



# Empty Homes Policy

Version 2 | May 2017

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## **1 Purpose**

1.1 This document sets out our approach to managing the empty homes we own, or manage on behalf of other landlords. The empty homes process includes finding a suitable new tenant for the home, preparing the home so that it is ready for letting and completing any asset renewals that are required and to the appropriate standard whilst the home is empty.

1.2 The policy aims to support Red Kite's Empty Homes process to:

- Provide good quality homes for the community
- Make homes available for letting to the community as soon as practical
- 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 tenants 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 Commercial will be responsible for the following, delegating responsibility to the Homes Agency Manager where appropriate

- Managing the performance of contractors engaged in working in empty properties.
- Ensuring that the period a home is empty is kept to a minimum by owning the complete process from tenant exit to new tenant
- Ensuring that staff understand their responsibility for delivering empty home management processes and they are adequately trained to implement the procedures
- The Health and Safety of staff, partners and customers visiting an empty home
- Effective key management and security of empty homes

2.2 The Empty Homes Surveyor will be responsible for

- Ensuring property meets the lettable standard
- 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 general health and safety standards

### **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>
- Data Protection Act 1998  
<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>
- IET Guidance Note 3 – Inspection and Testing
- Homes Standard – Homes and Community Agency

### **4 Definitions**

4.1 An empty home is a property owned or managed by us 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 property from the date we know it is to become vacant to the date a customer moves into their new home. The process mainly involves identifying the right customer 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:

- 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 being abandoned and the correct notice has been served and expired

- The home has been badly damaged by fire or flood 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:

- We 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
- They 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
- We may be required to pay Council Tax on some empty homes
- They may reduce the income for our landlord customers

## 6 Empty Homes Process

6.1 When we become aware that a home is to become empty we will carry out a visit to inspect the condition of the home as soon as possible (pre-termination visit). We will identify repairs that are our responsibility to complete and repairs that are the responsibility of the tenant.

6.2 We will explain clearly to the tenant the work they are expected to carry out before their tenancy ends in order to meet our [Home Return Standard](#). Should the tenant not carry out the work expected or we identify damage as a result of misuse or neglect once the home is empty, we will re-charge the tenant 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 home that we own then we may withdraw our offer if they do not carry out the work expected in order to meet the [Home Return Standard](#).

6.4 We will carry out necessary repair and asset replacement to bring our homes up to our [Empty Homes Lettable Standard](#). We may carry out this work whilst the current tenant is still in occupation or after the tenant has moved out.

6.5 Where we are managing a home on behalf of another landlord we will carry out work to the standard agreed by the landlord.

6.6 We will ensure that all statutory safety works and checks are completed before any home is let. We may need to complete some non-urgent work after the new

tenant has moved in. If we need to complete asset replacement work, such as the programmed installation of a new bathroom, and that renewal will cause a delay to the void turnaround, then where possible, we will carry it out once the new tenant has moved in. We will explain clearly to the incoming tenant when we intend to adopt this approach. Where we are able to, and the property is a Red Kite home, we will offer the tenant a choice of materials and styles of components.

## **7 Allocation of empty homes**

7.1 Our [Allocations Policy](#) sets out how we will let our empty homes.

7.2 When letting our social and affordable rented homes we work in partnership with Wycombe District Council to house those in greatest need of housing. In line with our nominations agreement with the Council, most of our homes are let through the sub-regional Choice Based Lettings system, via Bucks Home Choice. Eligibility for a home is assessed by the Council which applies the criteria of reasonable preference contained in the Housing Act 1996.

7.3 As permitted by our nominations agreement with the Council, we may allocate some of our empty homes to our existing customers who have a need to move. We also partner other agencies to provide homes to applicants who meet our allocations criteria.

7.4 When letting homes on behalf of other landlords we will ensure that the tenant meets the criteria set by the landlord.

7.5 Where we are managing market rent homes, we will let to suitable customers looking for a new home and not just applicants assessed as in need of a social or affordable rented home.

## **8 Monitoring Performance**

8.1 We will record and evaluate key stage completion information in our empty homes process in order to ensure that we deliver the service in the most efficient and effective way.

8.2 We will use performance information to identify trends that will help us to improve our empty homes process. For example, by capturing trends in hard to let homes we can identify solutions that will stimulate demand in these homes.

8.3 We 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.

8.4 We will report empty homes performance information to the senior leadership team and our Board.

## **9 Related policies/information**

9.1 The following policies and strategies are related:

- Allocations Policy
- Bucks Home Choice Allocations Policy
- Sheltered Transfer Policy
- Priority Moves Policy
- Decant Policy
- Empty Homes Lettable Standard
- Home Return Standard
- Asset Management Strategy
- Recharge Policy
- Asbestos Policy
- Electrical Safety Policy
- Gas Safety Policy
- Repairs Policy
- Equal Opportunities
- Feedback Policy

## **10 Expected legislative/environmental changes**

10.1 The Housing and Planning Act 2016 contained provisions for reducing regulation of Registered Providers. The changes have not yet been brought into force but they may have some impact on the way we allocate some homes when they do make these changes. This policy will be reviewed whenever changes are made that will affect this policy.