of empty properties through operating an efficient void and lettings process.
- 5.3 Void properties are an unavoidable part of the provision and management of rented accommodation, as tenancies end. The Trust will measure and report upon the rate of terminations (turnover) and reasons for termination.
- 5.4 A property is void when it is permanently vacated by the occupant and a rent or service charge is no longer being charged for the property.
- 5.5 Typically this occurs:
- When a tenant has formally terminated the tenancy by written notice
 - Where a tenant transfers from one Peaks & Plains property to another
 - By implied surrender or abandonment of a tenancy; where the appropriate legal notices have been served in accordance with our procedures
 - Due to eviction by the Trust (supported by the relevant court action).
- 5.6 It is essential that we have an effective and efficient system in place to manage void properties and limit as far as possible the length of time that they remain void, thus minimising the amount of rental income lost through voids.
- 5.7 The Trust will maintain a clearly defined Lettable Standard, which sets out the condition an empty property must meet before it is re-let. The Lettable Standard is designed to ensure properties are compliant with all health and safety requirements, and fit for occupation, while balancing the need to return homes to use as quickly as possible. The Trust recognises that some non-essential works may be completed post-occupation where appropriate and clearly communicated. The Lettable Standard will be reviewed periodically, including consultation with customers.

6. PROCESS

- 6.1 The Trust aims to meet the timescales set out in this section wherever possible. However, these may be varied where necessary due to operational constraints, access issues, health and safety considerations, or other exceptional circumstances. .
- 6.2 Tenants are informed within their tenancy agreement, on the Trust website and other information leaflets on what action they need to take to end their tenancy.

- 6.3 Tenants must give 4 weeks' notice in writing to end their tenancy. This date is calculated from the Monday immediately following the date the notice is received in writing, unless the notice is received before 10am on the Monday and in those instances, that Monday will be used as the start date.
- 6.4 In circumstances where the tenancy needs to end as a result of death or incapacity (mental or physical) of the tenant, notice may be served by the tenant's executor, a public trustee of the deceased, a personal representative or an appointee with the tenant's power of attorney.
- 6.5 The exception to the notice period is when Trust tenants are transferring to another Trust property. In cases of tenants transferring to another Trust property, the tenancy will end from the Monday after all keys to the property and a completed tenancy termination form have been received by the Trust.
- 6.6 A tenancy may also end by way of an order through the court giving the Trust possession of the property, or through the service of relevant notices in cases where a property has been surrendered or abandoned in accordance with our procedures.
- 6.7 Rent will remain payable until the tenancy terminates and in cases where keys are surrendered, in the absence of a fully completed tenancy termination form, by someone other than the tenant or the tenant's representative the property will be treated as abandoned and the Neighbourhood Officer must take the appropriate action.
- 6.8 The Trust will attempt to contact all tenant(s) who wish to terminate their tenancy at the earliest opportunity, during the termination period. This is to identify remedial repairs and give the outgoing tenant(s) relevant information to enable them to end their tenancy with no or minimal repairs for which they will be liable and to identify the approximate duration a property is likely to be void due to repairs.
- 6.9 Trust tenant(s) are obligated to leave the property and garden areas in a clean and tidy condition as explained in the tenancy agreement, outgoing tenants will be reminded of their rights and responsibilities. They will also be contacted by the Income Team regarding the status of their rent account and encouraged to clear any outstanding debt before the end of tenancy. If this is not possible, tenants will be required to set up a repayment agreement on the monies owed to the Trust. Any credits on rent accounts will not be refunded until confirmation of no rechargeable repairs.
- 6.10 The Trust will inform the outgoing tenant of any repairs that will be recharged to them within 20 working days of the final end of tenancy date and charges will be made in accordance with our Rechargeable Repairs Policy. Tenants will also be responsible for the full costs for clearing out the property and or garden in line with the terms and conditions of their tenancy agreement. This includes the removal, making good or reinstatement of any fixtures, fittings, alterations or additions installed by the tenant without the Trust's prior written permission, or where permission was granted subject to reinstatement at the end of the tenancy.

- 6.11 The Trust will begin the process of allocating at the likelihood of a re-lettable void property occurring. This will be managed sensitively where appropriate.
- 6.12 Once the property has become empty and the keys returned, a further inspection will be carried out within 3 working days to identify any further works required to meet the lettable standard. A schedule of works and costs will be produced no more than 10 working days post tenancy. At the inspection, the inspector will:
- Take meter readings and details which are entered directly to a portal for the utility management company
 - Request any required property clearance and/or bio clean
 - Provide an initial inspection of the property
- 6.13 Some void properties will be allocated to alternative contractors for completion, for example if they require large scale works. When void properties are allocated to a partner contractor, they will complete the schedule of works required and submit this for approval.
- 6.14 The Trust will work with the Local Authority to identify applicants who's needs will be met by an empty home with an existing adaptation.
- 6.15 Where property repairs are anticipated to be above £15,000, or structural issues are identified, or the length of time to re-let the property exceeds 6 months, the Property Condition Manager will refer this to the Asset Manager. An "Option Appraisal" will then be completed to decide whether to proceed with the high value works/letting process or to dispose of the asset which will then follow the Trust's Disposal policy.
- 6.16 We will where possible, carry out accompanied/virtual viewings with the prospective tenant at the earliest stage of the void process to establish if the property will be accepted.
- 6.17 All applicants will have an assessment completed before any sign up appointment is completed to ensure the property matches their needs and so that any support required can be put in place to aid a sustainable tenancy. This will include an affordability check and identity checks.
- 6.18 When all repairs are completed, a post inspection will be carried out by the Property Condition team. For all returned and completed properties, the property will be returned in a clean and lettable condition with relevant certificates and signed Lettable Standard document.
- 6.19 The Trust will carry out a gas safety check, and a copy of the gas safety certificate will be issued at sign up. The gas will remain capped at sign up and the incoming tenant will need to book an appointment for the gas turn on and test. Any future gas installation by the tenant, including gas cooker connections, must be carried out by a Gas Safe certified installer.

- 6.20 The Trust will carry out an electric safety inspection and provide the incoming tenant with a copy of the electrical safety certificate at the sign up appointment. An energy performance certificate will be provided at the sign-up appointment, properties that are let will have an EPC rating of at least an E.
- 6.21 The location of meters, stopcocks and wheel valves will be identified and noted on the lettable standard document, and will be shown to the incoming tenant by the Neighbourhood Team at time of viewing.
- 6.22 The Trust will inform the incoming tenant of any repairs that will be carried out post-occupation, for example, garden works. This would be included on the lettable standard document.
- 6.23 As part of the process, the Trust does not carry out cosmetic internal decoration prior to the commencement of a new tenancy. All properties will be presented at the agreed Lettable Standard, meaning ceilings, walls, and woodwork will be structurally sound, free from major defects, and in a clean condition. The property is let as seen, and all subsequent redecoration remains the sole responsibility of the tenant.
- 6.24 The Neighbourhood Team will book applicants who have accepted the property after a viewing in for a tenancy sign-up. These will be planned using the expected completion date of any void repairs. The communication between the teams involved in void management is essential in keeping applicants updated should the sign-up date need to be amended and brought forward or delayed.
- 6.25 A sign-up takes place to ensure that customers understand that by signing a Tenancy Agreement (which is a legally binding document) they understand the rights and responsibilities associated with the tenancy. The customer is committing to upholding the obligations within it, such as payment of rent and charges and around not contributing to anti-social behaviour. The Tenancy Agreement must be completed correctly and signed by the customer.
- 6.26 In cases where a TORT notice has been served (a notice served pursuant to the TORTs (Interference with Goods) Act 1977, where goods have been left behind), for example following an eviction or following taking possession of an abandoned property, any repairs that they are due to be recharged for will be added to the account within 21 days of the TORT expiring.
- 6.27 Photos and / or videos will be taken of a void property at the time of inspection and at the time that voids work are completed.
- 6.28 In the event that empty properties in a neighbourhood or block are attracting vandalism or anti-social behaviour then the Trust may consider:
- Boarding or sheeting sensitively (as necessary) to prevent unauthorised access;
 - Providing mobile or static security arrangements;
 - Removing appliances, (e.g. heating appliances)

- 6.29 The Trust may at its discretion; to mitigate vandalism and anti-social behaviour or to reduce the financial liability of vacant properties; seek to implement phased demolition in advance of the full regeneration or redevelopment plans. This will require consent from the Local authority and will be managed to minimise disruption and inconvenience to remaining residents.

7. ABANDONED PROPERTIES

- 7.1 The Trust will seek to regain possession of abandoned properties in adherence to the relevant law and regulatory framework.
- 7.2 The Trust may serve a Notice to Quit (NTQ) upon suspected abandoned properties and, if required, may seek to regain possession of the property via court order. The NTQ will become effective after 28 days if the tenant has not confirmed an intention to return.
- 7.3 Upon gaining possession of an abandoned property, the Trust may serve a Goods Notice on belongings left in the property for a period of up to 28 days. Upon expiry of the Goods Notice the Trust may sell or dispose of any unclaimed goods.

8. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and reviewed by EMT and the EDI forum when considering this Policy.
- 8.2 The Trust will provide information in other languages, in Braille, large print or audio where requested.
- 8.3 The Trust is committed to delivering the Empty Property Management Policy in a fair, inclusive and accessible way. We will consider individual needs and make reasonable adjustments where required throughout the void, viewing, sign-up and letting process. Information will be made available in alternative formats and languages on request, and non-digital methods of communication will remain available where needed. We will seek to ensure that adapted properties and support arrangements are considered appropriately so that homes are matched to need and barriers to access are reduced.
- 8.4 The Trust will make use of existing stock by promoting a transfer to a property that is empty and contains the adaptations the customer requires. The Trust will match empty properties with customers who require the facilities of that particular property.

9. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 9.1 The Executive Team are responsible for approving the policy and monitoring performance.
- 9.2 Overall responsibility for this policy lies with the Executive Director of Operations. The Assistant Director of Asset and Development, the Head of Repairs, Maintenance & Investment and Assistant Director of Housing will be responsible for the operational implementation of this policy, through their teams.

- 9.3 The Trust will ensure that staff work in accordance with the Personal Safety at Work Policy when inspecting properties, carrying out accompanied viewings or applicant assessments as necessary.
- 9.4 The Maintenance Manager - IHMT will manage the repair and renovation part of the voids process. Where capital works are determined on the pre inspection, the works will be managed by the Maintenance Manager – Investment. The Neighbourhood Manager, through the Neighbourhood Team, will manage allocations of social and affordable rent properties including viewings and verification.
- 9.5 The Neighbourhood Manager, Maintenance Manager-IHMT, Maintenance Manager – Investment, Property Condition Manager and the Asset Manager are responsible for the operational delivery of this policy and the associated procedures.
- 9.6 The Neighbourhood Manager, Maintenance Manager-IHMT, Maintenance Manager – Investment, Property Condition Manager and the Asset Manager are responsible for providing timely performance information.

10. MONITORING AND REPORTING

- 10.1 Empty property performance will be monitored through Key Performance Indicators, this will be monitored on a monthly basis by the Performance Management Group.
- 10.2 A quarterly report is provided to the Senior Leadership Team on all voids. There is also regular reporting to Board.

10.3	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
	• % Rent Loss
	• % Tenancy Turnover
	• Number of Strategic Voids
	• number of empty commercial properties
	• Number of Voids (Exc. Strategic)
	• Average Void days
	• Average Void Cost
	• Reasons for termination
	• Properties empty for more than 8 weeks (excluding strategic voids).

- 10.4 Performance indicators are subject to change at the annual review.

11. CONSULTATION

- 11.1 The Trust has consulted on the Empty Property Management Policy with Challenge Group members.

12. REVIEW

- 12.1 This policy will be reviewed every 2 years. The policy will be reviewed sooner if there are major legal, regulatory or other changes that make this necessary.

13. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- Lettable Standard
- Assignment, Mutual Exchange and Succession Policy
- Rechargeable Repairs Policy
- Adaptations Policy
- Allocations Policy
- Disposals Policy
- Personal Safety at Work Policy
- Former Tenancy Arrears and Credits Policy
- Tenancy Policy
- Repairs Policy
- Adaptations Policy
- Disposal Policy
- Transfer Policy
- Gas Servicing Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- Electrical Safety Policy

POLICY INFORMATION

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