

# Empty Homes Policy

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## 1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Empty Homes Policy (EHP) outlines Beyond Housing's commitment to delivering first class homes and services to customers, based on:

- Empty home standard: Providing homes to a high standard and quality, so that customers value them, look after them and wish to stay in them.
- Customer first: Understanding who our customers are and what they want from us, to improve customer experience and satisfaction, so that they value our services.
- Organisational culture: Having people with a desire to care for customers when providing them with a home and services.
- Business sustainability: Building a stronger business by continually improving performance and ensuring business viability and value for money (VFM), when managing Beyond Housing's assets.
- Enhancing Beyond Housing's reputation and image: Increasing demand for homes and services to become a landlord of first choice, to sustain the communities Beyond Housing serves and to help regenerate the region.

- 1.2 Registered Housing Associations must have in place a policy and procedures for managing empty properties to ensure security and that loss of rental income and repair costs are kept to an absolute minimum. This is also important for maintaining good estate management as empty homes can have a detrimental effect on neighbouring properties and the wider community (Dept. for Communities). This policy states how Beyond Housing will do this.

## 2.0 Objective

- 2.1 Beyond Housing is committed to letting properties to a high standard, in line with customer expectations, in a timely manner in ways that are cost effective. Delivery of this policy will ensure that:

- Beyond Housing offers customers homes they want and are satisfied with
- Lettings are made in a way that is easy and accessible for customers
- Lettings are made quickly and easily in a timely manner for customers
- Customers are supported in the early days of their tenancy to ensure it can be maintained
- Empty homes are managed effectively and brought back into use as efficiently as possible adhering to the principles of value for money.

- 2.2 The EHP, applies to Beyond Housing's social housing rented properties throughout the area of operation, and applied to the following stock types:

- General needs
- 'Designated' properties – those with a community emergency alarm call system.
- Independent Living Service (ILS) schemes.

- 2.3 The EHP does not apply to:

- Supported units – 3 supported living schemes
- Shared ownership and Rent to Buy properties
- Properties managed by agents
- Garages
- Warehouses

- Commercial properties e.g. shops

2.4 **Tenancies** – The EHP will cover the following:

- Types of tenancy
- The tenancy agreement
- Letting of homes

2.5 **Empty homes process stages** – The EHP will cover the following:

- Pre-termination and termination of tenancy
- Empty home inspection
- Empty home repair
- Home advertising
- Applicant selection
- Home viewing
- Tenancy sign-up
- Aftercare service.

2.6 **Types of tenancy:** The Regulator for Social Housing's (RSH) Tenancy Standard states that registered providers shall offer tenancies or terms of occupancy compatible with the purpose of the accommodation, the needs of individual households, the sustainability of the community and the efficient use of stock.

2.7 Tenancy types are granted in accordance with this and the Tenancy Management Policy – Assured Tenancies and Equitable Tenancies (used for under 18 applicants where a guarantor is needed).

2.8 **Tenancy Agreement:** New tenants will be provided with a tenancy agreement setting out their rights and responsibilities, Beyond Housing's rights and responsibilities and other relevant tenancy information, in accordance with the Tenancy Management Policy.

2.9 **Letting of homes:** Beyond Housings properties are let in accordance with the CBL policies operated by relevant local authorities covering the area:

- Tees Valley Home Finder (TVHF) – Tees Valley local authorities.
- North Yorkshire Home Choice (NYHC) – North Yorkshire local authorities.
- Other lettings schemes operated by neighbouring local authorities.
- Including any associated local lettings policies.

2.10 **Pre-termination and termination of tenancy:** In accordance with the Ending Tenancies Procedure Beyond Housing requires 4 weeks notice from customers when terminating their tenancy. Terminations should be done via the designated Tenancy Termination Notice. In circumstances of transfers and death or in exceptional circumstances such as domestic violence this policy allows for this to be waived. Tenants have no legal right to revoke or extend their tenancy termination notice, but revocation or extension of a tenancy termination notice may be allowed in exceptional circumstances. Where keys are handed in by a customer without a tenancy termination notice a four week notice period will be enforced. A lesser period may be granted in exceptional circumstances.

2.11 Upon receipt of a Tenancy Termination Notice, Beyond Housing expects access to tenants' homes for colleagues to inspect the condition of the home and advise on their responsibilities, and for staff and prospective tenants for the purpose of re-letting the premises.

2.12 Matters relating to transfers, abandonment, successions, assignments and mutual exchanges are dealt with under the Tenancy Management Policy.

2.13 **Empty home inspection:** An empty home will be inspected when a tenancy is terminated to ensure safety and security and the locks will be changed.

2.14 Repairs will be assessed and arranged for the re-letting of the property in accordance with the Empty Home Standard. This includes rubbish removal, cleaning and decorations where needed. The property will be classed as either requiring minor or major repair work.

- 2.15 Where possible, to meet the needs of ingoing tenants, an immediate let for the tenancy to commence after initial safety checks/works have been completed, can be arranged, allowing them to take up residence. Any further repairs/works will then be completed after they have moved in.
- 2.16 **Empty home repair:** Beyond Housing is committed to providing quality homes to a high standard and will ensure they are ready for letting, being structurally sound, weather tight, safe and secure and clean and tidy, in accordance with the Beyond Housing Homes Standard.
- 2.17 Safety checks for homes will be completed before tenancies start and customers will be provided with copies of relevant certificates with their tenancy agreement.
- 2.18 Repair work for homes will be completed in accordance with the Empty Home Standard, before tenancies start.
- 2.19 Gardens will be clear of rubbish and unauthorised structures. Grass, vegetation and paths will be kept in accordance with the Void Garden Clearance Specification.
- 2.20 Fencing to front, side and rear boundaries will be repaired or replaced where fencing is in place in accordance with the Empty Home Standard. This standard takes into account any customer vulnerabilities. This will be done whilst the property is empty or afterwards, at a date agreed with the customer.
- 2.21 **Home advertising:** For customers wishing to become Beyond Housing tenants or existing tenants wishing to transfer to another Beyond Housing home, available homes will be advertised for letting in accordance with the CBL schemes operated by relevant local authorities covering the area:
- TVHF – Tees Valley local authorities.
  - NYHC – North Yorkshire local authorities.
  - Other lettings schemes operated by neighbouring local authorities.
  - Including any associated local lettings policies.

- 2.22 Available homes will be advertised when a notice to terminate a tenancy is received.
- 2.23 The frequency of advertising will be determined by the CBL schemes (2.21) and available homes will be advertised via a number of different channels.
- 2.24 When bidding for homes, the number of bids that customers are allowed, will be determined by the CBL schemes (2.21).
- 2.25 **Applicant selection:** When selecting applicants to become Beyond Housing tenants, this will be in accordance with the CBL schemes operated by relevant local authorities covering the area:
- TVHF – Tees Valley local authorities.
  - NYHC – North Yorkshire local authorities.
  - Other lettings schemes operated by neighbouring local authorities
  - Including any associated local lettings policies.
- 2.26 The CBL schemes will determine the priority lettings bandings, the prioritisation of applicants for lettings and the removal of any priority bandings.
- 2.27 Where necessary to protect communities and Beyond Housing, some applicants will be designated as 'Non-qualifying' for Beyond Housing homes, e.g. convictions, anti-social behaviour, debts owed to Beyond Housing. Those applicants will not be eligible for Beyond Housing accommodation, will be notified of the decision and will not be able to bid for Beyond Housing accommodation.
- 2.28 Beyond Housing tenants will not be allowed to transfer to another Beyond Housing home where their home does not meet the required standard (exceptions to this may be made for individual circumstances), where debts are owed to Beyond Housing or where a Notice of Seeking Possession for breaching tenancy conditions has been served (see Tenancy Management Policy). However, those tenants will be given the opportunity to rectify their circumstances to be considered for a future transfer.

- 2.29 When selecting applicants, Beyond Housing will work with them to ensure they can afford the homes they have applied for and identify any support needs to help with moving-in and sustaining their tenancies.
- 2.30 Where properties are declared as being 'difficult-to-let' (DTL) which cannot be offered to any prospective customers, Beyond Housing will consider incentives to enable the letting of those properties.
- 2.31 **Home viewing:** A home viewing will be arranged for customers to view a home in advance of signing up for a tenancy, to enable them to determine if it meets their needs and preferences. Vulnerable customers will be encouraged to seek the attendance and support of a representative where appropriate.
- 2.32 When viewing, homes will be safe to enter. Customers will be notified of outstanding repairs, when they will be completed and when the tenancy sign-up is expected. Where customers wish to move in immediately, Beyond Housing will arrange for some repairs to be completed after they have moved in.
- 2.33 Customers will be shown around the property and shown the important features, equipment and associated services.
- 2.34 Where possible, items from previous tenants may be left in the home e.g. carpets, where ingoing tenant's want them.
- 2.35 When customers refuse a property, they will be given guidance on what happens next, in accordance with the CBL policies operated.
- 2.36 **Tenancy sign-up:** When customers accept a Beyond Housing home, a tenancy agreement will be issued for them to sign and the tenancy will be commenced. New tenancies commence any day of the week, except weekends. Beyond Housing transfers will commence on Mondays.
- 2.37 Tenancy sign-ups will be conducted by arranging an appointment convenient with customers, or can be conducted at home viewings where appropriate.

2.38 At sign up, a useful information pack will be issued and various things will be explained, including:

- The responsibilities and obligations of new tenants and Beyond Housing as their landlord.
- The level of rent, associated service charges and what they include and rent increases.
- The range of rent payment methods and the preferred method will be agreed.
- Financial support and welfare benefit eligibility.

2.39 **New home aftercare service:** The emphasis on our new home aftercare service is just as important as the provision of a new home. Beyond Housing aims to make sure that moving into a new home is a positive experience for customers. One that is supportive to enable customers to settle in quickly and one where any issues are identified and resolved quickly. Beyond Housing therefore prides itself in providing homes and services that customers value, to be a landlord of first choice.

2.40 New tenants will be contacted or visited to confirm they have moved in, to see how they are settling in, to offer advice and guidance where it is needed and to deal with any issues they may have.

2.41 A customer satisfaction survey will then be conducted after customers have moved in to obtain feedback on their experiences of the homes and services they have received.

### 3.0 Definitions

3.1 **Empty home:** An empty home is any property that is untenanted and does not have a legitimate tenant for a period of time.

3.2 **Empty home classifications:** Empty homes can be classified as requiring either ‘minor’ or ‘major’ repair work. This is done at the empty home inspection with an assessment of the extent of repair work needed to enable the letting of a home i.e. does it require minor or major works. This is in accordance with the CORE (COntinuous REcording of



Lettings in Social Housing) classification. Targets for completion of minor and major repair works are contained in the Empty Homes balanced performance scorecard.

3.3 **Minor repair works:** Minor works include unplanned urgent repairs, routine repairs, redecorations, cleaning and clearances that are contained within a landlord's re-let time for CORE reporting purposes.

3.4 **Major repair works:** Major works prevent the re-letting of a home due to their scale and extent. They are works that cannot reasonably be carried out with a tenant in occupation and therefore need to be carried out whilst the home is vacant. The time in repair is not included in the CORE overall relet time.

3.5 **Difficult to Let (DTL) home:** DTL properties are defined as unpopular housing stock managed by the not-for-profit housing sector including Local Authorities and Housing Associations. This is due no demand based on:

- Location
- Type
- Design
- Size
- Affordability
- Standard
- Limited, or no, bids to property advert.

Numerous offers being refused, based on:

- Property type not fit for purpose
- Oversupply
- Neighbourhood stigma

Higher than normal rates of turnover.

3.6 **Choice Based Lettings (CBL):** CBL schemes allow applicants to bid for rented properties advertised by local authorities and housing associations. Applicants can bid if they are registered on the CBL scheme.

- 3.7 **Local lettings policies:** Are an important tool used to respond to specific local circumstances and are one of the main vehicles for local authorities and housing associations to use flexibilities within their overall allocation scheme for social and affordable rented housing.
- 3.8 **CORE Reporting:** The COntinuous REcording (CORE) of lettings and sales in social housing in England is a national information service recording the characteristics of both private registered providers and local authority, new social housing tenants and the homes they rent. It provides the statistical information that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (HCLG) produces on social housing.

## 4.0 Responsibilities

- 4.1 **Director of Customer Services** and **Director of Property Services** are responsible for the overall implementation of the policy.
- 4.2 **Communities Managers** are responsible for the day to day implementation of the policy for Communities, ensuring adherence and compliance with it, and working in line with the relevant procedures.
- 4.3 **Communities Co-ordinators** are responsible for approvals, ensuring their teams work in line with the policy and procedures and the completion of quality assurance for compliance, within Communities.
- 4.4 **Communities Advisors** and **Team Support Assistants** are responsible for working in line with the policy and procedures in a competent manner, within Communities.
- 4.5 **Voids Manager** is responsible for the day to day implementation of the policy for Property and Commercial Operations, ensuring adherence and compliance with it, and working in line with the relevant procedures.
- 4.6 **Team Leaders** and **Charge Hands** are responsible for approvals, ensuring their teams work in line with the policy and procedures and the completion of quality assurance for compliance, within Property and Commercial Operations.

- 4.7 **Trade and Maintenance Operatives**, the **Impact Team** and **Void Cleaners** are responsible for working in line with the policy and procedures in a competent manner, within property and Commercial Operations.

## 5.0 Sustainability

- 5.1 The development of this policy was committed to reducing the carbon footprint of Beyond Housing. The Empty Homes Standard will help improve the energy efficiency and affordability of the homes Beyond Housing lets to customers and the way Beyond Housing operates will continue to be streamlined with improved digitisation to provide more efficient ways of working and reduced carbon emissions.
- 5.2 The Empty Homes Service will aim to be continually improving performance, measuring success and progression, and managing Beyond Housing assets and homes in terms of knowing when to invest and when not to. This is to ensure business viability and VFM, to build a stronger business.

## 6.0 Reporting

- 6.1 Reporting will be undertaken in relation to the performance of the policy. The following KPI's have been identified and will be reported over the life of the policy. The owners of the KPI's have also been identified alongside alignment to the objectives of the policy.

EHP Objective	EHP KPI	KPI Owner
Offer a home customers want.	Customer satisfaction with their new home meeting their needs.	Communities Managers (CM)
Offer a home customers are satisfied with.	Customer satisfaction with their new home's condition/standard.	Voids Manager (VM)
	Customer satisfaction with cleanliness of new home.	VM
	Customer satisfaction with standard of decoration of new home.	VM

EHP Objective	EHP KPI	KPI Owner
	Customer satisfaction with standard of garden of new home.	VM/CM
Offer a home in a way customers are satisfied with.	Customer satisfaction with the overall lettings service they have received.	CM
Offer a home in a time suitable for customers.	Customer satisfaction with length of time between registration and offer.	CM
	Customer satisfaction with length of time between offer and viewing.	CM
	Customer satisfaction with length of time between viewing and moving in.	CM
Provide a comprehensive aftercare service for customers to help them move in to their new home.	Customer satisfaction with the aftercare service received when they moved into their new home	CM/VM
Let properties at the most efficient cost.	Void property rent loss.	CM/VM
	Average void repair cost.	VM
	Void management cost (Lettings)	CM
Let properties efficiently and effectively.	Total number of void properties.	CM/VM
	Total void properties as a % of total stock.	CM/VM
	Average re-let time (days).	CM/VM
	Voids – average working days to complete minor repairs.	VM
	Voids – average working days to complete major repairs.	VM
	Property turnover.	CM
	Number of property lettings.	CM
	Number of property terminations.	CM

## 7.0 Consultation

7.1 Customers have been extensively involved in the development of the service; helping shape the empty homes offer and ensure properties that are ready to be let are in good condition and meet the expected needs and demands of a customer joining Beyond Housing.

- 7.2 Feedback concerning the service will be sought regularly via satisfaction surveys assessing the lettings process, the standard of the home they move into and the support they receive immediately after taking up a tenancy.

## 8.0 Revision

- 8.1 This policy will be subject to review after three years or in response to changes in legislation or good practice, whichever is the sooner.

Version No	Revision Date	Reason for Revision
1	August 2021	