

# Voids Management Policy

Stevenage Borough Council

[2025]

<b>Date created</b>	June 2024
<b>Approved by</b>	Cabinet
<b>Owner</b>	Denise Lewis (Assistant Director Building Safety and Housing Property Services)
<b>Version</b>	1
<b>Author</b>	Lori Smith (Empty Homes Manager)
<b>Business Unit and Team</b>	Building Safety and Housing Property Services: Housing Asset Management
<b>Policy Review Date</b>	June 2026
<b>Equality Impact Assessment Date</b>	April 2024 (reviewed February 2025)

For translations, braille or large print versions of this document please email [equalities@stevenage.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@stevenage.gov.uk).

## Contents

1. Purpose.....	3
2. Scope.....	3
3. Legal Framework.....	4
4. Equalities.....	5
5. Data Protection.....	5
6. Policy .....	6
7. Consultation .....	8

8. Monitoring and Review .....	9
9. References and Resources .....	9
10. Abbreviations and Definitions.....	10
11. Appendices .....	10
12. Version History .....	10

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy is to outline how the council manages residential properties within the housing stock when they become vacant. Residential properties will become vacant when a tenancy has been terminated. Vacant properties are referred to as “empty homes” or “voids”. The policy will keep in line with the ‘Making Stevenage Even Better’ corporate plan priority of maintaining good quality homes for the allocation of housing under the council’s statutory duties.
- 1.2 The Voids Management Policy outlines Stevenage Borough Council’s approach to managing void properties to:
- Minimise loss of rental income by reducing the length of time a property remains empty with no tenancy attached; whilst still ensuring the property is repaired to an agreed standard.
  - Provide clear expectations to outgoing tenants about how a property should be left when the tenancy ends.
  - Provide clear expectations for contractors and also incoming tenants on the Council’s Lettable Standard.
  - Monitor void management performance.
  - Monitor customer satisfaction of incoming tenants with their new home.
  - Ensure value for money is delivered in carrying out works to void properties.

## 2. Scope

- 2.1 The Head of Housing Asset Management is responsible for:
- The effective implementation and delivery of the policy.
  - Monitoring performance and delivery.
  - Reviewing the policy.
  - Developing processes and procedures in line with the policy.
  - Ensuring that the policy aims and terms are adhered to.

The policy will be administered by the following teams: Empty Homes, Voids and the relevant contractors or direct labour operatives.

This policy will impact tenants of SBC, applicants for social housing in Stevenage, Staff and Councillors.

2.2 This policy links to and should be read in conjunction with the following policies and strategies:

- Tenancy Policy and Tenancy Agreement Conditions
- Housing Asset Management Strategy
- Housing Allocation Policy
- Aids & Adaptations Policy
- Under Occupation Policy
- Local Lettings plan – Independent Living
- Repairs and Maintenance Policy – rechargeable repairs
- Damp & Mould Policy

This policy supports the council's corporate priorities, which are set out in [Corporate Plan: Making Stevenage Even Better \(2024-2029\)](#)

In particular: Maintaining Good Quality Homes

### 3. Legal Framework

3.1 This Policy will ensure compliance with the following legislation and regulatory standards and promote good practice:

- Housing Act 1985
- Equality Act 2010
- Homelessness Act 1996
- Housing Act 2004 - Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
- Localism Act 2011
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982
- Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 (GSIUR) as amended 2018 Approved Code of Practice and guidance
- British Standard 7671 As Amended (Electrical Installations)
- Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR
- Decent Homes Standard
- Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) and the Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards (effective from April 2024)

3.2 The Council as the landlord is committed to providing good quality homes in line with the [Regulator of Social Housing Consumer Standards](#). As a Registered Provider the Council will ensure that void properties meet the required outcomes of the safety and quality standard particularly with regards to the following:

- Stock Quality – through a survey of condition prior to and after the property becomes void (and carrying out any works identified to meet the Lettable Standard) will ensure the Council has an accurate, up to date and evidenced understanding of the condition of their homes which can reliably inform provision of good quality, well maintained and safe homes for tenants.

- Decency – through surveys and associated works to meet the Lettable Standard will ensure that prior to reletting void properties meet and/or continue to be maintained to at least the Decent Homes Standard. The Lettable Standard is consistent with the Decent Homes Standard.
- Health and Safety - take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of tenants in their homes and associated communal areas. When properties are void surveys undertaken will identify and assess any Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) related hazards, for example damp and mould, and enable action to be taken to remove and/or mitigate these risks to ensure that tenants are safe in their homes. All health and safety related compliance checks will also be undertaken including in relation to gas, electrical, asbestos, fire, water (and lift safety as appropriate) given the property type and location.
- Repairs, maintenance and planned improvements – any repairs and maintenance required will be undertaken as necessary as part of works to meet the Lettable Standard. Where any are to be completed after reletting details will be provided to the new tenant as part of the tenancy sign-up process. Where, based on stock condition survey data, any components, for example kitchen, bathroom or heating, are due for renewal as part of a current or future planned programme this information will be shared with the tenants as far as known. If based on their current condition a component requires renewal whilst the property is void this would need to be agreed separately by the relevant Manager within the Housing Asset Management team.
- Adaptations – where the pre-void surveys identify that the property has been adapted to meet the needs of person(s) with a disability these will be noted and retained to enable the property to be matched to a suitable applicant.

## 4. Equalities

- 4.1 Under the Equality Act (2010) the Council has a legal duty to fulfil the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). Through this duty and in the application of this policy, the council will carry out its functions in a way that:
- a. Removes discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is unlawful under the Equality Act (2010).
  - b. Promotes equal opportunities between people who have a protected characteristic(s) and those who don't.
  - c. Encourages good relations between people who have a protected characteristic(s) and those who don't.

Further information on the Council's fulfilment of the Equality Act (2010) is set out in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy (2022) and Reasonable Adjustment Policy (2024).

## 5. Data Protection

- 5.1 The Council regards respect for the privacy of individuals and the lawful and careful treatment of personal information as very important to delivery of services.
- 5.2 The Council will ensure that it treats personal information lawfully and proportionately as set out in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act (2018). For further information on the Councils approach to handling information please see [Data Protection Act \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/data-protection-act).

## 6. Policy

### 6.1.1 Tenancy Termination:

Tenants or Next of kin must end a tenancy in accordance with the ending a tenancy guide: <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/your-tenancy/ending-your-tenancy> or [Death of a Council Tenant \(stevenage.gov.uk\)](https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/death-of-a-council-tenant)

- How to end the tenancy
- Responsibilities
- What you need to do before you leave
- After you leave

On receiving written notice the Council will conduct a pre-void visit before the tenancy is terminated to inspect the condition of the property. Outgoing tenants will be asked to sign a 'pre-void property inspection form' during this visit. This form will be taken as an agreement that they will adhere to the following conditions set out in the leaving standard:

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/housing/council-housing/your-tenancy/ending-your-tenancy/advice-on-how-your-property-should-be-left>

There will be opportunity for remedial repairs to take place during the notice period where reasonable and appropriate. It will be the tenant or next of kin's full responsibility to leave the property, garden and outbuildings empty and clear of all items and rubbish. Anything that is left incomplete will be registered as a rechargeable repair.

If elements of a property are considered to have been damaged deliberately or through negligence by the tenant or their household, or unauthorised alterations have been found, the outgoing tenant will be responsible for making good to an approved standard or they will need to agree to any recharges before they can move.

If damage or unauthorised alterations are not visible at the pre-void inspection but are later identified, the outgoing tenant will be notified and recharged.

If a tenant is known to have a disability or vulnerabilities, then recharges may be waived in certain circumstances as set out in the Council's Repairs and Maintenance Policy.

**\*\*Repairs policy link to be added\*\***

Former tenants who feel they have been recharged unfairly have the right to appeal. They must do so in writing, addressing it to the Former Tenant Arrears Advisor who will investigate the matter. The final decision on whether charges should apply will be communicated to the former tenant of the property in writing.

Temporary accommodation terminations will be managed by the Temporary accommodation team. The termination of the occupation agreement will be based on rehousing, abandonment, or eviction. Once the property is vacant the property will be handed over to the Empty Homes team if extensive void works are required.

#### 6.1.2 Void Repairs:

Once the tenant has vacated, the tenancy terminated and keys handed back to the council, the Council will inspect all void properties and scope works required to meet the lettable standard. Asbestos reports will be obtained from the in-house team and any relevant asbestos removal will be carried out. Void properties will be cross referenced against the stock condition survey data and planned works programmes with the relevant teams to make the most cost-effective use of resources. Full stock condition surveys will be carried out to all void properties and ensure updated data is captured to help inform future investment requirements. Works orders will be raised with the contractors or in-house team for repairs to begin with the agreed KPIs. The Council will carry out works in progress visits to inspect standards of work and health and safety compliance of contractors.

All void properties must pass a gas and electrical check with the relevant certificates obtained. A copy of these will be given to the new tenant as part of the sign-up process along with an asbestos survey, a valid EPC and fire safety related information. Any major works or health and safety works that would cause a high level of disruption to tenants or put their safety at risk, will be completed prior to the start of the new tenancy. Minor repairs may take place after the new tenancy has started, this will be communicated to the tenant during the sign-up process and a date to be confirmed by the Empty Homes Team. Any property that requires extensive major works maybe taken out of management to be reviewed by the Head of Housing Asset Management.

Once all repair work to a void property has been completed the property will be post inspected by the Empty Homes Surveyors to ensure the property meets the Council's Lettable standard.

**\*\*link here for lettable standard once approved\*\***

#### 6.1.3 New Tenancies

When a property is put on notice before termination it will be offered in accordance with the Council's Housing Allocations Policy.

<https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/housing/allocations/housing-allocations-policy.pdf>

New tenants will be offered a viewing and given progress updates where available and safe to do so. Once the property is ready to let the new tenants will be contacted to arrange the viewing and sign up. A copy of the lettable standard will be issued and anything that is not deemed to meet these will be reported by the tenant. New tenants will be given the opportunity to feed back their satisfaction with the lettings process including the condition of the property through the satisfaction survey issued within the first 2 weeks of their new tenancy.

Temporary accommodation sign up for occupation agreements will be managed separately by the temporary accommodation team.

#### 6.1.4 Targets for Void properties (key to key)

The council will work to target timescales in managing void properties to make sure that the key to key process is as efficient as possible and the property is re-let within the shortest possible timescales. Each stage of the void path will have a set target that will be recorded and monitored within the housing management system.

Internal monitoring and reporting will be conducted to check the progress of all void properties against the target times for the key to key process. The reporting will be used to identify reasons behind any delays in each stage of the process and to resolve any common occurrences that are within the Councils control. Targets have been set for the following void paths based on the extent of works required:

Key to Key KPIS:

- General Needs (GN) Standard 28 days (inc 6 days for letting)
- GN Major 56 days (inc 6 days for letting)
- Sheltered Housing (SH) Standard 66 days (inc 44 days for letting)
- SH Major 94 days (inc 44 days for letting)
- Temporary Accommodation (TA) 10 days key to key

## 7. Consultation

7.1 The following stakeholder consultation has been undertaken to inform this policy:

- Staff involved in the key-to-key process – Pulse staff survey.
- The Policy content has been written based on scrutiny reviews of the Repairs and Void Service by the Community Select Committee.
- On going Lettable Standard Survey is available for Tenants that have moved in over the past 12 months to capture trends to improve the service.



- 7.2 As part of the implementation of this policy, we will actively seek feedback from tenants on the operation of this policy and provide feedback on how we have taken this on board when reviewing this policy.

## 8. Monitoring and Review

- 8.1 This policy will be reviewed by the relevant Business Unit's Head of Service or Service Manager every 2 years (see page 1 for details of Business Unit) or earlier if there is a change in legislation or regulatory standards. Where more than 10% of the policy content is changed the Assistant Director and appropriate Portfolio Holder will be required to decide if the policy needs to be formally reconsidered by the Cabinet or other appropriate decision-making body.
- 8.2 Where there is a request for the content of the policy to be reviewed in response to a complaint, the relevant Business Unit's Assistant Director will be notified. If the Assistant Director agrees that a review of policy is required, this will be discussed with the appropriate Portfolio Holder. The Head of Service or Service Manager will be responsible for implementing a subsequent policy review.

## 9. References and Resources

### Internal:

- Tenancy Policy and Tenancy Agreement Conditions
- Housing Asset Management Strategy
- Housing Allocation Policy
- Aids & Adaptations Policy
- Under Occupation Policy
- Local Lettings plan – Independent Living
- Repairs and Maintenance Policy – rechargeable repairs
- Damp & Mould Policy
- Stevenage Standard
- Lettable Standard
- [Corporate Plan: Making Stevenage Even Better \(2024-2027\)](#)

### External:

- [Housing Act 1985](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- [Housing Act 1996](#)
- [Housing Act 2004 - Housing Health and Safety Rating System \(HHSRS\)](#)
- [Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012](#)
- [Social Housing Regulation Act \(2023\)](#)
- [Localism Act 2011](#)
- [Local Government \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Act 1982](#)

- [Gas Safety \(Installation and Use\) Regulations 1998 \(GSIUR\) as amended 2018 Approved Code of Practice and guidance](#)
- [British Standard 7671 As Amended \(Electrical Installations\)](#)
- [Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR](#)
- [Decent Homes Standards](#)

## 10. Abbreviations and Definitions

EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
EPC	Energy performance certificate
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
KPIs	Key performance indicators
PSED	Public Sector Equality Duty
SBC	Stevenage Brough Council

## 11. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

## 12. Version History

Date	Outlined Amendments	Author
April 2024	Creation	Lori Smith
April 2026	Review of policy	Lori Smith