

EMPTY HOMES POLICY

1. Purpose

1.1 This policy sets out Red Kite's approach to empty homes management and maintenance, and the letting of empty homes. The policy follows the regulatory framework's consumer standards to demonstrate that we let our homes in a fair, transparent and efficient way, make best use of our stock and work with the local authority partners to assist in meeting shared objectives. This policy applies to all social rent homes which include those let at an affordable rent. Allocation for homes which are not considered to be social rents (for example market rent or shared ownership) are outside the scope of this policy.

1.2 The policy aims to support our Empty Homes process to:

- Provide good quality homes for the community
- Make homes available for letting to the community as soon as practical
- Ensure homes are let to a safe and secure standard and to the agreed quality standards
- Minimise rent loss to us and our landlord customers
- Minimise void costs for us and our landlord customers
- Enforce tenant recharges for damage and neglect
- Ensure tenant understand the termination process including their responsibilities
- Ensure nominations agreements are followed and correctly applied
- Report on empty homes enabling identification of hard to let homes and development of strategies to minimise them
- Comply with legislation with regards to gas, electric, asbestos and fire regulations

2. Responsibilities

2.1 The Head of Relationships will be responsible for the following, delegating responsibility to the Empty Homes & Lettings Team leader where appropriate.

- Ensuring that the period a home is empty is kept to a minimum by owning the complete process from tenancy termination to reletting to a new tenant
- Ensuring that staff understand their responsibility for delivering empty home management processes with regard to rent setting, managing the home

return standards and the allocations and letting procedures and they are adequately trained to implement the procedures

- The health and safety of staff and anyone visiting an empty home to view it
- Effective key management and security of empty homes.

2.2 The Property Pod will be responsible for

- carrying out a technical inspection within 2 working days of receiving the keys when a home becomes empty
- managing the performance of contractors engaged in working in empty homes
- ensuring the home meets the lettable standard
- assessing whether there are any other planned maintenance works to be carried out, such as kitchen and bathroom works or if EPC ratings are below C and assessing whether works (including bringing it up to C) can be done before the new tenant moves in
- ensuring gas and electrical tests are completed
- undertaking other compliance checks as necessary i.e. water testing where required
- draining down systems during inclement weather
- ensuring the Health and Safety of contractors and staff visiting an empty home.

3. Legal framework

3.1 There are a number of pieces of legislation and regulations relating to our empty homes process including

- Defective Premises Act 1972
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1972/35/contents>
- Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1985/70/contents>
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/43/contents>
- General Data Protection Regulations 2018
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents>

- The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/632/contents>
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1998/2451/contents/made>
- Energy Performance of Buildings (England and Wales) Regulations 2012
- IET Guidance Note 3 – Electrical Inspection and Testing
- Tenancy Standard – Consumer Standards 1st April 2024
- Safety and Quality Standard – Consumer Standards 1st April 2024

4. Definitions

- 4.1 An empty home is a home owned or managed by Red Kite which does not have a tenant. Empty Homes are often referred to as a “void” property.
- 4.2 Empty homes management is the process of managing a home from the start of the notice to quit period to the date a tenant moves into their new home and after care check ins. The process mainly involves identifying the right applicant to become the tenant of the empty home and completing necessary repair works ready for their occupation.
- 4.3 A home may become empty for a variety of reasons. These include, but are not limited to:
- It is a new or improved home awaiting a new tenant following hand-over
 - The previous tenant has given notice and vacated the home
 - The tenancy period has come to an end and the tenant or landlord has decided not to renew the tenancy
 - The death of a tenant
 - The landlord has a court order for possession of the home and has carried out an eviction
 - The home is suspected as having been abandoned and the correct notice has been served and expired
 - The home has been badly damaged by fire or flood, or is any other way defective and unsafe and the extent of repair work requires the tenant to be moved in order for the repairs to be made
 - The home has been categorised as awaiting demolition/regeneration

5. Policy statement

- 5.1 We are committed to keeping the number of empty homes and the length of time they are empty, to a minimum for the following reasons:
- The regulatory requirement to make best use of our assets
 - The aim to provide homes to meet the needs of the local community
 - The loss of rent and security costs incurred use resources that could be better spent on improving our homes
 - Empty homes have a negative impact on the time waited by households registered on Choice Based Lettings
 - They can be targets for vandalism and squatting and can result in increased costs in terms of repair damage
 - They can have an adverse effect on the local community of increased fears of crime, higher incidences of fly-tipping and vermin and undermining community regeneration
 - To minimise our liability for Council Tax.

6. Empty Homes Process

- 6.1 When we are made aware that a home is to become empty a visit will be carried out to inspect the condition of the home as soon as possible (pre-termination visit). Repairs will be identified as either the tenant's responsibility (with opportunity to remedy or be recharged appropriately) or the responsibility of Red Kite.
- 6.2 The work that needs to be carried out will be clearly explained to the tenant before their tenancy ends in order to meet the [Home Return Standard](#). Should the tenant not carry out the work expected, or damage is later identified as a result of misuse or neglect once the home is empty, the tenant will be recharged the cost of repairing the damage in accordance with the tenancy terms and conditions and our [Recharge Policy](#).
- 6.3 If the tenant is moving to another Red Kite home, then the offer may be withdrawn dependent on the condition of their home, or where we feel it could be resolved quickly, if they do not carry out the work expected in order to meet the [Home Return Standard](#) or pay for recharged work in advance. Where a tenant is subject to a direct let via Priority Move policy, although the offer may not be withdrawn the recharges will apply where there is damage, in line with our Recharges Policy. A good example is if a person is at risk of Domestic Abuse and case has been discussed in HALP and authorised for a priority move. However, this will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

- 6.4 Necessary repair and asset replacement to bring our homes up to our *Empty Homes Group Lettable Standard* be carried out. This could be work whilst the current tenant is still in occupation or after the tenant has moved out.
- 6.5 All statutory safety works and checks will be completed before any home is let. Some non-urgent work may be completed after the new tenant has moved in. If asset replacement work is needed, such as the programmed installation of a new bathroom, and that renewal will cause a delay to the void turnaround, then where possible, it will be carried out once the new tenant has moved in and this will be explained clearly. The tenant of a Red Kite home will be offered a choice of materials and styles of components where possible.

7. Allocation of empty homes

- 7.1 While the home is being brought up to the minimum empty home standard the lettings team will be identifying a new tenant. As soon as practicable we will arrange a viewing/sign-up interview, and a tenancy start date in order to minimise any times between the completion of works and a new tenant moving in.
- 7.2 Our Red Kite Allocations Policy sets out how Red Kite will let our empty homes (*please see Red Kite Allocations Policy*).

8. Monitoring Performance

- 8.1 Red Kite monitors and benchmarks its services and performance against set criteria and standards. Overall performance will be reviewed monthly with an assumption that performance will continually improve until we are achieving optimum performance.
- 8.2 All key stage completion information in our empty homes process will be recorded and evaluated in order to ensure that the service is delivered in the most efficient and effective way.
- 8.3 Performance information will be used to identify trends that will help to improve the empty homes process. For example, by capturing trends in hard to let homes solutions can be identified to stimulate demand in these homes or time taken to hand the keys to the contractors can support timely start of void repair/technical works.
- 8.4 Red Kite will work with our contractors to ensure that they embrace our Empty Homes Policy and contribute to us minimising the length of time a home is empty.
- 8.5 Empty homes performance information will be reported to the senior leadership team, OPATs Committee and the Board.

Document Controls			
Version	6	Effective date	<i>January 2025</i>
Subject matter expert drafter	<i>Head of Relationships</i>	Process owner	<i>Head of Relationships</i>
Related Pod	<i>Relationships Community Property Finance</i>	Related Policy	<i>Allocations Policy</i>
Review period	<i>3 Years</i>	Next review due by	<i>January 2028</i>
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