



West Lancashire Borough Council

Empty Homes for Council Owned Housing Policy

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Service Area	Property Services
Group / Persons consulted	Landlord Services Committee Your Voice Tenants' Group
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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 West Lancashire Borough Councils owned homes become empty when a tenancy has ended, and a new tenancy has not yet started. Empty homes may arise due to formal termination of a tenancy, abandonment of a tenancy, the tenant transferring to another tenancy, eviction of the tenant, or the tenant's death.
- 1.2 As rent is not due on an empty home, this can represent a significant financial loss. This policy aims to keep financial loss to a minimum, whilst ensuring that a home is let to the right applicant as quickly as possible, in line with the Councils Allocations Policy. West Lancashire Borough Council aims to let every home to a tenant which is the best match for that home. However, on occasions, the Council may hold an adapted home empty, until it is allocated to an applicant best matched.

2.0 Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to set out the Council's approach to dealing with empty Council owned homes to ensure that the Council provides an efficient and customer focused service which:
- Complies with regulatory and legislative requirements.
 - Ensures value for money in repairing empty homes and achieving the relet standard.
 - Balances the need to minimise rent loss whilst letting empty homes to the right applicant in terms of our Allocations Policy.
 - Maximises customer satisfaction in relation to the standard of a tenant's new home.
 - Is consistent with our Asset Management Strategy.

3.0 Aims

- 3.1 The Council aims to ensure that Council owned homes which become empty are re-let as quickly and efficiently as possible, with due regard to the needs of outgoing and incoming tenants, and the need to maintain homes to the agreed relet standard. The Council will do this by:
- Minimising empty home rental loss, the period that homes are empty and repair costs through effective coordination of Housing Management and repairs operations to re-let homes within agreed target times.
 - Ensuring effective, efficient, and accountable management of homes, whilst minimising avoidable costs.
 - Enabling effective monitoring and reporting of empty homes turnaround times.
 - Ensuring stringent cost control of repair costs whilst not affecting turnaround times.
 - Ensuring that tenants are aware of their tenancy obligations in relation to ending the tenancy e.g., requirement to give 28 days' notice, to return all keys on time and to fully clear the home and leave it in a clean condition.
 - Ensuring that repairs to homes are undertaken to enable the Council to re-let to the required standard (Appendix A) and that where appropriate "rechargeable" repair costs are met by the outgoing tenant or pursued post termination of the tenancy.
 - Making effective use of void periods to carry out upgrading or major repairs as appropriate and to co-ordinate with the major repairs programme regarding decant requirements.

- Incentivising take-up of empty homes where appropriate e.g. through offering a paint pack.
- Preventing end of tenancy arrears wherever possible.
- Sustaining tenancies to avoid homes becoming empty where possible by providing support and intervention for tenants to enable tenancies to continue.
- Ensuring incoming tenants are given all required information, documentation, and advice to allow them to move into their new home promptly at the agreed commencement of tenancy date.
- Achieving high levels of tenant satisfaction with the condition of homes at the beginning of the tenancy.
- Limiting the number of repairs required in the first few years after a home is relet.

4.0 Definitions

4.1 Throughout this policy some words or phrases used will be understood by some, but not all. The meanings of some key words/phrases used in this document are given below:

Decent Homes Standard - a standard set nationally which states that a Decent Home is one which meets all statutory requirements in relation to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, is in a reasonable state of repair, has reasonably modern facilities and provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

Fair Wear and Tear – the law defines fair wear and tear as “reasonable use of the premises by the tenant and the ordinary operation of natural forces.” ‘Natural forces’ relates to time and normal daily activities.

Planned works – refers to the replacement of elements (e.g. kitchens, bathroom, or boilers) within the home once they have reached the end of their useful life. This work can be programmed based on information on component life cycles and installation dates.

Post-termination – refers to the period immediately after a tenant has left their home.

Pre-termination – refers to the period after a tenant has given notice to leave but has not yet left their home.

Recharges – the cost of repairing or putting right damage or neglect to homes that are not as a result of "Fair Wear and Tear" and are deemed to be caused by the tenant. These costs are recharged to the tenant.

Sign-up – is where the new tenant/s are asked to sign the tenancy agreement and given the keys to their new home.

Statutory Standards – are standards laid down by the law which must be adhered to.

Tenant Improvements – is the term used for works carried out on their home by the tenant.

Value for Money – is the overall value based on cost, efficiency, and effectiveness.

5.0 Legislative Requirements

5.1 This Empty Homes Policy for Council owned homes and the way in which services are delivered comply with the requirements of the following standards and legislation:

- Localism Act 2011.
- The Housing Act 1985.
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982.
- Housing Act 1996 (Part 6).

5.2 Approved Code of Practice and guidance.

- British Standard 7671 As Amended (Electrical Installations)
- Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR.
- Equality Act 2010.

6.0 Associated Policies

6.1 This policy has links with the following policies:

- Council's Repairs Policy
- Allocations Policy
- Recharge Policy
- Tenant Alterations Policy.

7.0 WLBC's Approach to Council Owned Empty Homes

7.1 Empty Homes often require the input of multiple departments and primarily the repairs team, and lettings team.

7.2 The Customer Services team will begin the empty homes process by informing all key departments that a tenancy is terminating.

7.3 The repairs team will carry out a pre-termination inspection with the tenant. This is to help establish what works are required, and advise the tenant of any repairs that are their responsibility.

7.4 The Council's clearance team will clear the home of any items left by the previous tenant. It is however the tenant's responsibility to clear their home of all possessions and waste so a recharge may be applicable for this.

7.5 A surveyor from the repairs team will collect the keys from the Customer Services or relevant team and will then complete a joint inspection along with our contractor to establish the extent of the work required.

7.6 An Electrical Test (EICR), Gas Safety Inspection (LGSR) and Asbestos check will be undertaken when a home is empty in order to ensure that the home is compliant and safe for re-let.

7.7 Repairs to the empty home will take place.

7.8 A joint post inspection will take place by a repairs surveyor and contractor to ensure that all of the required repairs have been completed to the agreed standard.

- 7.9 An accompanied viewing of the empty home will be arranged with the prospective tenant. If the tenant wants the home, then all documentation is signed and the keys to the empty home are given to the tenant.

8.0 Recharges & Former Tenant Debts

- 8.1 When a tenant terminates their tenancy, they are still responsible for all outstanding debt until this has been paid in full. This debt will be pursued with the tenant.
- 8.2 If a home is left in poor condition, full of possessions or waste, and works are required due to tenant misuse or are considered rechargeable for any other reason, these will be completed during the period that the home is empty, and the cost will be recovered in line with the Council's Recharge Policy. It is the tenant's responsibility to ensure that the home is returned in a suitable state in order to avoid any potential recharge costs.

9.0 Monitoring & Targets

- 9.1 Empty Homes Performance will be monitored to ensure that targets are being met. An empty homes tracker is in place to assist with monitoring, which tracks each step from collection of keys to the commencement of a new tenancy.
- 9.2 The following will be monitored as part of our monthly Performance Management Framework
- Number of empty homes
 - Average empty home turnaround time
 - Average costs of repairing an empty home

10.0 Policy Review

- 10.1 This policy will be reviewed in line quarter one of 2026 or when a change in Legislation is received, there are best practice developments, or to address any operational issues with the empty homes procedure. Input will be sought from our residents (via the tenant security group or similar) prior to making any substantive changes.

11.0 Version Control

Date	Amendment	Version

Appendix A

Relet Standard

Relet Voids Minimum Standard – General Needs

Miscellaneous	<p>The property will be clean, safe, secure and in reasonable decorative order.</p> <p>An asbestos survey will be undertaken. Where an asbestos survey has previously been carried out a management survey will be undertaken. Where it hasn't a full invasive survey will be conducted.</p> <p>And EPC certificate will be provided where not in existence or the existing certificate is 10 or more years old.</p> <p>The property will be wind and watertight, secure, and free from structural problems, mould growth and rising or penetrating damp. Necessary repairs to remedy any issues identified will be carried out.</p> <p>An air freshener will be provided in each room.</p>
Rubbish/waste	<p>No rubbish or waste will be left in property including the loft space. Photographs will be taken of any waste/rubbish left for recharge purposes.</p>
Gardens/outside space	<p>No rubbish or waste will be left in the garden, including sheds and outbuildings and an assessment for health & safety will have been carried out. Any trees/bushes which are significantly overgrown and either substantially blocking light and/or in a potentially dangerous condition will be cut back or removed if not protected by a Tree Preservation Order. Garden/outside space will be clear of rubbish when the new tenant moves in.</p> <p>Photographs will be taken of any waste/rubbish left for recharge purposes.</p> <p>Footpaths will be level, sound and free from trip hazards or obstruction. Hardstanding's and driveways will be in a safe condition and free from trip hazards.</p>

	All gates and garage doors will open and close freely and will be fitted with a suitable latch or lock.
	All drains will be free from blockages. All WLBC owned boundary fencing will be in place and will be safe and secure.
Fencing	Party fencing which is identified as the responsibility of WLBC will be in place and will be safe and secure. There will be a 2m length of 1.8m high privacy fencing adjoining the property followed by up to 1.2m fencing as per existing (usually ranch style) or similar approved for the remainder.
Roofs	All roof coverings will be sound and free from leaks.
Integral sheds and bin stores	No rubbish or waste will be left and an assessment for health & safety issues will have been carried out.
Former tenant's fixtures/fittings	Remove and dispose (unless otherwise advised) of any former tenant's fixtures and fittings and take photographs for recharge purposes.
Decoration/finishes	
First room entered in the property	This room will be of a good standard of decoration, with redecoration carried out where required.
Ceiling	Will be free from nicotine and/or water stains, bowing, large cracks or mould. Any polystyrene ceiling tiles and coving will be removed, and the plaster made good.
Walls Wall covering	As above and there will be no flaking plaster or signs of dampness. All plastered walls will be in good condition ready for redecorating and any artex finishing or sharp protrusions will be skimmed over. Wallpaper will only remain in the property if it is sound and in good condition. Plastered walls are to be free from graffiti Paintwork will be sound and clean.
Doors/windows	Windows will be clean.
Woodwork & metalwork generally	Paintwork will be sound and clean.

Heating/hot water/gas

Gas fire/electric fire	Will be clean and in full working order.
Electric storage heater(s)	Where found, raise with WLBC to consider alternative heating provision. Where decision is made to retain, heaters will be clean and in full working order.
Air source heating	Will be clean and in full working order.
Gas boiler or Gas water heater	Will be clean, controls/time-switch, thermostat etc. in place and in full working order.
Electric water heaters (e.g., immersion)	Will be in good working order.
Gas cooking point	Will be provided where possible.
Gas/electrical safety check	<p>Gas will be capped off and a gas safety label fitted at meter position. Heating system will be inspected and any work to remedy any defects will be carried out.</p> <p>An electrical safety check will be carried out and a certificate provided prior to letting.</p> <p>Gas fired heating systems will be turned on and tested upon request from new tenant after occupying, and a copy of the LGSR will be provided to WLBC and to the new tenant.</p>

Electrical

Light fittings	<p>Correct light fittings will be fitted in appropriate rooms (i.e., rose and pendant to lounge areas and bayonet fittings to bathroom). All will be clean and sound with no visible defects.</p> <p>Where provided fluorescent lighting will be working and diffusers free from debris and stains.</p>
Socket outlets	All light bulbs will be present and working. No burn marks, cracks or damage will be evident, and they will be securely fixed to the wall. A TV aerial will be present in the living room and will be fit for purpose.
Switches/pull-cords	The switch operates properly no damage evident. Pull cords will be clean.
Extractor fan (if there is one)	Will be clean and visually checked.
Electrical cooking point	Will be provided.

Smoke/CO alarm	<p>There will be a fully working smoke alarm at the property and any hard-wired smoke alarm will be serviced and cleaned.</p> <p>A carbon monoxide alarm will be present and in full working order.</p>
Heat detector	A heat detector will be present in the kitchen and expiry date will have been checked.
Meter and consumer unit	Will be clean, intact, wiring visually sound and fuses labelled.
Electrical safety test	An electrical safety check will be carried out and a certificate provided. A comprehensive installation test will have been carried out to complete dwelling (all boards) including all Council installed appliances, all in accordance with the provisions of the current I.E.E. Regulations. NICEIC inspection report will be completed and returned to the Contractor Administrator immediately following test. The test includes earth loop impedance, operation of M.C.B's, and or R.C.D., polarity, earthing. Earth continuity of all water pipes, insulation resistance and earth continuity for all appliances, e.g., fans, downflow heaters, for which the Council are responsible.
Plumbing/sanitaryware	
Taps	Taps will be clean, disinfected, in good working order and will not drip. Any items in need of replacement should be as per the kitchen/bathroom specification. If bath taps are in need of replacement and the property has a combi-boiler, replace with shower mixer tap. If the property does not have a combi-boiler, replace with standard bath taps.
Bath	Will be clean, disinfected, with no cracks or chips to surfaces. The sealant and panels will be intact and plugs and chains in place. Any items in need of replacement should be as per the bathroom specification.
Showers	<p>Leave in situ any walk-in showers/wet rooms provided as disabled adaptations unless advised otherwise.</p> <p>A new shower curtain will be provided, and a new shower hose and spray will be provided if in situ. Any unsafe shower units</p>

	fitted by former tenants will be removed and walls/tiling made good.
Wash hand basin	Will be clean, disinfected, with no cracks or chips to surfaces. The sealant and panels will be intact and plugs and chains in place. Any items in need of replacement should be as per the bathroom specification.
WC	<p>A new WC ring seat and cover will be fitted and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The WC will be chemically cleaned. • The flush mechanism will work. • The pan and cistern will not be cracked or damaged. • The pan will be secure to the floor. • There will be no signs of leakage. <p>Any items in need of replacement should be as per the bathroom specification.</p>
Kitchen sink & drainers	<p>This will be clean, disinfected, with no visual damage and the sealant will be intact. Sink will be free from leaks.</p> <p>Any items in need of replacement should be as per the kitchen specification.</p>
Pipework generally	Pipes will be securely fixed with no sign of leaks.
Rainwater goods (gutters, and downpipes and gulleys)	Will be in place, intact and functioning as designed, free from blockages/leaks.
Tiling to kitchen & bathroom walls	<p>Will be clean, disinfected, free from cracks, firmly fixed and the grouting will be clean and free from mould. A tiled splash-back will be present around the bath and wash hand basin at least two rows high, and tiles present to the shower area if a shower over bath is present.</p> <p>There will be a tiled splash back in the kitchen which is free from cracks and is securely fixed to the wall and grouted to a minimum of 450mm high.</p> <p>Any items in need of replacement should be as per the kitchen/bathroom specification.</p>
Flooring: kitchen/bathroom/WC	Kitchen flooring will be clean, disinfected and serviceable. It will be even with no cracks or splits and no tiles will be loose.

	Any flooring in need of replacement should be as per the kitchen/bathroom specification.
Flooring: other rooms	<p>Flooring will be sound, even, and in reasonable condition to receive floor coverings. Any missing or broken floor tiles (including asbestos floor tiles)/floorboards will be replaced.</p> <p>Laminate flooring in flats above ground floor will be removed.</p>
Joinery/fixtures	
Windows	<p>All windows will be in good condition, free from cracks, secure and will open and close freely. All windows will be safe and watertight.</p> <p>Handles, stays, restrictors and catches (where fitted) will be intact and working. Glass will be free from cracks.</p> <p>Double glazed units will be free from misting. Safety/fire-rated glass will be installed where necessary.</p> <p>All upstairs windows will meet current safety regulations (e.g., restrictors/fire-rated glass fitted where required).</p> <p>All window openings will be fitted with a curtain batten.</p>
Staircase	<p>The balustrades, treads and risers will have been checked for risk of trapping of children e.g., gaps between balustrades, etc. (In older properties banisters may not, unfortunately meet current specification).</p> <p>A suitable handrail will be fitted to all stairs</p> <p>All internal doors will be present and will match.</p>
Doors	<p>Door & fittings will be sound and intact and door closers in place & operational. Doors will all open and close freely.</p> <p>All fire doors will open and close as intended and any fire protection including intumescent strips and stopping must be intact.</p> <p>Glass will be sound and safety/fire-rated glass will be fitted.</p>

	Privacy indicator locks will be provided on bathroom and toilet doors.
Kitchen units and worktops	<p>Will be clean and disinfected, inside and out, serviceable and in sound condition. Cabinets will be in good condition, securely fixed to the walls and doors and drawers will open with ease. Worktops will be free from scratches, chips and burns and edges will be covered with edging strips.</p> <p>Any integrated kitchen appliances will be removed and three 620mm spaces will be left for kitchen appliances if in general needs accommodation, including connections for a washing machine, or two appliances if in sheltered accommodation.</p> <p>There will be at least a double base unit, a sink with double base unit, a double wall unit and 1.5m² of worktop (space permitting) and any replacement items will be fitted like for like, raising any issues with obsolete components to WLBC if necessary.</p> <p>WLBC will be notified of any kitchen which doesn't meet the specification as soon as it is identified, to enable a decision around its replacement.</p>
General	<p>All architraves and skirting will be complete and in good condition. Any missing/damaged items/fixtures will be replaced/repared e.g. skirting boards.</p> <p>Any damaged items will be made good/repared and if not damaged by fair wear and tear then photographs will be taken for recharge purposes.</p>
Condensation/mould	There will be no signs of significant mildew or mould growth.
Ventilation	Vents and airbricks will be checked to ensure they are not blocked or sealed.
Main entrance/locks	
Front door	<p>All external doors will be in a good condition, safe, secure, and weather tight.</p> <p>All front doors on flats with communal stairwells will be FRA compliant including suitably operating door closers.</p>

	Locks will be changed and (in general needs properties) 2 keys will be provided.
	Doors will be fitted with a letterbox and a door number will be provided.
	A door mat to the inside of the front door will be provided.
Patio/rear door	Locks will be replaced, and keys will be provided.
Window locks	Keys for window locks (where fitted) will be on site and operational.
Secondary means of escape	Will be free from obstruction and fully operational.

Temporary Accommodation

In addition to the above the following standards apply to temporary accommodation

- Locks will only be changed where advised.
- Property will be in good decorative condition.
- Electrical equipment provided by the Council will be inspected, PAT tested and labelled with certification provided.
- Any blinds will be clean, free from mould and in good working order, replacing as necessary.
- A key safe will be fitted and in good working order, replacing as necessary. A set of keys and/or key fob will be left in the key safe.

Relet Voids Enhanced Standard – General Needs

As above for Relet Voids Minimum Standard – General Needs, but in addition:

Strip any wallpaper and prepare all walls, including plasterwork, prior to applying two coats emulsion to walls and ceilings; prepare all surfaces prior to applying two coats primer/undercoat and one coat gloss to all woodwork.

Ensure existing carpets are in good condition, clean and free from stains, and if not present, fit tight woven medium contract grade carpet to all room except kitchen and bathroom, preparing sub-base, laying underlay, gripper or tape, and cutting and fitting as necessary, door strips etc. Ease any internal doors as necessary.

Relet Voids Enhanced Standard – Sheltered Needs

As above, but in addition:

Strip any wallpaper and prepare all walls, including plasterwork, prior to applying two coats emulsion to walls and ceilings; prepare all surfaces prior to applying two coats primer/undercoat and one coat gloss to all woodwork.

Ensure existing carpets are in good condition, clean and free from stains, and if not present, fit tight woven medium contract grade carpet to all room except kitchen and bathroom, preparing sub-base, laying underlay, gripper, or tape, and cutting and fitting as necessary, door strips etc. Ease any internal doors as necessary.

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